

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

in UNESCO National Commissions

TOWARDS A MODEL
OF MEANINGFUL
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT,
INTERGENERATIONAL
DIALOGUE, AND
PARTNERSHIPS

Mohammad Asadi Lari 1996-2020

This toolkit is dedicated to the fond memory of Mohammad Asadi Lari, an influential, respected, admired, and beloved member of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO's Youth Advisory Group. Mohammad was an exceptional human being. He worked tirelessly for peace, inclusive science education, equitable and just global health, meaningful youth engagement, entrepreneurship, and social innovation. An altruistic global citizen and builder, he was a model of compassion in the service of the values and ideals we stand for. We thank him for his invaluable contribution to the work of UNESCO. May his soul rest in peace, power, and light.

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Egypt	South Korea	Oman	Viet Nam
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**Youth Forum on
Traditional Values
and Peace in Andong,
Republic of Korea**

*Photo: Korean National
Commission for UNESCO*



**Youth of UNESCO Associated Schools in Belgium and
Sustainable Development Goals**

Photo: Mieke Van Ingelghem/University College Leuven-Limburg



UNESCO
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Ghana
National Commission
for UNESCO

**The Ghana National Commission for
UNESCO celebrates the International
Day of Light with UNESCO Associated
Schools in Accra**



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The UNESCO Associated Schools National Choir in France at the tribute to Charles Aznavour

Photo: French National Commission for UNESCO

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Students at the Model UN International Conference in Noarootsi, Estonia

Photo: Enn Narrusson

Foreword

**By Sébastien Goupil, Secretary-General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and
Gašper Hrastelj, Deputy Secretary-General of the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO**

The Canadian and Slovenian National Commissions for UNESCO are proud to be leaders in the collective endeavour to update this toolkit so that UNESCO's National Commissions can effectively and meaningfully engage youth and mainstream their perspectives in our work.

As National Commissions, we must help break down barriers that prevent youth from exercising their inherent power and influence. Our cross-sectoral mandates give us the platform to leverage the power and expertise of young people by recognizing they are more than our future: they are also an essential part of our present. Through collective action, recognition, and dialogue, UNESCO's National Commissions are uniquely positioned to lead the coalition of individuals, organizations, and voices that advocate for the rights of all youth to be heard, seen, and consulted as part of decision-making and governance processes.

Through partnerships with several UNESCO National Commissions, and under the guidance and leadership of young people, we updated this toolkit to provide a path for UNESCO's National Commissions to re-examine the ways in which youth inform our work and contribute to our relevance within UNESCO and the broader UN system. Moving beyond a model of empowerment to a model of meaningful engagement and intergenerational collaboration is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable solutions. The potential and power of young people can thus be fully realized and enable us to maximize our collective potential and impact.

We would like to thank the participating National Commissions, the UNESCO Youth Section, and the many youth who participated in this process for contributing their valuable expertise, experiences, and insights regarding youth engagement and intergenerational dialogue. We hope this toolkit will allow you to meaningfully engage diverse stakeholders in your work so they can join the innovative initiatives being championed by National Commissions and youth globally.

INTRODUCTION

By Bushra Ebadi, Chair of the Youth Advisory Group
for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO



We

need to create an enabling environment for young people, where they are seen not as subjects to be protected, but as citizens with equal rights, equal voices and equal influence, as full members of our societies and powerful agents for change.”

– Message from António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations on the occasion of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, and Youth Forum - 23 June 2019

We can speak about the large numbers of young people around the world: how young people are the largest demographic in many countries and communities. We can speak about how the decisions we make today will irrefutably shape the future of the planet and our societies. We can speak about the importance of ensuring we educate young people, so they are prepared for economic, social, and environmental change. It is true that young people aged 18 to 35 comprise over 32% of the world’s population (UN DESA 2019) and that they will be greatly impacted by what we do today. But our reason for engaging youth should not only be predicated on these facts and statistics. Young people should be engaged in decision making, governance, leadership, programming, monitoring and evaluation, and design because it is their inherent right.

For far too long, young people have been marginalized from the spaces where decisions are made. In many places around the world, they are criminalized for gathering in public places, for daring to engage civically, and for taking a vested interest in their futures. Young people are infantilized – treated as if their opinions, inputs, and experiences are somehow less because they have not reached a certain age. And yet, despite these barriers, young people are finding ways to make an irrefutable impact in their communities, countries, and the world.

If we are truly committed to finding sustainable, just, and inclusive solutions to the challenges we are facing around the world – climate change, human rights violations, poverty, inequality, xenophobia, and misogyny, among others – we will need to work together across generations and cultures. We will need to build bridges that foster meaningful relationships among communities of people. We must value each other enough to create spaces for each other and to celebrate the diversity of our experiences.

This toolkit aims to provide UNESCO National Commissions and young people with best practices, models, and insights on how to achieve meaningful youth engagement, intergenerational dialogue, and partnerships to help achieve UNESCO’s intersectional mandate. Peace begins in the minds of individuals, but ideas without action will not build the peaceful, just society and world many of us are dreaming of. We all have a role to play in realizing these ideas and dreams into action.

“UNESCO is working with young people as pro-active contributors and not just beneficiaries in its programmes and projects. Young people are highly engaged in our work in reducing inequalities and building peaceful societies through our Youth Space Initiative, Youth Climate Action Network, and Preventing Violent Extremism Project, only to name a few.”

– Message from Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of the International Youth Day “Transforming Education”

12 August 2019

Purpose of the Toolkit

The 2011 Toolkit on Youth Engagement in National Commissions served as a spark for many organizations to develop localized youth strategies, to reflect on their ability to engage youth, and to consider how to work alongside youth in the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). During the 2017 UNESCO Youth Forum, it became apparent that youth, National Commissions, and UNESCO would benefit from a revised toolkit on meaningful youth engagement, with insights, best practices, and examples from diverse stakeholders.

The 2020 Toolkit builds on the successes of the 2011 Toolkit in advocating for youth involvement in decision-making, social campaigns, community building, and leadership in fighting climate change and promoting sustainable development. It promotes more meaningful youth engagement and intergenerational dialogue and partnerships. Dialogue and partnerships are necessary to ensure that young people's experiences, skills, and insights are valued and incorporated into the work of National Commissions.

The 2020 Toolkit aims to be more inclusive, adding perspectives and examples from youth, marginalized communities, and National Commissions from around the world. This means involving marginalized individuals and communities, including Indigenous peoples, non-UNESCO youth, differently-abled persons, forcibly-displaced persons, immigrants, and gender and sexually diverse persons. The 2020 Toolkit provides UNESCO National Commissions with insights and concrete recommendations to more meaningfully engage young people from 15 to 35 years and foster dialogue and partnerships across generations. This toolkit asks you, as a member of a UNESCO National Commission, to consider the following questions as you develop strategies and programmes for meaningful youth engagement and intergenerational partnerships and dialogue:

- Is the expertise of youth being valued?
- Are youth, especially marginalized youth, being engaged in the work of National Commissions?
- Who are we currently engaging with in the work of our National Commissions and how are we engaging with them?
- How do we prepare and support youth to engage in world events, including the UNESCO Youth Forum and the General Conference?

Keys to Youth Engagement and

INTERGENERATIONAL

Dialogues

Action 1

Address barriers that prevent youth and other marginalized communities from participating in the work of National Commissions including:

- Complex bureaucracies and structures
- Inadequate funding
- Lack of resources, awareness, and membership in formal networks
- Time constraints

Action 2

Champion accessible and inclusive programming, information, and governance by:

- Ensuring activities and meetings are planned in accessible locations, dates, and times
- Providing youth with fair and adequate compensation for their work and ensuring their labour is not exploited
- Developing and sharing a database of National Commission members and networks, youth organizations, and young experts and community leaders

Action 3

Mainstream youth and provide them with active roles in all National Commission activities by:

- Developing a mechanism for youth to provide regular feedback and input to the work of the Commission and UNESCO
- Creating and sharing a set of transparent criteria for youth interested in engaging with the National Commission
- Inviting youth from diverse backgrounds, including those who are gender and sexually diverse, racialized, Indigenous, differently abled, newcomer, and displaced to present their work, research, and experiences as experts and facilitators in workshops, panels, and other forums
- Opening channels of communication between youth and National Commissions to encourage proactive dialogue
- Ensuring at least one young person is engaged in each of the Commissions' working and expert groups, and boards

Action 4

Invest in developing the leadership potential and skills of youth by:

- Encouraging youth to train and build the capacities of other youth in their communities
- Organizing intergenerational activities, including mentorship programmes

Youth

ENGAGEMENT

Defining Youth

The UN defines youth as people between 15 and 24 years. While UNESCO uses the UN definition of youth, many National Commissions and regional organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and Organization of American States (OAS), use broader definitions of youth, including individuals up to 35 years of age. This toolkit uses the most inclusive definition of youth and defines youth as individuals between 15 and 35 years.

Youth can also be understood as a stage rather than an age: There is no consensus about how to define “youth.” Defining youth primarily by the criterion of age is increasingly less appropriate in a context in which the life trajectories of young people are becoming more diverse and complex because such an approach assumes that, within a given age bracket, all youth are similar.¹ Instead of simply inquiring about a person’s age, it is important to consider the common barriers, experiences, and capacities influenced by cultural, political, economic, legal, and social factors.



60% of population is youth

Kenya

“Youth constitute over 60% of the population in Kenya. They are our key stakeholder and we work with them especially in sensitization activities and environmental conservation. We also involve them in relevant policy discussions to ensure inclusivity and ownership.”

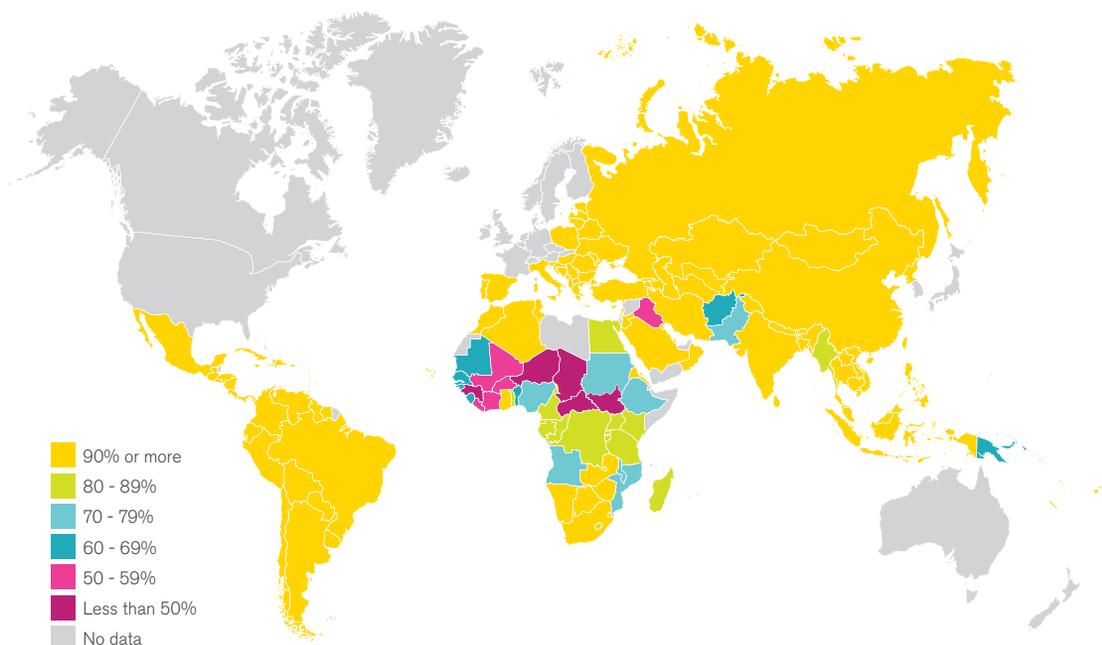
– Jacqueline Njeru, Deputy Director of the Social and Human Sciences Programme at the Kenyan National Commission for UNESCO

GLOBAL MEDIAN AGES

Geographic Region	2015	2020
Africa	19.3	19.7
Asia	30.3	32.0
Europe	41.4	42.5
Latin America and the Caribbean	29.1	31.0
Northern America	37.9	38.6
Oceania	32.6	33.4

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2019, <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

YOUTH LITERACY RATE



UNESCO eAtlas of Literacy, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <https://tellmaps.com/uis/literacy/#!/tellmap/-601865091>

Without youth engagement, our organization would be inexistent. Youth Engagement is at the base of the National Youth Council. We have youth engagement at different levels. To start with, we have it at the grassroots, the involvement of young people in youth clubs. Then, in each region, members from the youth clubs are elected to form the regional youth councils. Finally, all the regional youth councils throughout the island are regrouped under the National Youth Council. Young people are also represented on the executive committee of the National Youth Council.”

– Appanah Rajesh, Secretary of the Mauritius National Youth Council

What Is Meaningful Youth Engagement?

The idea of meaningful engagement can be traced to Sherry Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation*. According to Arnstein's philosophy, meaningful [youth] engagement must:

- Redistribute power, negotiated between youth and those who hold power
- Share planning and decision-making responsibilities
- Ensure youth have the power to assure the accountability of programmes
- Involve youth directly in planning, policymaking, and programme management

These criteria form the foundation for meaningful youth engagement in this toolkit. Meaningful youth engagement is an effective way to build the capacities of young people, their communities, and the organizations they work with. Meaningfully engaging youth can also support young people in their transition to work, public life, and entrepreneurship.

FORMS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Decision-making

Community service

Volunteering

Social entrepreneurship

Leadership

Media (social and traditional)



“Youth can enable an organization to reach people that would normally be beyond its scope. Young people value the opinions of their peers and are more likely to listen if the information comes directly from their friends.”

– Latvian Commission for UNESCO Programme Officer

Benefits of Meaningful Youth Engagement

Youth have brought new perspectives, ideas, ways of working and thinking, technical expertise, visibility, and energy to National Commissions. They are and will continue to be key partners in the development of various initiatives and projects. Meaningfully engaging youth provides an opportunity to ensure programmes and policies are being co-created and developed with those who are directly impacted by them, thereby making them more effective in achieving their stated objective(s), developing a sense of co-ownership and responsibility amongst stakeholders, and improving their relevance and legitimacy with young people. Youth-led initiatives have successfully increased grassroots awareness and partnerships of UNESCO and its work. As a result, diverse stakeholders better understand the relevance of UNESCO to their own work. Sustainably-engaged youth and youth organizations allow National Commissions greater ease in convening groups or individuals for consultation and partnerships. Engaging youth has helped National Commissions modernize their work, advance inclusion, mobilize local communities, and realize their mandates. Everyone’s work is far more impactful when youth are engaged.

Meaningfully engaging youth also contributes to developing their capacities, skills, and awareness, including acquiring planning, leadership, teamwork, and other life skills; establishing a sense of responsibility towards the community, environment, and world; and trusting their own abilities. Youth report gaining opportunities to meet and exchange with children, young people, and adults from diverse regions, countries, and backgrounds; engaging in intergenerational dialogue and partnerships; learning about and from UNESCO-related initiatives; participating in national and international forums; and impacting policy.



FOR YOUTH:

- Building relationships, sense of self and community, and networks
- Creating and developing awareness of political and social rights and responsibilities
- Fostering global citizenship
- Understanding socio-political issues, cultural diversity, and complex challenges
- Earning professional work experience and expertise
- Accessing greater opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and learning
- Gaining opportunities to offer insights and expertise on diverse issues

FOR ORGANIZATIONS:

- Increasing the ability to respond to and address local needs and issues facing youth
- Accessing new ideas, relationships, communities, and networks
- Gaining a more nuanced understanding of political, social, cultural, and economic issues
- Creating opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and learning
- Increasing the impact of work and programmes
- Increasing the capacity to sustain UNESCO's message and work for future generations

Youth Engagement as a Rights Issue

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Lisboa+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes provide a strong foundation for youth engagement.

“Respect for the Views of the Child” states that “when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. Youth participation in initiatives that impact them is critical to ensuring that young people’s rights are being upheld” (Article 12 of UNCRC, UN 1989).

The Lisboa+21 Youth Declaration (June 2019) states that “meaningful youth participation, engagement and empowerment are instrumental in all stages of youth policymaking processes and decision-making processes that affect young people’s lives at local, national, regional and international levels.”¹ It recognizes that “youth remain largely excluded from formal decision-making and political participation, and that new forms of political, economic, cultural and societal engagement and participation have emerged, based on specific issues and contexts, utilizing both online and offline methods.”²

Meaningful youth engagement can be supported by National Commissions through the development and implementation of intergenerational policies and strategies that fully incorporate young people into programmes and priorities.



Bushra Ebadi, Chair of the Youth Advisory Group, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, speaking at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth 2019 and Youth Forum Lisboa+21

Photo: Run Lola! Studio

Engaging Youth as Partners in Peace, Sustainability, Development, and Justice

UNESCO recognizes youth as partners and drivers of positive change towards peace, sustainability, development, and justice. UNESCO has created programmes to develop skills and generate opportunities for youth to express themselves, advance innovative ideas, and engage in decision-making and community-building. UNESCO's work is designed to support social innovation across generations by promoting, advocating, and building the capacities of youth and other key stakeholders. Below are descriptions of key activities.

Youth Spaces Initiative

In 2018, UNESCO launched the [Youth Spaces Initiative](#) as a follow-up to the 10th UNESCO Youth Forum. The Youth Spaces Initiative aims to engage youth at the community level in partnership with UNESCO, public authorities, governments, civil society, and other stakeholders. Most importantly, it is one of the first initiatives that is explicitly working to engage youth who lack opportunities for engagement; who are not part of established, formal networks; and whose work and impact may otherwise go unnoticed. Youth Spaces are led by and sustained through youth-led action.

National Commissions can support the Youth Spaces Initiative by:

- Raising awareness of the Youth Spaces Initiative at the local, national, and regional levels
- Identifying youth who would be eligible and benefit from the initiative
- Providing youth with relevant resources and information
- Maintaining a database of youth-led organizations, initiatives, and leaders, and identifying opportunities for collaboration
- Hosting a Youth Space through the National Commission
- Offering to share existing workspaces, resources, and knowledge with a local Youth Spaces Initiative
- Encouraging National Commission members to foster a learning partnership with young leaders
- Providing opportunities for an exchange of experiences, skills, and capacity building

Youth Forum

Launched in 1999, the UNESCO Youth Forum is held every 2 years to coincide with UNESCO's General Conference, the organization's highest decision-making body. The Forum is one of the few regular and institutionalized mechanisms in the UN system that allows youth to exchange and engage with peers from around the world and submit recommendations to Member States.

The Forum has undergone changes over the last decade, with efforts being made by the UNESCO Youth Programme Team to select youth delegates based on their innovative and inclusive leadership skills; commitment to supporting youth and other marginalized communities to reach their full potential; and demonstrable achievement in advancing peace, sustainable development, and justice. The Forum provides youth with an opportunity to engage in dialogue with each other, UNESCO, and other stakeholders; to inform UNESCO's approach to meaningful youth engagement; and to present their ideas, suggestions, and recommendations to Member States through UNESCO's General Conference. Greater participant accountability is needed to ensure the Forum has a measurable impact on youth around the world.

National Commissions can support and engage with the UNESCO Youth Forum by:

- Maintaining a database of youth leaders to help UNESCO identify qualified candidates
- Supporting youth leaders in applying, preparing, participating, and engaging in the Youth Forum
- Providing youth delegates with relevant literature and resources on the theme to be discussed during the Forum, UNESCO's role, mandate, and principal fields of interest
- Building the capacities of youth to engage with national, regional, and global forums, including the Youth Forum through mentorship, resource mobilization, and programme accessibility
- Advocating with national governments for meaningful youth engagement throughout the UNESCO General Conference
- Facilitating meetings between Youth Forum delegates and their country's Permanent Representative to UNESCO, relevant government officials, and former UNESCO Youth Forum participants
- Meeting with Youth Forum delegates post-Forum to discuss and support action plans for implementing recommendations developed during the Forum
- Providing support to Youth Delegates to enable them to fully participate in the Forum, including financial, travel, coordination of visas, and accommodations, where possible

- Developing partnerships to support the participation of marginalized youth, including youth from other national contexts, in the Forum
- Attending the UNESCO Youth Forum, where possible, in solidarity with Youth Delegates and providing support as requested
- Working with national delegations to the UNESCO General Conference to provide UNESCO Youth Forum delegates with speaking opportunities
- Commissioning reflection papers from Youth Delegates prior to or after the Forum to highlight their expertise and perspectives

#YouthOfUNESCO

#YouthOfUNESCO and @UNESCOyouth are the official social media handles for UNESCO's youth community online. The UNESCO Youth Programme team manages the official Facebook page and works to "bring youth voices to the fore and encourage young people to come together to take action."

National Commissions can support #YouthOfUNESCO by:

- Sharing content from the official [Facebook page](#) and other social media accounts through National Commission accounts
- Encouraging and supporting youth in writing and submitting relevant content for publication to the UNESCO Youth Programme team
- Translating or funding the translation of #YouthOfUNESCO content to or from local languages, especially Indigenous and endangered languages
- Sharing relevant resources, toolkits, projects, and programmes with the UNESCO Youth Programme team for dissemination to youth via social media channels



The Burkina Faso Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations organized a round table in the city of Ouahigouya to raise awareness and involve young people in the monitoring and prevention of violent extremism

Photo: Commission nationale burkinabé pour l'UNESCO

“Sustainable youth engagement is more than preparing a delegate to the UNESCO Youth Forum. It is believing that young people have something unique to contribute to the discussions and events related to UNESCO. It is making sure they have the opportunities to do so by encouraging their active engagement in UNESCO-related programmes and activities whenever possible.”

– Canadian Commission for UNESCO

International Youth Day

On December 17, 1999, in resolution 54/120, the UN General Assembly endorsed the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (August 1998) that August 12th be declared International Youth Day. The Assembly recommended the organization of public information activities for International Youth Day to raise awareness of the World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the General Assembly in 1996 (resolution 50/81).³

With the adoption of the Lisboa+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes (Lisbon, 23 June 2019), International Youth Day presents National Commissions and UNESCO with an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of youth in advancing peace and sustainable development.

National Commissions can support International Youth Day by:

- Hosting activities on International Youth Day and during the month of August in support of the year's theme
- Highlighting and raising the profile of youth leaders on social media
- Developing an International Youth Day activity toolkit or sharing existing toolkits, such as the Canadian Commission for UNESCO's Youth Day Activity Toolkit (2017), developed by youth
- Encouraging partners and networks to participate in International Youth Day activities

Project Planner

UNESCO developed an interactive project planning tool to support youth in designing and implementing projects. The project planner is available in six languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. National Commissions are encouraged to share the Project Planner with youth in their communities. It would also be beneficial for Commissions to advocate for and support the translation of the tool in more languages and to ensure it is accessible to people with different abilities.

Prevention of Violent Extremism through Youth Empowerment

UNESCO's Prevention of Violent Extremism through Youth Empowerment in Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia creates opportunities for young people “to engage as change-makers and peacebuilders in their immediate communities and wider societies and promote a constructive vision of young people as leaders, addressing hate related issues.”⁴

This project adopts an inclusive, multi-sectoral approach across youth, education, culture, and communication and information. The objective is to create an environment where youth are empowered, heard, and engaged as change-makers in their immediate communities to prevent violent extremism by:

- Equipping youth with values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills
- Promoting exchange, communication, and cooperation beyond social, cultural, and linguistic boundaries
- Supporting youth civic engagement
- Encouraging participation in peacebuilding
- Promoting human rights and intercultural understanding⁵

National Commissions must approach the issue of violent extremism in a nuanced manner, ensuring that youth are not criminalized or stereotyped as perpetrators of violence. Removing structural barriers is a primary way to address this issue by promoting the agency of young people and upholding their ability to exercise their inherent power and to act and make decisions.

National Commissions can support youth in preventing violent extremism by:

- Drawing on best practices and lessons learned from UNESCO's Prevention of Violent Extremism through Youth Empowerment in Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia project
- Including youth in preventing and countering violent extremism projects and programmes
- Supporting research on the role of youth as peacebuilders, with a focus on diverse youth, including differently abled, racialized, displaced, Indigenous, gender and sexually diverse, and newcomer youth

Networks of the Mediterranean Youth (NET-MED Youth)

NET-MED Youth was a five-year EU-funded and UNESCO-implemented project (2014-2018) that provided young people with the “necessary skills, tools and capacities to be active citizens and take part in decision-making.”⁶ Youth members participated in the development, revision, and monitoring of national youth strategies and policies; the production and monitoring of youth-related media content; and the follow-up with renowned experts on employment policy development and implementation. NET-MED Youth worked with youth organizations from 10 countries along the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean Sea; different national decision-makers (ministries, public institutions); and social partners, media professionals, citizen journalists, and bloggers.

National Commissions in the Mediterranean region may benefit from connecting with NET-MED Youth participants, referring to the documents and resources it developed, and drawing on best practices and lessons learned from the project.

National Commissions can engage with and support initiatives like NET-MED Youth by:

- Raising awareness of the project and other relevant initiatives within its networks, including among youth, government officials, and civil society
- Providing funding or other in-kind resources to youth-led projects and initiatives working to build the capacities of young people and foster meaningful partnerships with diverse stakeholders
- Proposing opportunities for collaboration between National Commissions and projects or initiatives
- Commissioning research, toolkits, and other resources from members of the project

While youth are considered important to the work of UNESCO, efforts must be made to ensure they are engaged in work that is relevant to their expertise, interests, skills, and capacities. There is a need for greater transparency regarding the modalities for youth engagement by UNESCO and how member states can, together with National Commissions, contribute to advancing UNESCO's important work.

Youth Engagement in National Commissions

Not all Commissions have a formal youth group, council, or structure. The absence of these bodies can be attributed to a lack of funding, human resources, conducive regulations, frameworks on youth engagement and work, and interest from youth. National Commissions face a variety of challenges in meaningfully engaging youth, including:

- Maintaining long-term and sustained engagement
- Ensuring consistent and clear communications
- Meaningfully engaging youth into formal structures
- Understanding the interests, needs, and preferences of youth
- Developing trust and respect in relationships with youth and other marginalized stakeholders
- Equipping youth with the skills, expertise, and intercultural information needed to collaborate on global or technical issues
- Making every effort to find the time to meet, given busy schedules
- Ensuring gender equality, inclusion, accessibility, diversity, and intercultural dialogue
- Addressing mobility, access, and inclusion issues
- Collecting, analyzing, and maintaining data on youth, including information on youth organizations, networks, and leadership

Mainstreaming youth (ensuring all sectors view and engage with youth as a priority instead of relegating youth to one sector or team) within National Commissions and UNESCO has proven to be a challenging endeavour. However, this should be the ultimate goal of all meaningful engagement and opportunities.

FORMS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Initiative	Example
Youth Advisory Group	Canada https://en.ccunesco.ca/networks/youth-network
National Youth Forums/ Conferences	Côte d'Ivoire UNESCO Youth Forum https://www.facebook.com/unescofj2013/?_rdc=1&_rdr https://web.facebook.com/9e-Forum-des-Jeunes-de-UNESCO-en-CI-1476776669288990/ Kenya National Youth Forum https://orgs.tigweb.org/kenya-national-youth-forum https://www.facebook.com/kenyan.youth.for.sustainable.leadership/ Model UNESCO Mongolia Youth Conference Collaboration between the Mongolian National Commission, UN Youth Advisory Panel, and UNESCO Beijing https://www.facebook.com/modelunescomongolia/
International Youth Volunteering	Kulturweit International Youth Volunteering https://new.dainst.org/en/web/guest/karriere/praktika-und-ehrenamt/kulturweit https://www.facebook.com/GermanyInCanada/posts/the-international-cultural-voluntary-service-of-the-german-commission-for-unesco/2312859985593778/
Youth Platforms	Slovenian UNESCO Youth Platform http://unesco-mladi.si/unesco-youth-platform-of-slovenia/
Youth Incubators	Providing youth in Côte d'Ivoire with grants to implement ideas or initiatives to advance peace and sustainable development https://www.facebook.com/unescofj2013/?_rdc=1&_rdr

Insights from Youth

Surveyed youth indicated that youth would like to be more actively engaged in their Commissions' programmes, activities, and structures. They want to co-create, develop, and implement projects and initiatives related to UNESCO's work; they want to be part of national, regional, and global youth networks allowing for greater information and resource sharing, capacity building, and organizing, while ensuring there are steps and mechanisms in place to ensure follow-up and accountability in consultations. By working with youth, UNESCO and National Commissions can expand their stakeholder base and ensure greater awareness and exposure of their work. Youth suggestions to increase engagement include:

Outreach Strategies

National Commissions should develop easy-to-understand guides and use plain language when describing their mission, work, and operations. They should increase their presence on social and traditional media, visit learning or educational institutions, host events for youth, and partner with local organizations with whom youth are already engaged.

Youth Ambassadors

National Commissions should designate a permanent role for youth in the work of the National Commissions and UNESCO. Potential roles include ambassadors, executive members, advisors, artists, researchers, focal points in subject or programme areas, volunteers, delegates in conferences or forums, experts within UNESCO networks, and leads for youth groups and committees.

Mainstreaming Youth Engagement and Improving Access

National Commissions should take steps to ensure greater representation in their existing youth groups or bodies. They should reach out to their networks, including local and regional governments, so that their calls for participation are available on social media, online forums, educational institutions, and in places where youth are already active. Calls for participation should be made available in a variety of languages, created in an accessible format, and shared with a diverse community leaders to reach youth in their communities. Efforts should be made to engage with marginalized youth, including those who are Indigenous, rural, remote, or homeless, by addressing accessibility issues including supporting travel and other costs that may prevent individuals from meaningfully engaging.

E

ngagement of youth helps policymakers define targeted interventions to address the issues affecting them.

– Programme Officer, Namibia National Commission for UNESCO



Youth Engagement Across Sectors

Meaningful youth engagement is also viewed as a priority in local governments, and within civil society and non-governmental organizations. In some cases, youth have been involved in shaping policy, serving as leaders in their communities, and engaging in advocacy. Youth must be involved in the development of solutions to the challenges they are facing. Initiatives that aim to bolster youth engagement must focus on the many dimensions of “empowerment”: psychological, community, organizational, economic, social, and cultural.

Many youth have expressed the desire for more opportunities to engage locally and the need for building the capacities of governments, civil society, and other actors in facilitating and championing youth engagement through the development of policies, legislation, and budgets.

A lack of coordination between civil society organizations and government hinders the impact of the work and leads to weak monitoring and evaluation processes. Converging capacities would lead to greater impact and would not only benefit youth, but their communities as well.

To better engage youth, civil society organizations can offer youth opportunities to participate in and facilitate civic engagement. Local governments and civil society can serve as the first entry points for engagement for young change makers and public figures. It would also be beneficial to commission a study of youth engagement in various contexts in order to understand the specific barriers to engagement.

National Commissions can partner with local governments that are designated members of the Man and the Biosphere, Creative Cities, and World Heritage networks.

Youth Engagement



STRATEGIES

Across National Commissions

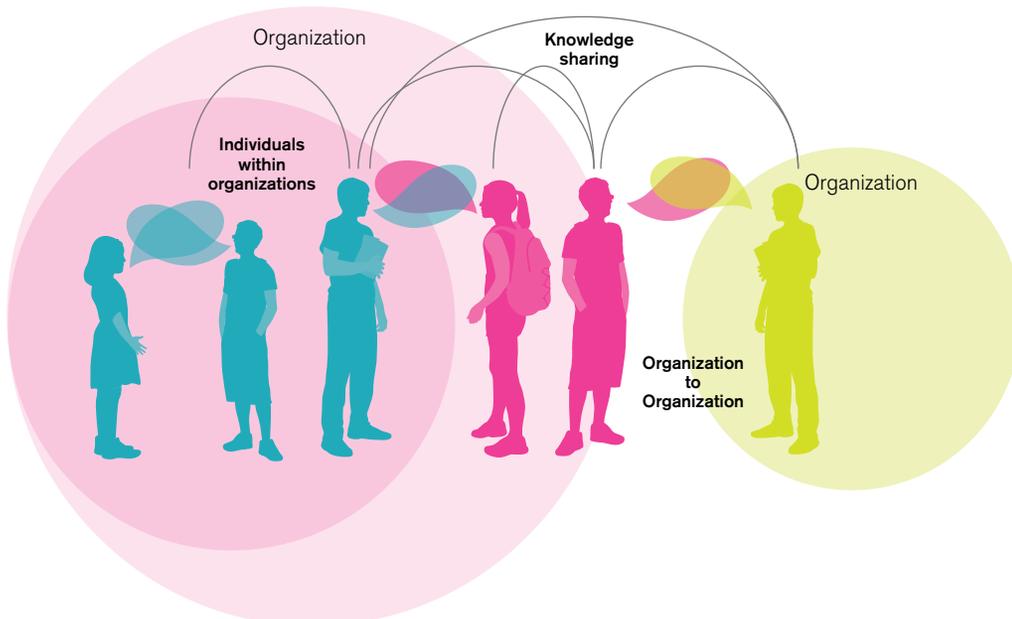
Youth should not be seen as a separate or parallel issue, rather integrate and mainstream youth in the overall agenda items, activities and goals.”

– Programme Officer, Swedish National Commission for UNESCO

All Commission strategies for engaging youth are different, which provides a unique opportunity for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building among Commissions. Youth participate in National Commissions and UNESCO as:

- Members of advisory boards, executive committees, councils, Biosphere Reserves, sectoral bodies, or with the Associated Schools Project
- Staff members, interns and co-op students, technical experts, or volunteers within National Commissions

KNOWLEDGE IS SHARED BETWEEN AND WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS



Many National Commissions seek to identify, develop, and deploy innovative solutions to support meaningful youth engagement and intergenerational and intersectoral dialogues and partnerships. To foster greater collaboration and innovation, the following section of the toolkit outlines the strategies and experiences of National Commissions from around the world.

Strategies and Experiences from National Commissions

Below are examples of initiatives provided by National Commissions. Some offer analysis in the form of specific challenges and opportunities.

Andorran National Youth Forum

- Partners with the national government's youth department and municipal youth offices to connect with external organizations for implementing youth projects
- A member of the Andorran Commission attends the National Youth Forum and makes connections with young leaders
- Other initiatives:
 - » Supporting the participation of Andorran youth in international conferences and events related to UNESCO's priority areas
 - » Connecting with and fostering relationships with youth in schools through ASPnet
 - » Identifying media and activities of interest to youth, including music, video games, street art, and performance

CHALLENGES:

- Many Andorran youth pursue academic studies abroad in countries such as France or Spain, which presents a challenge for sustained communication and engagement

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Engage youth travelling abroad as ambassadors
- Encourage youth to share their learning while abroad with local youth upon their return
- Support these learning exchanges at local, national, and international levels

Austrian Youth Advisory Panel

- Consists of young experts and activists in areas related to UNESCO's priorities
- Panel chairperson is a member of the Commission's Executive Board
- Panel members participate in international meetings and conferences, including the UNESCO Youth Forum
- Responsibilities include:
 - » Analysis of all UNESCO programmes with respect to topics relevant to young people
 - » Development of Panel priorities
 - » Regular exchange of information and opinions with Panel members
 - » Cooperation with the other Advisory Boards and Working Groups within the Austrian Commission
 - » Cooperation in the development of the Austrian position in the respective subject areas
 - » Initiation of a broader discourse, creating public resonance, and raising awareness of the Commission and UNESCO's priorities within Austria as well as awareness-raising measures
- Other initiatives:
 - » Programme Specialist for Education, Science, and Youth is responsible for coordination of youth matters
 - » Appointment of Youth Representative for the Commission, responsible for monitoring UNESCO-related topics from a youth perspective and actively participating in national and international working groups and conferences
 - » Educational resources for youth

CHALLENGES:

- Communicating UNESCO priorities and mobilizing young people outside of school can be a challenge because the priorities may not directly relate to young people's daily lives

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Clearly communicate how UNESCO priorities relate to young people's lives by partnering with community organizations, social enterprises, and governments to host activities and programmes raising awareness and engaging young people in advancing UNESCO's mandate



Youth Advisory Group of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO

Canadian Youth Advisory Group

- A group of leaders and experts, 18 to 30 years, from across Canada are selected to serve two-year terms (eligible for renewal)
- Each member is part of a sectoral working group based on their expertise and interests
- Each lead of the sectoral working group sits on the Advisory Group's Steering Committee, with two individuals responsible for professional development and alumni engagement
- Youth advisors elect a Chair and Deputy Chair to lead the Youth Advisory Group's Steering Committee
- Initiatives and activities include:
 - » Identify issues and concerns of youth at local, provincial, and national levels
 - » Develop publications and projects to advance the Commission's priorities
 - » Participate in local, national, and international conferences and workshops related to UNESCO's priorities
- Other initiatives:
 - » Contributing to the official youth engagement strategy
 - » Supporting youth participation and engagement in conferences, workshops, and forums at the local, national, and global levels

CHALLENGES:

- Difficult to ensure accountability between Commission members and youth, especially for incorporating youth in all areas of the Commission's work

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Develop clear terms of reference that outline the roles and responsibilities of youth and other Commission members

Côte d'Ivoire Youth Group

- Composed of more than 500 youth, 16 to 35 years, who participate in the activities of the Commission, ASPnet, and universities
- Facilitates the transfer of knowledge among youth, enabling them to be more responsible citizens
- Members are responsible for promoting and engaging in UNESCO's work, developing the capacity of youth, and participating in decision-making
- UNESCO launched the Incubator, the first incubation centre, in September 2017. It functions as a social innovation laboratory, specializing in education, training, and building the capacities of youth organizations

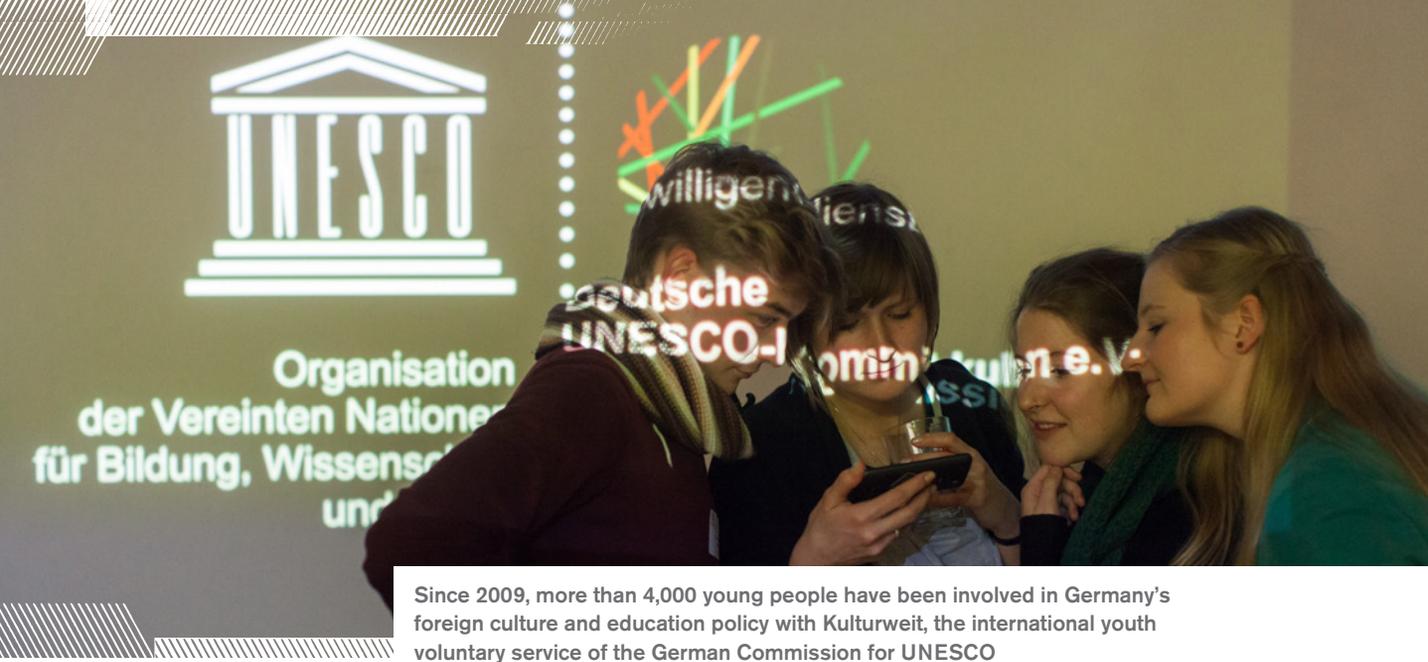
Estonian Youth Group

- Composed of young people, 17 to 24 years, who are engaged in the Commission's activities
- Youth contribute to the development of policy papers, participate in UNESCO youth events and meetings, and organize an international Model UN Programme for school students in Estonia
- The Estonian Model UN Programme consists of a training seminar, one-day mini-models in schools, and an international three-day Model UN event with students from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and others
- Model UN themes are selected by organizers based on current UN, UNESCO, and Estonian foreign policy and development priorities



Estonian Model UN youth team and participants

Photo: Andrey Pankratov



Since 2009, more than 4,000 young people have been involved in Germany's foreign culture and education policy with Kulturweit, the international youth voluntary service of the German Commission for UNESCO

Photo: German Commission for UNESCO/Till Budde

German Kulturweit International Volunteering Programme

- The international youth volunteering programme, “Kulturweit,”⁷ works in collaboration with the German Federal Foreign Office and promotes a globally open-minded society within Germany
- Kulturweit Fellows incorporate youth perspectives into Commission work. The Kulturweit programme provides an opportunity for intergenerational learning so youth and elders learn from one another
- Volunteers are able to gain experience working abroad and in diverse sectors and organizations, including museums, media outlets, Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks, and other National Commissions
- The programme provides funding to ensure marginalized youth are able to participate
- Other initiatives:
 - » Providing a Junior Professional Training programme, an opportunity for recent master’s graduates to work and learn at the Commission after their studies
 - » Co-designing a youth engagement model

CHALLENGES:

- Difficult to meaningfully engage youth when resources are limited, and youth lack awareness of the Commission’s and UNESCO’s work

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Make participation more accessible for young people by collaborating with external partners to fund Young Professionals’ salaries, youth activities and programmes, and travel grants or scholarships

Greek Hellenic National Commission Youth Committee

- Composed of seven board members and more than 200 general members across Greece
- Members of the Youth Committee organize seminars, workshops, and activities on issues related to UNESCO's core sectors

Hungarian Network Model

- Leverages networks such as the ASPnet, the Anna Lindh Foundation, and the Hungarian Model UN Student Association to engage young people from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds
- Partners with the Hungarian Model UN Student Association to host a Model UN General Conference and to discuss UNESCO priorities, such as intangible heritage and climate change mitigation

CHALLENGES:

- A lack of resources can make it difficult for National Commissions to support, educate, and engage youth in their work

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Use online tools such as email, websites, and informational meetings and competitions to open communication channels with young people

Jamaican Youth Committee

- The Jamaican Ministry of Youth established a Youth Committee in response to the UN's decision to involve young people across its programmes and activities
- Youth Committee members represent diverse sectors and are appointed to all advisory boards and committees within the Commission

CHALLENGES:

- Youth attendance rates in meetings can be low due to conflicting school and work schedules

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Schedule meetings at convenient times and accessible locations for youth members
- Provide youth with letters of support or official invitation letters that they can give to their organizations, schools, and employers

Kenyan UNESCO Youth Forum

- Allows youth 20 to 34 years (45 to 200 participants) to participate in specific activities implemented by the Commission's different programmes
- Participants represent youth in various national and international forums, volunteer in environmental conservation initiatives, promote peer-to-peer learning, and participate in UNESCO's culture of peace and non-violence programmes

Korean Youth Strategy

- Selects and supports 10 to 15 projects led by youth groups each year
- Uses the projects to focus on achieving Sustainable Development Goals
- Organized the campaign, "Leave No One Behind," for International Youth Day in Seoul in 2019
- Publishes an annual report on youth projects



Participants at the Youth Forum on Traditional Values and Peace in the Republic of Korea

Photo: Korean National Commission for UNESCO

Latvian Young Inheritors School

- Launched an initiative in heritage education to support implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 11.4 to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”
- The “Young Inheritors School” project is a cycle of lectures and workshops that builds on the World Heritage Convention’s core principles: credibility, conservation, capacity building, communication, and communities
- This initiative provides students from UNESCO Associated Schools with knowledge and skills necessary to protect and sustainably manage the Historic Centre of Riga World Heritage Site
- Students learn basic restoration skills, urban planning principles, and building design processes in a historic setting and gain opportunities to learn from heritage inspectors and city guides
- Other initiatives:
 - » Ensuring youth lead the development of training and leadership materials for other initiatives through the UNESCO Youth School
 - » Partnering with ASPnet, Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, and the 4th May Declaration Club to educate youth on intangible heritage, Latvian history, and Baltic culture
 - » Training youth on how to conduct research on intangible cultural heritage in partnership with Serde, an interdisciplinary art group, and the ASPnet

CHALLENGES:

- Sustaining youth interest and attracting new youth can be challenging for organizations

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Create and maintain a database of youth organizations, leaders, and activists to help communicate with and identify youth relevant to its work and projects

Lebanese Networks

- The Lebanese Commission manages three well-established networks for youth: the UNESCO Associated Schools, the Clubs for UNESCO network, and the Lebanese Network for the Anna Lindh Foundation for Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue between Cultures (Lebanese ALF Network)
- The Lebanese ALF Network includes youth organizations active across various UNESCO fields and subject areas, including human rights, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, environment, arts, education, civic education, and ethics

CHALLENGES:

- Difficult to gain support from local and international partners for National Commission activities, including building the awareness and capacities of young people to engage in world and humanistic issues

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Build support for Commission's work by partnering with regional and national UNESCO offices, educational institutions, networks, and local youth clubs and organizations

Lithuanian Youth Council

- A representative of the Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT) engages in the work of the Commission to advocate on behalf of youth interests
- LiJOT is comprised of non-governmental youth organization members representing over 200,000 young people in Lithuania
- The Council serves as a platform for dialogue to advance youth organizations' interests and initiatives

CHALLENGES:

- Difficult to involve youth and youth organizations in UNESCO-related matters because of the unique goals, motivations, and objectives of diverse stakeholders

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Connect with youth organizations for comments and input on specific issues, strategies, programmes, and projects relevant to their expertise and interests
- Integrate youth perspectives and insights in drafting and producing strategies

Namibian Youth Representation

- A youth representative sits on the National Commission's Executive Committee and advocates for youth priorities and programmes
- The National Commission collaborates with the ASPnet and National Youth Council of Namibia to facilitate partnerships between youth and policymakers to develop and identify programmes and activities for youth

CHALLENGES:

- National Commission staff find it difficult to create programmes and activities that are relevant to the needs and interests of youth

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Partner with youth to develop relevant programmes and activities

Netherlands Youth Commission

- Consists of members, 16 to 24 years, from diverse backgrounds who provide guest lectures in schools and organize activities



The UNESCO youth commission in the Netherlands consists of youth between 16-24 years of age

Photo: Marieke Brugman



Youth Diversity Forum participants planting Kahikatea trees in Ōtautahi/Christchurch, New Zealand
Photo: New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO/Tania Guenter

New Zealand Youth Network

- Composed of five youth representatives from each of its Sectoral Commissions: Education, Culture, Science, Social Science, and Communications
- Youth can participate in internships within the Commission's Secretariat, assist with coordinating the Commission's Youth Network, and provide ongoing support to schools
- Youth are sponsored to attend national and international events, included on steering committees for major Commission projects, and encouraged to initiate relevant projects
- Other initiatives: Partnerships with youth organizations, including the UN Youth Association of New Zealand

CHALLENGES:

- Age restrictions can prevent the continued engagement of young people in the work of National Commissions

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Create pathways for young people to remain engaged in their work and organizations as adults
- Youth involved in formal structures or bodies should transition to alumni membership with clear and realistic expectations of their capacity to contribute to the Commission's work

Romanian Youth Group

- Composed of young volunteers who promote and participate in the Commission's projects
- Other initiatives:
 - » UNESCO's Academy of Young Women works to raise awareness and offer insight into the experiences of women globally
 - » Alumnus Club for UNESCO enables young people to develop experience in their field of study

Slovenian Youth Platform

- A network of approximately 100 young people, 12 to 29 years, engaged in UNESCO-related work
- Establishes an annual working plan, including activities, projects, and youth participation in international conferences, financed by the National Commission
- Nominates UNESCO Heralds – young people who raise awareness about UNESCO among youth in schools, universities, and society at large

Swedish Partnerships with Youth and Youth Organizations

- The Swedish Commission consults with youth organizations to develop its strategy and prepare its official positions at the UNESCO General Conference
- The President of the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations has a seat on the board of the Swedish Commission to facilitate the exchange of ideas

CHALLENGES:

- Discussions and partnerships with youth organizations can be challenging due to the unique goals and objectives of diverse stakeholders

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Connect with youth organizations for input on programmes and projects that are relevant to their expertise and interests

Tanzanian Youth Desk

- Includes 92 active members who create public awareness on UNESCO's work and on rights, gender, and governance issues
- Projects include conducting gender rights analysis in Zanzibar, facilitating the Inter-university Bioethics and Scientific Research Forum, and promoting Sustainable Development Goals among youth

Ugandan Youth Strategy

- Partners with Uganda's National Youth Council, faith-based organizations, and educational institutions to facilitate youth dialogue and provide networking opportunities
- The Commission reaches out to youth by conducting workshops on skill development and vocational training and running camps for youth

CHALLENGES:

- Can be challenging for National Commissions to develop youth engagement strategies because they do not know where to begin or how to create clear objectives and actions for youth

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Convene a dialogue with youth and youth organizations to create a Youth Strategy for the Commission



Uzbek Youth Policy Unit

- Coordinates youth engagement across the Commission's activities, supervises the work of youth interns in the Commission, and facilitates information exchanges among youth organizations in Uzbekistan and abroad
- Holds monthly meetings with student associations on UNESCO themes at various universities, professional colleges, and secondary schools
- Youth participate in youth forums and intercultural dialogues, receive support in applying for UNESCO fellowships, engage in innovative projects with the ASPnet, and develop a more global understanding of issues, such as: HIV/AIDS prevention, healthy lifestyles, world cultural heritage protection, safeguarding intangible heritage, and media and information ethics

CHALLENGES:

- National Commissions may have limited internship and employment opportunities due to inadequate resources and capacities
- Many young people apply for opportunities, but only a few are selected

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Provide fair compensation to interns and staff members, regardless of age
- Find diverse ways to engage and support youth, including networking opportunities, commissioning of research and reflection papers, and providing patronage to youth projects

Viet Nam Youth Group

- Contributes to the Commission's activities, plans, and programmes
- Organizes exchanges with youth groups from other Commissions, ministries, and regions, and plans activities for skill development
- Participates in conferences, meetings, and forums, including the UNESCO Youth Forum

CHALLENGES:

- Youth may lack the experience and qualifications to effectively engage and participate in the work of National Commissions

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Organize training sessions for youth, establish formal mentorship programmes so youth can learn from Programme Officers, and provide opportunities for youth to participate in large UNESCO-related events and conferences

Collaboration Between Commissions

The limited resources of National Commissions individually could be overcome by collaborating and sharing resources with one another. To achieve an equitable balance of representatives from the northern and southern hemispheres, National Commissions in the Global North should partner with Commissions in the Global South to facilitate partnerships, exchange information and resources, and ensure balanced representation in regional and global forums. Exchanges of skills, experience, resources, culture, and information are all valuable measures to increase collaboration between National Commissions.

The Viet Nam and Korean National Commissions work closely together, inviting youth to participate in annual youth exchange programmes. Youth participants gain knowledge and work experience, and foster meaningful relationships with their counterparts.

The Estonian National Commission is collaborating with the Eswatini National Commission on youth volunteering and the UNESCO Associated Schools Network.

In 2008, the German National Commission launched Student Training for Entrepreneurial Promotion (STEP) initiatives to support partner Commissions in countries such as Liberia, Kenya, Uganda, Lesotho, Mexico, the Philippines, and South Africa in addressing youth unemployment. STEP works with universities in developing countries and countries in transition to introduce practice-oriented entrepreneurship programmes and training into their regular curriculum. The programme is tailored to the needs of each country and based on cutting-edge research on entrepreneurship success factors. STEP addresses adverse labour market conditions and limited employment opportunities by providing training to students to start and manage their own companies or organizations. The German Commission works with control groups to demonstrate the impact of entrepreneurship training in each case.



Since 2009 more than 4,000 young people have been involved in Germany's foreign culture and education policy with Kulturweit, the international youth voluntary service of the German Commission for UNESCO

Photo: German Commission for UNESCO/Till Budde



Intergenerational

DIALOGUE

and Partnerships

Modern understandings of intergenerational dialogue and partnerships can find their origin in traditional Indigenous learning practices, where elders and grandparents impart knowledge and educate youth in the community through storytelling and experiential learning.⁸ In various Indigenous communities, “mothers and grandmothers are the primary agents for intergenerational transmission of culture.”⁹ This is further supported by the Seventh Generation Principle, a philosophy articulated in the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee, the founding document of the Iroquois Confederacy, the oldest living participatory democracy on earth: “In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.”¹⁰ The idea of considering future generations in decision-making is not unique to the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois peoples. Intergenerational dialogue, learning, decision-making, and partnerships are fundamental to the sustainability of many cultures and societies around the world.

To successfully address global issues, youth must be engaged in partnerships with other generations. A survey of UNESCO National Commissions and youth found that intergenerational dialogue and partnerships remain a challenge for UNESCO and its National Commissions. Intergenerational initiatives have not been mainstreamed across UNESCO and are usually one-off events, such as luncheons, speaking engagements, Youth Forums, youth leadership training sessions, and UNESCO’s Academy of Young Women. Efforts are being made by National Commissions to develop mentoring systems and sessions on intergenerational dialogue during annual meetings that facilitate partnerships and programmes between elderly individuals and youth. Many surveyed youth indicated that they had not participated in any intergenerational dialogues within their National Commissions. Examples of intergenerational activities include:

- Youth in peacebuilding
- Participation in multicultural programmes and conferences
- Dialogues on education, health, and Sustainable Development Goals

One way to better facilitate intergenerational dialogue and partnerships is to make programmes more accessible to participants by taking the programmes to them. For example, mobility restrictions can prevent older individuals, who reside in elder-care facilities, from meeting young people. Providing young people with transportation to visit these institutions can overcome this barrier. Finding areas of common interest can also enhance dialogue and partnerships by offering an entry point for discussions.

Meaningful Youth Engagement and Intergenerational Dialogue

Consultations

National Commissions should:

- ❑ Make concerted efforts to identify youth experts and leaders from diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and academic, professional, and other qualifications for inclusion in consultations
- ❑ Send invitations to youth in advance of consultations in accessible and clear language
- ❑ Support youth in hosting consultations within their communities
- ❑ Reduce and address barriers preventing marginalized youth from engaging in consultations, including through reimbursement of expenses, flexible scheduling, accessible locations (including geographic, physical, financial, and cultural accessibility), and availability of interpretation, where possible
- ❑ Inform and obtain consent from all consultation participants
- ❑ Prepare youth to engage in consultations at the local, national, regional, and global levels by providing them with training and resources
- ❑ Fairly compensate youth for their contributions, including through financial remuneration, reimbursement for travel and other expenses, and formal acknowledgement of contributions in resulting documents, social media, and other communications
- ❑ Provide timely follow-up with participants regarding the consultation outcomes, the ways insights and ideas are being actioned, and the expected next steps in the process
- ❑ Share opportunities for further engagement with participants

Youth should:

- ❑ Plan and conduct consultations with diverse groups of youth, especially marginalized youth, including, but not limited to, those who are gender and sexually diverse; displaced or newcomers; differently abled; racialized or Indigenous; and criminalized
- ❑ Inform and attain consent from all consultation participants
- ❑ Ensure interpretation is available, including in sign language, during consultations, and in follow-ups
- ❑ Use insights, ideas, and suggestions from consultations to ensure diverse stakeholders benefit
- ❑ Identify partners and sponsors to provide funding and resources to ensure accessibility of consultations for all participants
- ❑ Follow up with consultation participants and inform them about how their insights, ideas, and suggestions were used and the impact they are making

Partnerships

National Commissions should:

- ❑ Acknowledge that individuals are still developing skills, regardless of their age, and may require additional time and support to produce high-quality deliverables and outcomes/outputs
- ❑ Ask youth for their opinions and ideas in order to sustain engagement and build trust
- ❑ Sustain partnerships with a focus on relationship building, accountability, and respect
- ❑ Work with existing youth organizations and leaders to engage youth who are actively involved in their communities
- ❑ Make efforts to partner with traditionally disengaged youth and youth who are not part of established networks, organizations, and institutions
- ❑ Incentivize partnerships by providing youth and other marginalized populations with patronage activities
- ❑ Actively participate in activities, events, and programmes organized by youth
- ❑ Provide youth and other marginalized individuals with financial support and compensation, where possible, for their work
- ❑ Use social media and web-based modes of communication to connect youth from diverse regions, bridge rural-urban divides, overcome distance barriers, and support sustained communication with the Commission
- ❑ Create opportunities for mentorship and intergenerational dialogue

Youth should:

- ❑ Clearly and honestly communicate expectations, concerns, and questions with Commission partners
- ❑ Ask clarification questions, as needed, to develop a better, more nuanced understanding of the National Commission and UNESCO and its work
- ❑ Prioritize diversity and inclusion in activities youth are participating in, leading, organizing, and evaluating to ensure there is no discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religion and faith, ethnicity, language, geographic location, language, socio-economic status, educational attainment, citizenship status, and differing abilities
- ❑ Seek out opportunities for partnerships, patronage, and collaboration in a timely, professional, and organized manner
- ❑ Develop partnerships with diverse groups of people, organizations, and networks
- ❑ Initiate, organize, facilitate, and engage in intergenerational dialogue and mentorship opportunities

Decision-Making and Governance

National Commissions should:

- ❑ Provide youth with opportunities and invite them to share their opinions, insights, experiences, ideas, and suggestions on existing programmes, services, and strategies
- ❑ Designate responsibility for youth affairs to a staff member within the Commission
- ❑ Ensure all Commission staff members include and engage youth in their work
- ❑ Develop and support youth advisory groups, youth panels, youth social groups, youth committees, and youth forums in collaboration with youth to continuously and tangibly engage youth in the work of the Commission
- ❑ Clarify the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for youth and Commission staff members

Youth should:

- ❑ Engage in opportunities to develop and hone their decision-making and leadership skills
- ❑ Complete assigned tasks and fulfill responsibilities to the best of their abilities
- ❑ Work collaboratively with National Commission staff members and leadership to advance the priorities and work of the Commission and UNESCO
- ❑ Be accountable to youth and other marginalized communities by inviting them into, and sharing, decision-making spaces
- ❑ Propose innovative ways to advance peace, development, justice, and sustainability



Young girls in Oman explore the Sustainable Development Goals

Photo: Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science

Examples of Intergenerational Activities

Storytelling Libraries

The Latvian National Commission for UNESCO's Network of Storytelling Libraries promotes the tradition of storytelling as part of Latvian intangible cultural heritage through intergenerational dialogue and community building. The network often organizes storytelling festivals in partnership with youth. Since 2013, 33 libraries across Latvia have joined the network, regularly organizing storytelling events and actively participating in Latvian Commission activities.

The Network of Storytelling Libraries gathers and makes information on local heritage more accessible; improves methodological knowledge in maintaining, preserving, and developing the storytelling tradition; promotes the development of personal storytelling skills among participants; raises awareness of UNESCO's and the Latvian Commission's heritage activities; and facilitates an exchange of experiences among members of the local community. The network promotes the use of innovative storytelling methods, including doll-art in libraries and living-libraries.

Latvian and international lecturers are invited to improve the skills of participating librarians in narration, event organization, and community development. Training seminars encourage librarians to become storytellers and give them the confidence and skills to support others in narrating, listening, and joining in a dialogue.

The network's events have successfully facilitated intergenerational and intercultural dialogue at the local level, revealing the extraordinary stories of locals and providing an opportunity to showcase storytelling talent. Joint meetings and events that include adults and youth help unite generations, allow for knowledge and experience sharing, and develop a mutually enriching dialogue among library visitors. This initiative demonstrates the great potential for libraries to strengthen connections across and between generations and to promote social cohesion, inclusion, and belonging.



Students of the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management at the University of Arts in Belgrade visit Bač Fortress in Serbia

Photo: Frederic Sarter



Participants at the Baltic Youth Forum in Latvia work on a social campaign for heritage safeguarding as a form of social responsibility

Photo: Ieva Dvarca

Suiti Cultural Space Intergenerational Research Expedition

The Latvian Commission partnered with Serde, an interdisciplinary art group, and the ASPnet to train youth on how to conduct research on intangible cultural heritage. Participants embarked on an intergenerational research expedition in the Suiti Cultural Space, a place inscribed on Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding list. The expedition resulted in the publication of 'Suiti Stories' based on Suiti history, the area, wartime experiences, refugees, the sea, fishing, traditional Suiti food recipes, and the Soviet Union.

Science Café "Natural Disaster Prevention"

The Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO partnered with the National Council for Scientific Research to launch science cafés in universities with the intention of bringing young people and professional scientists together to discuss relevant newsworthy topics in a casual and relaxed setting.

The Science Café makes science more relevant and simple and facilitates engaging conversations between experts and students about different scientific discoveries and technologies that fascinate and enlighten us.



CONCLUSION:

Moving from Empowerment to Agency



With increasing attention given to youth engagement within the UN system over the last two decades, more efforts need to be made to ensure that engagement is meaningful and inclusive. The challenges we collectively face require us to work across generations, sectors, and cultures.

Climate change, forced displacement, persecution, conflict, human rights abuses, discrimination, inequality, and poverty cannot be solved by working in silos of any kind, including generational silos. To build solutions, youth need to be present in the places and spaces where decisions are being made.

This toolkit provides a set of actionable recommendations by drawing on best practices and lessons learned from National Commission members and youth from around the world. It moves beyond the notion of “youth empowerment” to one in which young people can exercise their inherent power by confronting the barriers that prevent them from doing so.

Meaningful youth engagement requires us to invest in intergenerational dialogue and partnerships. By working together – creating, developing, implementing, and evaluating programmes, services, ideas, and solutions – we can drive positive impacts and outcomes for communities around the world. By doing so, we start to decolonize existing systems and work toward a future that is more just, inclusive, and sustainable for everyone.

By fostering a collaborative working environment and culture, National Commissions can become more resilient in the face of global uncertainty, funding and resource shortages, and skepticism about the effectiveness of multilateral organizations in achieving peace, sustainability, and justice. In fact, the examples cited in this toolkit provide evidence and inspiration for the enormous potential of collective action, when generations join forces to promote the principles of inclusion, empathy, and justice.

List of Abbreviations

ASPnet: Associated Schools Project Network

The ASPnet was launched in 1953. As of 2019, it includes over 7,500 educational institutions in 182 countries. Associated Schools support international understanding, peace, intercultural dialogue, sustainable development, and quality education in practice.¹¹

ESD: Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development “is a holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment” with the aim of transforming societies by enabling decision-making and action in support of environmental integrity, economic viability, justice, and cultural diversity.

Info-ethics: Information Ethics

Information Ethics encompasses the ethical, legal, and societal aspects and impacts of using information and information and communication technologies.

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all countries in 2015 and consist of 17 urgent calls for action that act as a “blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.”

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

Designates, with some regional differences, an organization independent from public power and generally with solidarity purposes.

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Additional Resources

Burkina Faso National Commission

- Publications
- Training resources
- <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/bf>

Egyptian National Commission

- Training youth to develop creative craft industries to achieve sustainable development in a number of cities of Egypt.
- Limiting the elements of non-traditional heritage in a number of cities in Egypt.
- Training youth and raising their awareness of underwater heritage preservation.
- Digital Participation Camp with the UNESCO Regional Office and the Ministry of Youth.
- <http://www.egnatcom.org.eg>

Guinea-Bissau National Commission

- Videos and images
- <https://en.unesco.org/countries/guinea-bissau>

Jordanian National Commission

- <https://www.facebook.com/JordanASPnet/>

Kenyan National Commission

- <https://unesco.go.ke/general-gallery/>
- <https://unesco.go.ke/shs-video-clips/>
- <https://unesco.go.ke/sports-for-peace/>
- <https://unesco.go.ke/jarida-newsletters/>
- <https://unesco.go.ke/stepping-up-stem-mentorship-for-girls-in-kericho/>

Latvian National Commission

- <http://www.barefootguide.org/>
- <https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/mainstreaming-peace-education-methodologies-approaches-and-visions-a-practitioners-manual/>

Lebanese National Commission

- [The Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO](#)

Mauritius National Commission

- [Mauritius National Youth Council](#)

Mongolian National Commission

- [Model UNESCO Mongolia](#)
- [ASPnet Mongolia](#)
- [United Nations Youth Advisory Panel](#)

Romanian National Commission

- <http://alumnusclubforunesco.ro/descopera-patrimoniul-multicultural-al-orasului-tau/>
- <http://alumnusclubforunesco.ro/ff-about/>
- <http://youthandmuseums.org/alumnus/>

Slovenian National Commission

- <https://www.facebook.com/UNESCOmladi/>
- <http://unesco-mladi.si/>
- https://www.gimptuj.si/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1161&Itemid=1
- <https://www.nib.si/mbp/sl/home/news/873-dan-odprtih-vrat-morske-bioloske-postaje-piran-7-6-2019>

Suriname National Commission

- Entrepreneurial training programmes for start-ups and mid-level entrepreneurs
- Participant and facilitator manuals
- <https://en.unesco.org/countries/suriname>

Tanzanian National Commission

- The Zanzibar Gender Analysis Report
- <http://www.natcom.go.tz>

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