



UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS
Youth, Peace and Security Agenda - Implementation
through Promoting Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue

Thematic Paper on Implementation of Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

Contact:

Dana Podmolikova
Project Management Specialist – Youth
danap@unops.org

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda was a turning point for recognizing young people's invaluable impact in matters of security, with the UN Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) highlighting the positive contribution of young people in preventing violent extremism and building sustainable peace. Since 2015, YPS has developed into a comprehensive agenda that aims to enable, support and increase young people's meaningful participation in decision making processes at all levels. Recent years have shown us that young women and men are not only capable but ready to assume a bigger share of responsibilities to shape the world and create narratives of mutual understanding and respect across borders, cultures, beliefs and faiths. It became very clear that sustainable peace will not be possible without young women and men being adequately represented in political life, political dialogues, reconciliation, peacebuilding and state-building processes. Young people are an asset worth supporting, investing in and empowering in order to achieve greater results and impact in peace, security, justice and sustainable development for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit young people particularly hard when their education got interrupted, their social interactions limited and their opportunities for personal and professional growth cut down. New approaches to support youth in times of crisis are therefore needed.

Violent extremists across the ideological spectrum view the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for expansion and young people are likely among the most at risk. The rising discrimination and xenophobia amid this unprecedented health predicament, are among the key drivers of radicalization and violent extremism. The interruption of conventional educational, physical/sport and recreational opportunities caused by the pandemic has increased time spent on social media by young people, therefore increasing the risk of exposure to violent ideologies and narratives. It has also intensified feelings of loneliness and socio-economic exclusion, which are some of the push factors leading young people towards radical narratives.

Conflicts are multiplying and are becoming more complex. Racism, xenophobia and discrimination have been exacerbated in the context of the pandemic. The United Nations Secretary-General has called for a strong investment in social cohesion to ensure diverse communities feel that their identities are respected. An essential prerequisite for constructing social cohesion and peace among nations is dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples based on mutual respect. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue is a crucial tool against isolation, mistrust and confrontation.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), one of the leading United Nations platforms for intercultural and interreligious dialogue, understanding and cooperation, builds bridges between societies, promotes dialogue and understanding, and seeks to forge the collective political will required to accomplish these tasks.

The recognition of the invaluable impact and contribution of young people in shaping peaceful and harmonious societies is where the YPS agenda intersects with the mission of the UNAOC. Youth is one of the five pillars of the UNAOC together with education, migration, media and the role of women as mediators and peacemakers in conflicts with cultural and religious settings. Through education, capacity building, training and many other opportunities for innovation and creativity, UNAOC empowers young women and men and youth-led civil society globally and recognizes them as powerful agents for social change, highlighting the will of the majority to reject violent extremism and embrace diversity.

UNAOC contributes to raise decision-makers' awareness on young people's contribution to issues of peace and security by fostering understanding and collaboration between people of different cultural backgrounds with the goal of preventing violent conflict and violent extremism. UNAOC works with multiple stakeholders at all levels striving to integrate youth participation into all activities and policy-making related to intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and violence prevention.

UNAOC YPS PROGRAMMING

Guided by the principle that youth are key actors to achieve peace, UNAOC develops programming to highlight and enhance the ability of young women and men to foster mutual respect, understanding and positive relationships between peoples of different cultures and religions. UNAOC emphasizes the importance of capacity building of young people and youth-led organizations to effectively implement initiatives advancing intercultural and interfaith understanding. Moreover, there is an educational dimension to all of UNAOC's youth programming, offering opportunities for skills and competence development to support leadership, project management and organizational development. The following are YPS related programming activities of the UNAOC:

Youth Solidarity Fund

<https://www.unaoc.org/what-we-do/grants-and-competitions/youth-solidarity-fund/>

The Youth Solidarity Fund (YSF) contributes to advancing the implementation of the UNSCR 2250 by providing the partnership, capacity-building and financial means that can help young people in implementing activities that prevent violent conflict, promote peace and social inclusion. YSF supports youth-led organizations that foster peaceful and inclusive societies by providing direct funding to outstanding projects promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue. It awards grants, technical support, networking and capacity building opportunities to selected projects that demonstrate innovative approaches to intercultural or interfaith dialogue while building bridges between diverse communities. Since its creation, YSF has funded 73 youth-led organizations in 42 states, representing a total of \$2.49 million in investments.

Established in 2008, the Fund responded to calls for action made by youth-led organizations around the world on the importance of establishing funding mechanisms for youth. Today, the Fund is more relevant than ever. As the global agenda increasingly speaks of youth participation and contribution to peace, development and security, it is critical to support this participation and contribution through funding and partnership opportunities. Released in January 2018, the Secretary-General's report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (A/72/1707-S/2018/43) stresses the importance of investing in prevention efforts, calling for a focus specifically on youth-led organizations when considering United Nations funding opportunities for civil society. "The Missing Peace", the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, noted in the UNSCR 2250 (2015), recommended that an investment be made in youth, such that they are viewed as equal partners for peace. That included the provision of flexible funding designed with the specific needs of youth organizations in mind.

Young Peacebuilders

<https://www.unaoc.org/what-we-do/projects-and-initiatives/young-peacebuilders/>

Young Peacebuilders (YPB) is a peace education initiative that UNAOC implements in different regions of the world, offering competence development to young people and contributing to growing and strengthening the global movement of young peacebuilders. Through this initiative, UNAOC is committing to support young people's participation in peacebuilding with a growing coalition of partners. The programme is designed to provide young people with skills that can enhance their positive role in issues of peace and security and in preventing violent extremism. It also brings visibility to the initiatives, actions and projects initiated by young people towards peace and the promotion of diversity and dialogue.

Since 2017, UNAOC has trained 80 young civil society leaders (aged 18-25) from 26 countries in West Africa, MENA and Europe under its Young Peacebuilders programme. The 5th edition of YPB has been launched in 2022 in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Based on internal and external evaluations, the training and advocacy programmes successfully build their capacity and enhance competencies on conflict transformation and conflict resolution, mediation, promotion of non-violent activism, overcoming negative stereotypes, prejudices and polarization as drivers of violent extremism conducive to terrorism. The tailor-made blended curriculum allows programme participants to work on specific issues related to peacebuilding and prevention of conflict and radicalization in their respective communities.

#YouthWagingPeace: A Whole Community Approach to Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education

<https://www.unaoc.org/what-we-do/projects-and-initiatives/youthwagingpeace-pve/>

Under the aegis of #YouthWagingPeace, UNAOC works with UNESCO MGIEP on a peace education initiative that is designed to support young people in gaining skills that can enhance their positive role in issues of peace and security and in preventing violent extremism. 35 young leaders from six South Asian countries¹, all of them young professionals working on Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) activities through education, are brought together to learn and build social and emotional competencies, critical media and project management skills. The skills and tools that these young civil society leaders acquire assist them and their organizations in implementing more successful projects while raising awareness among decision makers on the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding and policy making processes.

As part of the #YouthWagingPeace initiative, a selected number of young people are currently writing a report on the state of the Violent Extremism and PVE in South Asia through the youth lens. The report targets Member States, particularly in the South Asia region, to provide authentic accounts of youth to authorities and bring the young voices into peace and security processes.

1 India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Myanmar)

Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events and Promotion of Sport and its Values to Prevent Violent Extremism

<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sport-and-security-programme>

UNAOC and the group of partners² work together to maximize the potential of youth and sport in preventing violent extremism. The joint programme promotes the development and adoption of advanced policies and practices to enhance the security of major sporting events while promoting sport and its values as a tool to prevent violent extremism. Several elements of the Global Programme, such as the Global Awareness Campaign, a Policy Guide on Sport and PVE, and a Training Handbook for organizers of major sporting events, are being designed in collaboration with young people as key stakeholders. Moreover, successful and innovative practices on sport and PVE from youth-led organizations have been collected, promoted, and supported through the compendium of best practices and the grant mechanism for civil society organizations, some of them youth-led.

UNAOC leads the inclusion of young people in all aspects of the programme. Through youth consultations, UNAOC gathers contributions of young leaders to development of various outputs that advance the role of sport in PVE and create a safe space for young people to dialogue with Member States on how to improve the integration of youth in decision making processes. To this date, 50 young leaders from 38 countries and five continents with diverse experience in sport, peacebuilding and/or PVE have contributed their ideas and recommendations for programme outputs and on ways to further promote youth leadership in key decision and policy making processes.

Empowering Dialogue and Interfaith Networks (EDIN)

<https://www.unaoc.org/what-we-do/edin-empowering-dialogue-and-interfaith-networks/>

UNAOC and UNOCT/UNCCT co-implement the EDIN project - Empowering Dialogue and Interfaith Networks. The pilot project provides 20 young religious leaders, representatives of faith-based organizations and young media makers with a peer-to-peer learning space and builds their capacity to prevent sectarian violence and counter terrorist narratives, using efficient communication tools and strategies to reach their community. A series of capacity building activities enhances participants' competencies that help to debunk hateful discourse and promote interreligious understanding as key to social cohesion.

Participants work on creating and implementing social media campaigns targeting various audiences across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the global audience. Their campaigns highlight positive examples of peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony among three Abrahamic faiths, and celebrate diversity, promote inclusion and tolerance, address radicalization, hate speech, prejudices and biases, extremist views about "the other" and related violence. They offer counter narratives that will help build respect and mutual understanding, and celebrate shared values between the faiths, fostering social cohesion within societies. As one of the outcomes of the project, young religious leaders and media makers will become better equipped to advocate for stronger collaboration between media professionals, religious leaders, and policy makers in the field of interfaith and interreligious dialogue.

² United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS)

PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival

<https://pluralplus.unaoc.org/>

Launched in 2009, PLURAL+ Youth Video Festival is a joint initiative with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) that empowers youth by providing them with an opportunity for expression and media self-representation through original and creative videos focusing on migration, diversity or social inclusion. Through their videos, youth challenge the narratives and preconceived notions about these issues. PLURAL+ focuses on the participation and prevention pillars of UNSCR 2250, as a platform that celebrates and disseminates the perspectives of young people on global and local issues. With a network of over fifty partner organizations that support outreach and distribution of Plural+ videos, the programme amplifies young voices and offers a unique space for self-expression on sensitive issues. Since 2009, over 3,000 video entries from almost 100 countries have been submitted to PLURAL+. Selected videos have been screened and broadcasted in dozens of festivals, movie theaters, and television networks around the world, as well as in schools and global conferences, and have received more than one million views on various online platforms, including YouTube.

Fellowship Programme

<https://fellowship.unaoc.org/>

The UNAOC Fellowship Programme promotes intercultural and interfaith understanding by engaging young civil society leaders from Europe, North America, the Middle East and North Africa. Organized around two-week exchange trips, the initiative challenges perceptions and deconstructs stereotypes by letting participants experience cultural immersion while interacting with a wide range of actors and partners. In every country visited, the Fellows are provided with crucial comprehension tools to help them understand the plurality and the complexity of their surroundings and to get an extensive grasp of their host country’s culture, politics, society, religion, media and more. The young Fellows explore opportunities for intercultural collaboration and cross-cultural partnerships while exchanging ideas and good practices on how to address current global challenges and bridge the divide between peoples from different faiths and cultures. Since 2010, 269 young leaders from 50 states have been selected as UNAOC Fellows for their professional achievements and commitment to foster intercultural understanding.

Intercultural Innovation Award

<https://interculturalinnovation.org/>

Under the Intercultural Innovation Award (IIA), UNAOC and BMW Group, with the support of Accenture, strengthen impactful projects implemented by grassroots organizations that promote intercultural dialogue and contribute to a more peaceful and socially inclusive world by building mutual respect among peoples of different cultural and religious identities, rejecting violent extremism and embracing diversity. The initiative does not just recognize the grassroots organizations’ achievements but offers a year-long capacity building programme to strengthen their work in the long run. Successful projects receive additional support to scale up and replicate their initiatives in other contexts and settings. As of 2021, 61 organizations operating in 116 countries were awarded the IIA.

News Generation Against Hate: Empowering Local Youth to Create Alternative Narratives and Champion Diversity in the Media

<https://www.unaoc.org/what-we-do/projects-and-initiatives/news-generation-against-hate/>

Since 2020, UNAOC has been working with the municipality of La Courneuve in the suburbs of Paris on a project engaging local youth in efforts to change the negative narrative that surrounds the inhabitants of this diverse community. Young people are trained to enhance their intercultural and media literacy so they can develop their own alternative narratives to online as well as offline misinformation and hate speech. Having access to a safe space for discussions on sensitive topics means that young people can actively contribute to tackling deep rooted inequalities that are often a source of local conflict. By expanding their understanding and knowledge of key principles of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, young people are better equipped to lead the municipality's dialogue initiatives and better engage in key peace, security and local decision making processes.

#DigitalGamesForPeace Challenge

<https://www.unaoc.org/what-we-do/projects-and-initiatives/intercultural-dialogue-and-socio-emotional-competencies-for-peacebuilding/>

#DigitalGamesForPeace Challenge project, co-implemented with UNESCO MGIEP and UNOCT, works with young game designers, game developers and researchers in the fields of peacebuilding, PVE and intercultural dialogue from South and Southeast Asia to develop innovative ideas on the use of games for peacebuilding. 22 young peacebuilders worked on their game concepts and storyboards, resulting in four game ideas that were prototyped and presented to public as well as experts in the field.

Intercultural Leaders

<https://interculturalleaders.org/>

Recognizing the role of alumni in the implementation of its mandate and broader outreach, UNAOC created the Intercultural Leaders platform, an exclusive skills and knowledge-sharing web platform, where over 600 youth alumni of UNAOC programmes and projects, professionals from partner organizations, and a group of mentors collaborate by exchanging knowledge, best practices, and expertise on addressing cross-cultural tensions. By providing this platform to facilitate networking and relationship building, UNAOC is able to assist its alumni in developing increased capacity to sustain their work. Intercultural Leaders harness the solidarity of its members to maximize the impact of their work and help them foster cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Promoting the values that underpin Intercultural Leaders also enhances UNAOC's role as a convener, catalyst and thought leader.

#forSafeWorship Communications Campaign<https://forsafeworship.org/>

In the context of the implementation of the UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites developed by UNAOC, who is also the focal point for its implementation, UNAOC is working on a global communications campaign to celebrate the universality of religious sites as symbols of our shared humanity, history, and traditions and foster mutual respect. The Global Call to Action #forSafeWorship invites people worldwide, and the global youth and faith communities in particular, to submit multimedia stories about their relationships and personal, emotional connections to religious sites.

INTERCULTURAL AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AS A MEANS TO ADVANCE YPS

Building peaceful and harmonious societies requires everyone's participation and commitment. Young people are uniquely positioned to influence and inspire others to take a step in the right direction. Their force of 1.8 billion represents an immense power and opportunity to lead our global peacebuilding efforts. UNAOC programmatic activities continue to provide an essential platform for supporting youth and youth-led organizations and initiatives through funding, building their capacity and raising awareness of their activities. By strengthening its partnerships with youth and key civil society actors, UNAOC scales its efforts to create a societal "ripple effect" whereby the impact of its initiatives spreads to wider social circles of non-programme participants.

However, challenges remain. Building social cohesion is a long-term, on-going process which requires sustained efforts, funding and resources. Scarcity and unpredictability of funds make it difficult to design multi-year programmes, which could positively impact sequencing and interventions' sustainability. Lack of data and the intrinsic difficulty to precisely attribute and assess the impact of behaviors and attitudes change still constitutes a challenge as well as reaching to beneficiaries in remote communities, especially where a digital divide persists.

On the other hand, there are a number of opportunities to leverage intercultural and interfaith dialogue for bridging the cultural and ethnic divides. The success of intercultural and interfaith dialogue depends on our ability to listen with empathy and willingness to interact with diverse groups. Thus, having intercultural competencies, including socio-emotional skills, non-violent communication and ability to engage appropriately with others is a core focus of UNAOC's programming. Most of UNAOC's youth programmes place a huge emphasis on the capacity building of individuals and organizations to instill the relevant competencies and skills for effective dialogue. Moreover, UNAOC constantly looks for ways to enhance the learning and scale up the outreach.

Young people have repeatedly demonstrated that they are willing to make a mark in the world and stand ready to positively contribute to address cultural tensions and stereotyping. Therefore, more support, financial as well as technical, should be made available for grassroots youth-led organizations and individual peacebuilders to create and implement their own initiatives. More virtual and real spaces must be created for young people to meet and interact with each other in a safe and accessible environment in order to provide them with platforms for dialogue and positive self-expression.

CONCLUSION

Intercultural and interfaith dialogue is one of the most critical responses to identity-based conflicts. In the current multicultural world, respecting cultural, religious and ethnic identities is essential to guarantee peaceful interactions between ethnic, cultural or religious communities. UNAOC will thus continue to use intercultural and interreligious dialogue as key tools to bring diverse groups together and collectively promote inclusive societies. Together with young people and other stakeholders, UNAOC stands ready to enhance the YPS agenda in years to come.



“One humanity. Many cultures.”

UNAOC aims to improve understanding and cooperation among nations and peoples across cultures and to reduce polarization at local and global levels. It helps develop more inclusive societies, in which diversity is experienced as an asset.

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

730 Third Avenue, 20th Floor, New York, New York 10017

☎ Phone: +1-929-274-6217 📠 Fax: +1-929-274-6233 ✉ Email: contactaoc@unops.org

🌐 www.unaoc.org

🐦 twitter.com/UNAOC

📘 facebook.com/unaoc.org

📷 instagram.com/unaoc