

9th UNESCO Youth Forum

26-28 October 2015, UNESCO Headquarters – Paris, France

Young Global Citizens for a Sustainable Planet

An integral part of UNESCO's highest decision-making body, the General Conference, the UNESCO Youth Forum was initiated in 1999 to bridge the gap between the Organization's work and the realities of youth and youth organizations.

The 9th UNESCO Youth Forum will look at ***how youth, engaging as global citizens, can contribute to building a sustainable planet***, from the global to the local level. The different issues will be treated from multiple perspectives: from upstream policy discussion to action-oriented debates; from awareness-raising and information sharing to networking and capacity development, among others.

In line with the priorities outlined in UNESCO's Operational Strategy on Youth for 2014-2021¹, the thematic focus of the Forum puts the spotlight on the potential for young women and men to act as global citizens engaging not only from within their countries and communities to the global level but also vice-versa. Around the world, young women and men are driving change and claiming respect for fundamental freedoms and rights; improved conditions for them and their communities; opportunities to learn, working and participating in decisions that affect them, etc. At the same time, due to important social transformations and persistent crises, they are faced with acute challenges affecting their lives, including extreme poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, environmental degradation. Building a sustainable future and planet is directly linked to addressing these challenges through collective civic action. Such action lies at the heart of global citizenship, which is understood as a sense of belonging to the global community, and through which youth can engage for sustainable development – one that is both inclusive and environmentally sound – to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for current and future generations.

Global context: the 2015 landmark

The 9th UNESCO Youth Forum will be held at a conjunction of major global processes that directly impact current and future generations. It represents, therefore, an opportunity for young participants to have their say on these processes, identify concrete ideas for youth-led action and contribute to shaping UNESCO's related work.

2015 will mark the beginning of a new "social contract" of the international community – the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. Setting out a global sustainable development agenda, integrating social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions and underpinned by the universal values of justice and human rights, the SDGs will include goals and targets that focus on areas directly relevant to youth development and participation. The potential for youth mobilization and their interest for involvement in the post-2015 agenda have already been illustrated by their massive contribution to consultations on priority target areas for youth in the post-2015. The negotiations leading to the finalization of the SDGs are expected to be concluded at the next UN General Assembly in September 2015, just weeks ahead of the 9th UNESCO Youth Forum. As such, the Forum will be the first global youth event taking place after their adoption, providing a unique momentum for youth to engage in advancing this new social contract.

¹ Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002271/227150E.pdf>

2015 also marks the 20th anniversary of the “*World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY)*”, which provides practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of youth around the world, and constitutes the first global blueprint for effective national youth policies.² Youth-focused discussions on SDGs will both inform, and be informed by, the assessment of progress in the WPAY as well as the main steps forward. The 9th UNESCO Youth Forum will provide an important opportunity to discuss them, in conjunction.

Given the timing and location of the 21st *Conference of the Parties (COP21)* of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to be held in Paris (France) from 30 November to 11 December 2015, the Forum will also incorporate discussions on climate change and youth engagement to build sustainability. More concretely, it will focus on the ways in which climate change interacts with youth development. Young women and men are among the most affected by climate change as its impacts are felt over time. Its environmental, social and economic consequences impact their access to safe and adequate water and food, as well as to education. They impact their right to health, to housing and to a standard of living, as well as to work. They exacerbate poverty and enhance migration, leading to challenges related to the social inclusion of young migrants. Understanding the impact of climate change on the lives and development of youth leads to identifying solutions informed by science as well as indigenous and traditional knowledge where relevant, to increase youth resilience. Climate change can also lead to opportunities to re-evaluate and rethink social processes and leverage positive social transformation with particular focus on the needs of the most vulnerable and the use of knowledge to address such needs. Building capacities of youth to be tomorrow’s drivers of green economies, green growth and sustainable development not only tackles climate change in the long term, but also responds to some of their major concerns – their employability and livelihoods, enhancing their recognition and inclusion as actors for the development of our societies. The role of youth in leading change, by mobilizing their energy and ideas to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation will thus be an objective of the Forum.

Finally, the Forum is also inscribed in the celebrations of the 70th *anniversary of UNESCO*, which are envisaged as a platform to make the Organization intellectually and substantively fit-for-purpose to live up to the challenges of today and the forward-looking expectations of the global community at all levels. Youth will have a central place in the celebrations and, through the Forum, will be able to contribute to discussions on future world challenges and on UNESCO’s role in addressing them.

Within this context, the Youth Forum will be an opportunity to discuss how current political, economic, social and environmental changes affect youth and their development, as well as the ways in which young women and men engage at different levels to make a positive impact on such changes.

² A/RES/50/81 (10 thematic areas) and A/RES/58/133 and A/RES/62/126 (5 additional thematic areas – supplement to the World Programme of Action for Youth). Full WPAY available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>