

# Meeting of UNESCO Chairs on human rights, urban inclusion and migration 21-22 June 2017, UNESCO Headquarters

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*The 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guide all of UNESCO's 'soft power' action -- to empower women and men through education and lifelong learning, to deepen social inclusion, to support the rights of refugees and displaced persons, to defend freedom of expression, along with the right to seek, receive and impart information, to build capacities for everyone to create and share knowledge.*

*Irina Bokova, UNESCO's Director-General*

## **Introduction**

UNESCO convened at its Headquarters on 21-22 June 2017 a meeting with selected Chairs in human rights, urban inclusion and migration/human mobility – as actors with valuable expertise and analytical capacity – along with other institutes and experts (list of participants attached). The meeting had a dual objective (see background note and concept note):

- (1) to seek their advice and support regarding the process of reviewing, contextualizing and reinforcing UNESCO's mandate in the field of human rights and the fight against all forms of discrimination; and
- (2) to build, in response to global agendas, a solid multistakeholder partnership (on promoting a human rights culture with emphasis on gender equality; advancing urban inclusion and addressing the challenges of human mobility), with UNESCO Chairs as prime actors in the advancement of intellectual reflection, research and capacity development.

The 2030 Agenda's firm entrenchment in human rights and its vision of "leaving no one behind", makes it imperative for UNESCO – from the perspective of all its fields of competence – to carefully assess its role and position itself strategically within the framework of common efforts of the UN system. Within this context, the review of UNESCO's Human Rights Strategy and its Integrated Strategy to Combat Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, both adopted in 2003, appears as particularly timely.

Within the broad framework of the 2030 Agenda, specific commitments are of particular interest to UNESCO. These are: the promotion of a human rights culture, including a strong commitment to gender equality; the empowerment of local authorities as agents of inclusive development; and the advancement of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration premised on human rights norms. The emphasis on these commitments derives from their enhanced visibility and importance for the international community. It is also motivated by their multiple operational interconnections and their projections in multiple aspects of UNESCO's mandate, where the Organization has accumulated experience and expertise.

The Inclusion and Rights programme at UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector will be playing a central role in the pursuit of these crosscutting workstreams. With respect to the review of the strategies, it will support and coordinate Organization-wide efforts. In the case of collaborative work on human rights, urban inclusion and human mobility, the programme will promote synergies that fully recognize the interconnections amongst these topics as well as the importance of developing multidisciplinary responses that match the complexity of the challenges ahead.

This report contains a brief overview of ideas and key action points that emerged during the meeting.

## **Key ideas and recommendations**

Further to the ideas and recommendations on the specific topics under consideration – presented in the respective sub-sections below – there were a number of broader as well as follow-up process-related suggestions.

A type of action that participants were particularly keen on was the development of advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. These could focus on any of the issues falling within the scope of this renewed and expanded collaboration. A key point in this connection was the involvement of a host of actors, including universities, local authorities and national human rights institutions. Activities could take whatever form is considered appropriate for the specific audience and context, including seminars and advocacy events. Media, including local outlets, social networks and infographics should be actively employed, as well as culture and the arts through partnerships with museums and similar institutions. An illustrative example is UNESCO's collaboration with the *Musée de l'Homme* on the exhibition *Us and Them From Prejudice to Racism*. UNESCO's External Relations and Public Information Sector would be approached for advice on the design of such initiatives, while the expertise of the Communication and Information Sector would be invaluable with respect to media-related components.

To enhance knowledge sharing and facilitate joint collaboration, participants strongly recommended the creation of a digital platform. Operating as an online community of practice, the platform will feature documents, a discussion board, a calendar, an interactive map and a newsfeed regarding the activities of its members – including UNESCO Chairs, member cities of UNESCO's International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – ICCAR, and other partners. The platform – a first version of which is already set up (accessible at: <https://teams.unesco.org/cop/diversity-inclusion/uc/SitePages/Home.aspx>) will serve to strengthen the link between all different members, with the aim of implementing agreed upon joint action points. Further to electronic communication, participants were in favour of a face-to-face encounter, if resources allow it every 2 years and each time in a different location.

A main concern was the lack of funds. For this reason, the proposed joint actions outlined below are a combination of initiatives that either: are already planned; are to be implemented within the framework of existing resources of interested partners (crowdsourcing); or require mobilization of resources through joint efforts of interested parties – for instance exploring public-private partnerships. Naturally, the proposals draw on the mandate of UNESCO, the experience and knowledge of partners and related entry points and comparative advantages.

### **A) Contextualizing UNESCO's human rights mandate**

UNESCO's longstanding commitment to human rights was reaffirmed and contextualized in 2003, with the adoption of two mutually reinforcing organization-wide strategies - the human

rights strategy and the anti-discrimination strategy. The recently adopted global agendas with their specific commitments have created a momentum that should be fully harnessed. In the words of the Director-General, it is time “to cast a critical eye on what has been achieved, where there are strengths to build on and where there are weaknesses to correct”. As a result, the Organization should expand and adapt its strategic priorities to address current and expected challenges, while building on advancements and its own success stories.

Throughout the discussion, it was concluded that emphasis should be placed on areas and issues where UNESCO holds a comparative advantage in relation to other UN Agencies and international organizations. A strength of the Organization that should guide reflection is its multidisciplinary nature. It is also imperative to use very clear language in the formulation of expected results and main lines of action. Central among the areas of focus should be the interconnection between human rights and education (formal, informal and non-formal) as a fundamental instrument for the prevention of human rights violations. Within this broad framework, a vast array of activities could be considered, taking duly into account a gender equality dimension, such as : the development of training manuals and capacity-building initiatives, notably for human rights trainers and professionals; awareness-raising through seminars, conferences, and also cultural events and activities; advocacy initiatives, with youth as central player to forge intergenerational links in favour of human rights action and solidarity. UNESCO is well placed, owing to its multidisciplinary mandate, to elucidate the interconnection between human rights implementation and contextual considerations, including the impact of culture and cultural practices. The links of the Organization with networks of local actors – such as ICCAR, Chairs, etc. – allow it to play a role in the search for local solutions, as well as in sharing what works locally in the effort to address global issues.

Among the themes highlighted were: a) the entrenchment of sustainable development (and SDGs) in human rights; b) the interrelation of gender equality, peace and religion; c) gender equality and economics; and d) human rights and science.

The period from now until December 2018 will serve to amplify exchanges and consultations, within the Organization and with Member States and the host of UNESCO partners. As the process moves forward, an increasingly consolidated set of ideas and recommendations for action will be distilled from the consultations and contribute to further nurture and advance the debate. By the end of February 2019, this exercise should result in a consolidated draft, which will be submitted to the UNESCO Executive Board at its Spring 2019 session for consideration and eventual transmission for adoption to the General Conference that will convene in November 2019.

### Primary Action Points

- Reach out to Member States, especially through their National Commissions, to garner support and build ownership over the process and its outcome. UNESCO Chairs, ICCAR member cities and other partners could be helpful in this respect;
- Collect, through a questionnaire to Member States, input on advancements, challenges, lessons learned and comments regarding the issues highlighted in the 2003 strategies. It should be made clear that this is a consultation process to inform the way forward and not an evaluation to judge or “name and shame”;
- Make optimal use of the vast and multi-disciplinary networks at UNESCO’s disposal to support and feed their own activities (events, courses and trainings) into the review of the strategies and subsequently into their implementation.

## **B) Fostering Urban Inclusion**

This topic is framed within the 2030 Agenda, especially SDG#11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and the New Urban Agenda, where focus is placed on the sociocultural dimension of sustainable development and addressing all forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Excluding people (on religious, racial, social, gender-related grounds) exacerbates violence. An increase in migration to urban areas has multiplied challenges on resources and the acceptance of different cultures. ICCAR is an important platform to address resulting challenges of discrimination; local authorities (i.e. mayors) are invaluable spokespersons and implementers of related local practical actions.

Fostering an inclusive city requires a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive approach. An open and participatory decision-making process will allow taking on board and addressing the rights and aspirations of marginalized groups (i.e. vulnerable women and girls, urban youth, elderly and persons with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and the poor, etc.). It is essential to promote the civic participation of youth to address challenges related to income, access to services (employment, education and training), discrimination (gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, etc.), and lack of understanding of their rights (and how to exercise and claim them). A major concern is that of accessible and quality housing that does not reproduce or exacerbate segregation and exclusion.

### Primary Joint Action Points

- Conduct participatory comparative research on integrating marginalized populations through slum clearance, inclusive planning, and field experiments on how to structure urban democracy;
- Collect, analyze and disseminate citizen-generated data at the local level with a focus on different forms of discrimination and the effects of anti-discrimination programmes, thereby making ownership of such initiatives more community-oriented;
- Promote the exchange of information on city experiences (i.e. their practices, challenges, and lessons) in regard to inclusion. A compilation of practical guidelines and best practices, taking into account the importance of contextualization, should be created. These tools could be the basis for information sharing and targeted capacity-building for municipal officials and NGOs. Such initiatives could draw on the work launched recently to promote global citizenship education outside the school setting within the framework of the Coalition of Arab Cities against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance in partnership with the European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Graz;
- Organize periodic conferences/symposia (every 2 years) towards the implementation of the SDGs focusing, *inter alia*, on broadening participation in the development of policies and operational activities and on promoting interaction among selected neighboring cities with similar characteristics on human rights implementation at the local level (e.g. on housing, education, urban planning, etc.).

## **C) Human Mobility: transforming the discourse**

Firstly, the discussions highlighted a methodological challenge and a corresponding gap. In order to provide viable action points and policy recommendations, the analysis of context is imperative. Migration issues and challenges – actual or perceived – differ from one region to

another, and the knowledge available is considered globally as either insufficient or poorly used. Universal concerns derive from the marginalization of populations, and its economic, social, political and cultural consequences. Likewise, particular attention should be paid to the feminization of migration, taking into account the unique challenges faced by pregnant women and unaccompanied minors for instance, or the threat of human trafficking.

Another source of concern are the distinctions oftentimes made by governments of receiving countries between citizens and newcomers, as well as between newcomers according to their legal status (i.e. undocumented migrants, refugees, asylum seekers). These result in obstructions on the enjoyment and exercise of their fundamental rights, including the right to education. Within the framework of the right to education, and beyond promoting access to the different levels of education, steps must be taken to facilitate the recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications. Likewise, the right to housing, with its links to security and exclusion, is also forgone. Local and municipal authorities have a critical role in addressing related gaps and also in creating the conditions for social cohesion – for instance by protecting cultural rights and the identity of migrant populations, and valuing diversity.

Steps must be taken to support actions deriving from global agendas and international agreements, such as the migration-related targets of the 2030 Agenda and the related commitments of the New Urban Agenda, as well as Member States' expected commitments within the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (to be adopted in September 2018).

#### Primary Joint Action Points

- A main area of action is **advocacy** on the theme of human mobility and migration, mobilizing a variety of actors, with universities playing a key role, and employing all appropriate means and forms, including the media, culture and the arts.
- A second area is the conduct of **research**. In this respect, emphasis was placed on pursuing research carried out within the framework of the *Welcoming Cities for Refugees and Migrants* initiative, implemented jointly with the M.V. Vardinoyannis Foundation and the European Coalition of Cities against Racism. Analysis on city approaches, trends, and challenges of migration management should be deepened in Europe and expanded to other regions, drawing on the interest of partners – for instance the Autonomous University of Mexico – to lead such an exercise.

#### Conclusion

The innovation of bringing together Chairs dedicated to different but interrelated fields and the expansion of participation to a cohort of other stakeholders with which UNESCO works closely – such as city members of ICCAR, a centre under the auspices of UNESCO, national human rights institutions, research centres and intergovernmental organizations – proved extremely pertinent. The variety of expertise and rich experiences of the meeting's participants lends itself to creating a diverse yet cohesive network of committed experts and practitioners. The discussions during the panels and the working groups have resulted in a solid corpus of ideas to chart a roadmap for this joint collaboration.

UNESCO envisions a genuine forward-looking partnership with UNESCO Chairs, city authorities and research practitioners, as it rethinks and redefines its mandate on human rights and inclusion. This partnership will be carried forward by a specific roadmap for joint action that will harness the Chairholders' expertise and commitment to address challenges relating to the protection and promotion of human rights, migration issues and the cities agenda.