



Österreichische UNESCO-Kommission
Austrian Commission for UNESCO

Final Recommendations

European-North American Conference on Youth Participation

Introduction

We, the 50 participants from 24 countries (Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland) gathered at the *European-North American Conference on Youth Participation* held in Vienna, Austria (22 September – 24 September 2011). We examined UNESCO's work and structure on the basis of youth concerns and to exchange on our experience with respect to youth involvement in UNESCO, National Commissions and partner organisations. We defined better participation possibilities for youth. The term *youth* (or any other terms used for *youth* in the following) refers to all young people in a society. This means that any form of youth participation, including representative structures, should integrate all groups of young people with equal opportunities and treatment and should pursue gender parity.

Background

The *UN International Year of Youth* was launched on 12 August 2010, in order to strengthen the voice of the youth – 25 years after the first *Year of Youth*, organized in 1985. This is only one example for the long history of youth-involvement within UNESCO. Already in 1948 – three years after the Organisation was founded in November 1945 – the General Conference issued a resolution calling upon National Commissions to involve youth in UNESCO programme activities.

UNESCO's youth agenda now follows the *United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth* (WPYY), adopted by the General Assembly in 1995. It includes a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the conditions of young people around the world. It defines a young person as someone between 15 and 24 years old. This includes 1.2 billion people today and makes approximately 18% of the world population. The demographic prognoses predict this number to increase dramatically by 2025. That is why young people are crucial for the shaping of our future.

UNESCO tries to raise the awareness of young people's contribution to society, to support them addressing the challenges they face and encouraging them to participate in development initiatives, from community to global level, as Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, emphasized in her message on the occasion of the *International Youth Day* in 2011: "We must do everything to encourage their development and to protect their dignity and rights. Everyone's future depends on it!" The importance and involvement of youth-related topics in UNESCO-policies is also reflected in UNESCO Medium-Term-Strategy 2008-2013, where youth is defined as priority group.

Building on the recommendations of the 6th UNESCO Youth Forum, which contained that young people strive for further space to participate in UNESCO and National Commissions, we, the participants of the *European-North American Conference on Youth Participation* issue the following statement and call for action:

Recommendations

To youth and youth organisations

- Contact your National Commission to get informed and involved
- Found a UNESCO club at your educational institutions (like schools, universities, youth centres) in order to raise awareness
- Organize a "72-hours-project" on UNESCO topics; guidelines on where and how to do it should come from UNESCO. It should be open to everyone and be realized by local youth organisations. Possible activities could be debate panels, open space etc. and take place at or near UNESCO heritage places.
- Become delegates of youth organizations to the National Commissions and youth representatives of the National Commissions and make presentations and create a dialogue in schools, youth centres etc. about UNESCO.

To National Commissions

- Establish a youth advisory panel* in each National Commission, consisting of youth representatives. Its head, the *Youth Representative of the National Commission*, should be a voting member of the governing board of the National Commission. Members of the advisory panel* should have the possibility to be equal members of all other committees and task-forces of the National Commission as well. Creating a youth advisory panel* is the responsibility of the National Commission together with young people on the basis of different best-practice-models around the world (e.g. Austria, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden; more information see *Youth Engagement Toolkit* established by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO).
- Approach youth organizations and structures in order to realize projects on UNESCO topics and encourage them to appoint UNESCO representatives.
- Evaluate each activity that applies for sponsorship or moral support on the participation of youth in its development and realization.
- Put easily understandable and up to date information on your webpage for youth about UNESCO and possibilities to become involved.
- Raise awareness about UNESCO topics by initiating or taking a stand in public debates in relevant media.
- Facilitate cooperation with private companies on special projects like competitions, awards etc., in order to promote UNESCO values among youth on the basis of the "UN Global Compact on Public-Private-Partnership" (examples: Germany, Austria, France etc.).
- Encourage the organization of Model UNESCO-conferences, e.g. World Heritage Committees and Water Management Councils where young people simulate UNESCO and its working procedures in order to learn about content and structures
- Create/Further develop relationships with educational institutions in your country (e.g. UNESCO Associated Schools). A framework of standards should be defined in cooperation with and adopted by these institutions in order to maintain and improve the status of them.
- Ensure student participation in schools to promote the values and goals of UNESCO, also in the decisions on and implementation of UNESCO programmes and projects within these schools.

To governments

- Give more financial resources to National Commissions for funding youth related activities and projects.
- Send representative youth delegates to the UNESCO Youth Forum** and any other relevant youth conferences.
- Include youth representatives of National Commissions in your delegations to the UNESCO General Conference, the Executive Board of UNESCO and any other relevant UNESCO events. These delegations should support the resolutions of the UNESCO Youth Forum** officially.

To UNESCO

- Give meaning to the priority of *youth* for UNESCO: the Secretariat must provide adequate human and financial resources for youth programmes and activities.
- Make youth and youth issues a flagship programme for the next biennium.
- Acknowledge that mainstreaming the youth perspective into UNESCO structures is a two-folded issue; on the one hand it is ensuring participation and influence to the youth, on the other hand it is important to always have a youth perspective on UNESCO activities.
- Establish a virtual network that provides information and an openly accessible forum about Youth Networks and UNESCO Youth Organizations and the activities of the Youth Advisory Panels* in each National Commission in order to work together continuously.
- Reform the UNESCO Youth Forum**: The UNESCO Youth Forum** should become an integral part of General Conference and should be reformed into a *Youth Commission* with all the rights and responsibilities of other programme commissions, beginning with the General Conference in 2013. Delegates should be nominated half a year in advance so they connect with other delegates in their region and formulate resolutions. The Director General should have to write a report to the Executive Board and the Youth Network (which has been explained above) on what has happened with the resolutions of the Youth Commission and whether and how they were implemented.
- Let the UNESCO Youth Forum** elect a chairperson who functions as *Youth Advisor to the Director General of UNESCO*. The person should be integrated into the UNESCO structure (e.g. relevant commissions and task forces) and should be given assistance by advisors. She or he should gather information and opinions from the youth representatives, e.g. the heads of youth advisory panels*. The rules of procedure should be defined by the UNESCO Youth Forum**.
- Make sure that if a National Commission lacks the financial resources to send delegates to any relevant UNESCO Youth Conferences (especially the UNESCO Youth Forum**), UNESCO should support it with financial aid.

* The expression "Youth Advisory Panel" also stands for any other form of Youth Committee, Youth Working Group etc.

** To be reformed as the "Youth Commission" beginning in 2013

Conclusion

We, the participants of the *European-North American Conference on Youth Participation*, strive to introduce the recommendations at the upcoming UNESCO Youth Forum 2011 and to inform our relevant ministries on them.

We also request that the organisers of the *European-North American Conference on Youth Participation* forward the recommendations to the Director General of UNESCO, the Section on Youth, Sports and Physical Education of UNESCO and all National Commissions.

History has shown that youth best creates change for the benefit of all people in society. Give them the opportunities to do so.

Ask not what youth can do for you – ask what you can do for youth!

The participants

Vienna, 24 September 2011