Forum: Youth Assembly (YA)

Issue: Increasing the involvement of Youth Non-Governmental

Organizations in Intercultural Dialogue

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Position: Co-Head



Personal Introduction

Dear Delegates,

My name is Konstantinos Grafopoulos and I am a 9th-grade student at George Zois School. It is with great honour that I serve as this year's Co-Head of the Youth Assembly (YA) at the American College of Greece Model United Nations Conference (ACGMUN).

First and foremost, I commend your participation in the 8th ACGMUN conference. This event is both a challenge and an incredible opportunity for personal growth. As this is my first time serving as a Student Officer, I am eager to make your experience as rewarding and memorable as mine was during my first conference. In case that this is your own first experience of a conference, understand that we both share a tad of anxiety about this new experience. Having previously been a delegate, I strongly encourage you to embrace this experience fully and discover all the benefits that Model United Nations (MUN) has to offer.

Regarding this year's committee, I am genuinely captivated by the topics we will address in the Youth Assembly. In my view, it is one of the most impactful committees a Model United Nations conference can provide and it holds a special place in my heart as it was the start of my very own MUN journey. I want to assure you that I am here to support you every step of the way. If you have any questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me grafopoulos.k@zois.edu.gr. I am more than happy to help.

Remember that you are more than encouraged to extend your research and bring more information onto the committee's debate.

Looking forward to an inspiring and fruitful conference!

Topic Introduction

In an ever-evolving society, focused around equality and equal opportunities, the involvement of non-governmental organizations managed by the youth in global dialogue is a necessary part to transcend as a society. Youth Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are uniquely positioned to drive this dialogue, as they bring new perspectives, energy and creativity to bridge cultural divides.

Despite their potential benefits on a societal, political and economic aspect, many youth NGOs face a plethora of challenges during their upbringing, in their further development and in achieving widespread involvement in intercultural initiatives. Particularly, the establishment of an NGO, specifically a Youth NGO, is a demanding task. A range of hurdles in their way are the lack of resources, outdated ways of thinking and treating a younger individual, but also the limited variety of platforms to showcase their efforts, which often hinder their ability to make a meaningful impact. Examples of upcoming Youth Non-Governmental Organizations are the Asian Youth Council (AYC) and the World Youth Alliance (WYA). Advocating for the involvement of youth NGOs in intercultural dialogue not only benefits the organizations themselves but also strengthens the fabric of global citizenship.

All in all, Youth Non-Governmental Organizations, stay stable having an active vision and passionate goals, correlating strongly to the sense of "Balancing Infinite Opportunities" since they, in their turn, exercise their right to an effective representation of their voices, allowing themselves to make an impact, regardless of their funding or general basis.

Definition of Key Terms

Intercultural Dialogue

Interaction and communication between people from different cultural backgrounds to foster understanding, respect, and collaboration.¹

Youth Non-Governmental Organizations (Youth NGOs)

Organizations led by or focused on young people, working outside of governmental jurisdiction, often aimed at social development, advocacy, and youth empowerment.²

Civic Engagement

Active participation in society's political, social, and cultural matters by individuals or groups, including youth NGOs.³

Youth Empowerment

The procedure of equipping young individuals with the skills, self-confidence and platforms to achieve change and contribute to the maintenance of intercultural dialogue.⁴

Partnership Building

Forming and maintaining good diplomatic relations between youth NGOs, governments, international organizations and local communities to support intercultural initiatives.⁵

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

United Nations-led global goals, especially SDG 16 regarding Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions but also SDG 17 about Partnerships for the Goals, which align with promoting youth participation and intercultural dialogue.⁶

¹Coe.int, 2025, www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept en.asp#P30 3374.

² "What Is an International Youth NGO? - European Youth Foundation - Www.coe.int." *European Youth Foundation*, 2023, www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation/international-youth-ngos . Accessed 8 Feb. 2025.

³youth.gov. "Civic Engagement." Youth.gov, 2019, youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering.

⁴"Youth Empowerment | United Nations Development Programme." UNDP, <u>www.undp.org/governance/youth-</u> empowerment.

⁵ "Guide to Partnership Building." *UNDP*, <u>www.undp.org/publications/guide-partnership-building</u>.

⁶"The 17 Sustainable Development Goals." United Nations, 2024, sdgs.un.org/goals.

Advocacy

Actions taken to support or influence policies and practices in favor of intercultural understanding and youth involvement.⁷

Direct Representation

From the start of the time, there was direct democracy, so that people could immediately influence the course of history through communication with those in 'office'. Today, by direct representation, we mean, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), official parties, or autonomous individuals which have the power to influence and are designated for providing and expressing the beliefs of certain groups.

Background Information

The Origin of Youth NGOs

The journey of youth NGOs began in 1844 with the establishment of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) by George Williams in London, UK.⁸ Created during the Industrial Revolution, it aimed to provide a safe and supportive environment for young men, offering education, ethical guidance and productive activities. Decades later, in 1907, Robert Baden-Powell established the Boy Scouts Movement, exercising their resources on a public scale and focusing on leadership development and civil duties, as these were virtues requested by that certain time period, when politics was a core issue of daily life.⁹ These organizations laid the foundation for youth empowerment on a global scale and local scale, standing as a prototype of many more associations to come.

The Mid-20th Century and the integration of Youth NGOs into Society

By the mid-20th century, youth NGOs began to expand and become more than just an initiative but on the contrary, an active member. Along with the establishment of other global initiatives, these organizations were able to partially engage successfully. The European Youth Forum (EYF), established in 1955, became a European platform for uniting the voices of young Europeans and

^{7&}quot;What Is Advocacy?" *Theirworld*, theirworld.org/resources/what-is-advocacy/.

⁸ "Home." YMCA International - World Alliance of YMCAs, 2024, www.ymca.int/.

⁹ "Home." Boy Scouts of America, 28 Aug. 2024, www.scouting.org/%0A. Accessed 8 Feb. 2025.

advocating for their participation in governmental talks about procedural matters. Their existence did not solely advertise their movements but played a strong role in their widespread popularity. Their recognition helped foster the adoption of the Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect, and Understanding in 1965, signalling that youth members can take the role of a primary "stakeholder" fostering global peace and collaboration. Moreover, this shift contributed to social change and youth-led movements to achieve inclusivity, accounting for the suspicions audiences had, regarding their need to thrive. Globalization affected this aspect, via many transregional projects and became the current situation of the world, laying the ground for mentioning the importance of youth participation which became an increasingly important matter of discussion.

The 2000s-2020s Mark United Nations' Contributions and Future Plans

The 2000 launch of the United Nations Youth Program marked the start of a new era, ensuring that others view the inclusion of youth perspectives in global policymaking, pivotal.¹¹ This inclusion steadily grew larger in 2015 with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where young people were recognized as key participants who were able to voice their opinions and believe in achieving goals related to quality education, gender equality, environmental challenges that are all viewed by youth to be effectively faced. Furthermore, the United Nations Youth Strategy (Youth 2030) was adopted in 2020-combining global efforts to empower young people as advocates of change and evolution.

The Growing Influence of Youth NGOs in Global Forums

Youth NGOs have seen a rise in their participation in global forums over the years. This response correlates to the fact that through modern communication platforms, we get to be informed, updated and most importantly, eligible to make a well-studied choice. Recent statistics regarding this incline, prove that the number of youth organizations involved in such platforms increased significantly from 50

¹⁰ United Nations. "Support Sustainable Development and Climate Action." *United Nations*, United Nations, 2021, www.un.org/en/our-work/support-sustainable-development-and-climate-action.

¹¹"Home - Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth." *Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth*, 30 Dec. 2023, www.un.org/youthenvoy/%0A. Accessed 8 Feb. 2025.

in 2015 to over 300 in 2022.¹² This growth labels their recognition as a pivotal step so that young people can adapt, address global challenges, voice their opinions actively and to form sustainable, yet practical solutions. This steady increase explains the expanding influence of youth-led initiatives, considering that with evolution, they become increasingly needed, leading to policy change and fostering intercultural understanding, emphasizing why youth should constitute a part of diplomacy and international talks. Initiatives within the United Nations further explore the nature and concept of "youth diplomacy" and expanding audiences.

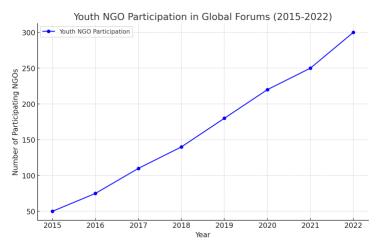


Figure 1: Graph depicting the participation of Youth NGOs throughout the years 2010-2022

Intercultural Dialogue and Peacebuilding

Their impact of Youth NGOs varies, depending on their work, from cultural, political and social contributions. A significant achievement of youth NGOs' work is fostering and promoting intercultural dialogue which is essential to participate efficiently in overconnected digital network-forums. Mass media are a part of our everyday-life, consequently, we should regulate them to fit into societal and humanitarian standards. Intercultural dialogue, particularly in this case, refers to the exchange of ideas, values and perspectives amongst individuals from diverse backgrounds. It is crucial to acknowledge its aid to reduce prejudice, overcome stereotypes, promote mutual understanding and foster peace, reaching the social aspect aforementioned.

¹²"Youth Development Index (YDI)." Commonwealth, 2020, <u>thecommonwealth.org/innovation/youth-development-index%20%0A</u>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2025.

Youth NGOs have additionally successfully and specifically utilized intercultural dialogue as a tool for uniting people from opposite sides of the globe and addressing social arguments and debates. This is directly implemented in regions in current conflicts. Programs organized by global bodies like the European Youth Parliament have brought together young people from across Europe to engage in constructive dialogue, advocating for breaking down stereotypes and fostering unity. These initiatives are inspired by global frameworks such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), which emphasizes the importance of diversity as a means of innovation and social progress and a means of eliminating discrimination in both societies of Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) and More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs).

In nations affected by conflict, youth NGOs have been pivotal in reconciliation.¹³ By engaging and integrating young people into dialogue and collaborative projects, these organizations create opportunities for healing and understanding, which stems from the youth and eventually reaches all age groups. Stereotypes are eliminated and eventually, this work contributes not only to peacebuilding but also to strengthening social cohesion, reducing the potential for future conflicts and mitigating the endangerment of human rights.

Challenges faced by Youth NGOs

Financial Struggles

A primary issue is limited funding and resources which eliminates their ability to fund programs and reach a wider audience. As a society we are not used to accepting their contribution because overwhelmingly, leadership positions are occupied by either experts or graduates of specific fields and as a result, many youth organizations are forced to rely solely on volunteer efforts and inevitably struggle to maintain stable financial support, which is an obstacle in their way.

Social problems

¹³"European Youth Parliament España | Parlamento Europeo de Juventud España." *European Youth Parliament España Parlamento Europeo de Juventud España*, 19 Jan. 2025, www.eype.es/en/%20%0A. Accessed 8 Feb. 2025.

Another challenge is the lack of recognition and representation in policy making forums. Most of the audiences are not aware of their existence therefore disregarding their always-provided help. While youth NGOs are increasingly "winning ground" in global discussions, their voices are often undervalued, and their perspectives are often, not integrated into policy decisions. Additionally, cross-cultural collaboration, such as language differences and geopolitical tensions, are the reason why building international partnerships with limited choice of resources is unachievable.

Solutions to these challenges

Addressing these barriers demands coordinated and synchronised efforts to enhance its funding budget, to effectively recognize youth as critical participants in decision-making and create opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges to achieve social cohesion. Projects have been attempted but it is a challenge that diplomatic and constructive debate must solve. The adoption of initiatives like the UN Youth Strategy (Youth 2030) represents a growing commitment to empowering youth organizations, but more needs to be done to overcome these borders.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Canada

Canada throughout its history, maintained a healthy environment where productive dialogue could be harvested. Its significance is shown by the "Vancouver Talks" it hosts and by programs like the Canadian Multiculturalism Program and other youth-centred projects like Katimavik, a long-standing Canadian program which promotes youth volunteerism and cultural exchanges between diverse communities across Canada. ¹⁴

Italy

Italy engages annually in youth programs through the Erasmus initiative. This movement actively supports the European Pillar of Human rights and has been in charge of hosting transregional lessons between European and Non-European nations. As revealed by a European University Institute in Florence, Italy, they are focused on an ERC-funded project ('TARGETS'), which conducts longitudinal

¹⁴Wikipedia Contributors. "Global Affairs Canada." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 27 Dec. 2024.

research on the impact of ethnic discrimination on the job search process. The job search experiences of ethnic minorities are rife with rejections and second tries.¹⁵

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America, being a world-power and "leader" of all projects, has had previous involvement in promoting their interaction in intercultural dialogue. They have fostered multiple exchange programs and youth-focused initiatives. Some of them are the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program which provides scholarships for high school students from predominantly Muslim countries to study in the United States and the Sister Cities International Youth Programs, promoting global partnerships through city-to-city relationships, facilitating youth exchanges for cultural dialogue. Supporting them financially, they are a major supporter of Youth NGOs. ¹⁶

Anna Lindh Foundation

The Anna Lindh Foundation is a Mediterranean-based organization dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. It has in the past supported and has continued to support youth NGOs through grants, training programs, and collaborative projects, encouraging initiatives that strengthen diplomatic relations around the globe. By forming partnerships among civil society bodies, the foundation empowers young people to lead and participate in efforts regarding cultural exchange, conflict resolution and mutual respect in the region. It made its debut by fostering 6 impactful policy debates and outreach dialogues, engaging 183 stakeholders and experts from academia, public policy, and civil society in just 4 months.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Italy – Center for Intercultural Dialogue." *Center for Intercultural Dialogue*, 22 Jan. 2025, centerforinterculturaldialogue.org/tag/italy/%0A. Accessed 8 Feb. 2025.

¹⁶ Sports diplomacy exchanges have involved tens of thousands of people from more than 180 countries to do just this. ... Did you know that the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) taps into the power of sport to protect our environment? *Https://Eca.state.gov/Sports-Diplomacy/Special-Initiatives*.

¹⁷"Anna Lindh Foundation – ALF Is an Intergovernmental Organisation That Brings Together Civil Society Organisations, Institutions, Governments, and Change-Makers from across the Euro-Mediterranean Region. Through Our Diverse Programmes and Initiatives, We Create Spaces for People to Meet, Learn, and Collaborate on Relevant Key Themes." *Alf. website*, 2024, alf. website/en/. Accessed 31 Dec. 2024.

European Youth Foundation (EYF)

The European Youth Foundation is an initiative of the Council of Europe which has financially supported youth-led projects, having the ability to additionally raise cultural awareness. The European Youth Foundation (EYF) targets empowering young people to achieve the synthesis of culturally recognising communities. Being a movement started by youth populations, it can actively shape our minds and advocate for the opinions to be voiced.¹⁸

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has actively set off on its humanitarian mission, fostering intercultural dialogue, through volunteer programs and interactive community engagement. By developing its Partnership- field, cooperating with financially strong bodies through the Donor Advisory Group (DAG) to develop its practical and regional infrastructure having surpassed cultural barriers and fostered mutual respect in diverse societies. Examples of such humanitarian aid is their presence in the Iranian region, helping millions and shaping billions.¹⁹

SALTO-YOUTH

SALTO-YOUTH, is a part of the European Commission's youth programs. It provides resources, training, and networking opportunities to support intercultural dialogue, particularly between European Union Members and in cooperation with the Arab League, has made an impact on Middle-East Republics. It connects youth workers and NGOs across the globe, fostering mutual understanding through capacity-building workshops and exchanges. SALTO-YOUTH has specifically been the reason for the establishment of the Erasmus initiative and Euromed conferences with global educational publications.²⁰

¹⁸ Funding and Grants Council of Europe EYF - European Youth Foundation - Www.coe.int." *European Youth Foundation*

www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation.

¹⁹ IFRC. "International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies." *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*, 2019, www.ifrc.org/.

²⁰ "SALTO-YOUTH." Salto-Youth.net, 2021, www.salto-youth.net/%0A.

Blocs Expected

Alliance 1

This alliance aims to maintain gradual changes by advocating for policies that support and integrate intercultural dialogue initiatives through youth NGOs. The aim is to ensure that governments, international organizations and educational foundations recognize and promote intercultural cooperation as a critical area of youth development and education. The members of this alliance rely on steady changes through global institutions.

Alliance 2

This alliance supports the involvement of Youth Non-Governmental Organizations, focused on ground-level engagement and capacity-building among youth NGOs to achieve intercultural exchanges. They emphasize on discussion between local governmental units and community-guided dialogue initiatives rather than relying heavily on institutional revamps.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Events
June 6, 1844	First Youth NGO founded by George Williams - The Young Men's Christian Association – (YMCA).
August 1, 1907	Founding of the Boy Scouts Movement established by Robert Baden-Powell.
July 23, 1996	Founding of the European Youth Forum (EYF).
December 7, 1965	Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect, and Understanding
November 11, 1995	Founding of the European Youth Parliament (EYP)
December 14, 2000	Launch of the United Nations Youth Program
September 15, 2015	Inclusion of Youth in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
September 24, 2018	Adoption of the UN Youth Strategy (Youth 2030)

Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties & Events

- Resolution A/RES/76/69 (2021)
- Resolution A/RES/78/129 (2023)
- Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)
- Resolution 2419 (2018)
- International Year of Youth (2010–2011)

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

UNESCO's Youth Forums

This initiative of UNESCO is referring to dialogues that on a yearly basis is based on different nations that can achieve the neutral element and has in the past, provided digital and practical amenities to each participant. Additionally, it has been enhanced by the expanded funding of UNESCO, not being geopolitically limited. These conversation hostings have no borders and stand limited of no difference. Yet, they are not currently accessible to all economic classes and can constitute a financial burden to less-abled citizens.

EU's Erasmus+ Programme

The Erasmus Foundation by the European Union has properly-targeted facilities to accommodate for the needs of students in collaboration with foreign universities. Such practices have been examined in Greece, Finland, Iceland and primarily started in the United Kingdom. During these programs we achieve just what our topic mentions, intercultural dialogue. There is no doubt that whoever acquires that chance is blessed with much more than just an educating experience. Nevertheless, these projects do not extend outside of the European peninsula and can lead to wasting potential from other continents like Asia, Oceania etc.

The Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum

The Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum has in the past exceeded international expectations and achieved global recognition. While operating in this specific area, they have overcome challenges of limited funding, almost no recognition upon public audiences and most importantly have struggled with

their interference in regions that face territorial disputes. These challenges, though, remain still a priority from their viewpoint. Lastly, The Anna Lindh Foundation that supports these ventures, has primarily over the course of the last decade, focused on infrastructural needs.

Council of Europe's Youth Department

This European Union-centered project was the first of its time and laid the foundation from many other associations to come. To begin with, its appeal to the European audience cannot be undervalued, utilizing both digital and practical amenities and means of evolution. Hopefully, this Department is not restricted by financial strains but yet again seems to be fairly limited to the European region, having no motive to expand or reach other continental geopolitical parts.

Possible Solutions

Intercultural Innovation Labs

A possible solution could be to establish hubs where youth NGOs can co-create projects addressing shared challenges in both practical and digital form. They will not be limited by their geographical difference and they can introduce young minds to new ideas. Hosted in neutral regions such as Geneva in Switzerland, on a yearly and monthly basis, overlooked and monitored by the United Nations to achieve global recognition. These hubs would provide the participants with expertise from executives to be better-informed. Considering that this initiative requires reliance and punctuality it would be clear to try and ensure transparency in the selection criteria of those participating.

Exchange programs for NGO Leaders

These exchange projects are meant to harvest the potential of young NGO leaders to live and work in different cultural situations, fostering understanding and collaboration. This could possibly defy inequalities and differentiate community roles, commonly regarded as "stereotypes". Still, this remains highly challenging, so they are called to evaluate each participant by their leadership talents and strengths. Focus should be put upon maintaining a diverse variety of participations from each corner of the world with the support of an international organization or institution. Simultaneously, they could help foster "Dialogue Circles", a means of promoting community-driven dialogue events led by youth NGOs to address local cultural differences and recognize shared values. Furthermore, they can encourage

and advocate for an Inclusive Policy Network within these circles to form coalitions policies that enhance intercultural dialogue and inclusion.

International Leadership Training

Aiming to educate both Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) and More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs), overlooked by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). These specific training modules need to moderate behaviors, illuminate participants on marketing illustrations and advertising mechanisms to promote the NGOs and detach funding. Yet, they can advocate for Global campaigns about the voice of the youth and their partaking in crucial decisions affecting them. International forums as such, where the youth can voice its opinion with NGO-led moderation so that healthy dialogue can be fostered is pivotal for peaceful maintenance.

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