



Reinforcing Competences of Education Practitioners to Manage Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue

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REPORT



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Executive summary

The [North-South Centre of the Council of Europe](#) organized a global education thematic seminar at the Lisbon Youth Centre (IPDJ) on 18 May 2023 with the national coordinators of the Global Education Network, academic experts, representatives of governments and international organisations, on the topic of “Reinforcing competences of education practitioners to manage intercultural and interfaith dialogue”.

The Seminar aimed to provide the space to analyse and discuss the latest developments shaping intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the education sector, the challenges involved, and the skills and competences needed for its implementation. The Seminar also provided the opportunity for participants to share useful practical tools and resources aimed at practising intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

The Seminar referred to the [Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living together as Equals in Dignity”](#) (2008), the [Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic culture](#) (2018) and the North-South Centre [Global Education Guidelines](#) (2019).

This activity was organised together with the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Global Education Network. These activities are part of [iLEGEND III: Intercultural Learning Exchange through Global Education, Networking and Dialogue \(2023-2026\)](#), a Joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe implemented by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe. The overall objective of the project is to increase the active engagement of EU member States, candidate and potential candidate countries’ citizens (in particular young people) in safeguarding sustainable development and confronting global challenges and inequalities at local and global level.

Rationale

In Europe, alongside many parts of the world, there has been a clear international commitment towards intercultural dialogue over the past two decades¹: the official discourse acknowledges cultural and religious diversity as an asset to society and individuals², and recognizes the role that culture plays in the development of social and personal identities. There is also easier access to information and learning opportunities than ever before. Yet an increasing number of young European citizens, who represent the cultural and religious diversity of EU societies, describe a sense of detachment from their peer community, and consider that they do not feel fully integrated in the school environment³. In the context of lasting geopolitical instability, punctuated by several economical and financial crisis and a worldwide Covid pandemic, public anxieties over migration and diversity have been steadily growing in Europe⁴ and

¹ The United Nations «Alliance of Civilizations» is an example of initiative of the international community « to build bridges, overcome prejudices, avoid polarization and a movement to strengthen mutual respect for traditions and religious beliefs» (Statement of the UN Secretary General at the launch of the Alliance on 14 July 2005).

² Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living Together as Equals in Dignity” (2008), Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

³ Assumpta Aneas & Ruth Vilà (2023): Evaluation of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Competencies. Identification of Factors Related with Its Performance among Adolescents in the City of Barcelona, Religion & Education, DOI: 10.1080/15507394.2023.2187202

⁴ See data from European Fundamental Rights Agency, such as “Second EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey” (2017).

beyond⁵. There is continued distrust and fear of the «other», hate crimes, intolerance based on religion or belief, and prejudice.

School teachers and teacher educators do not feel prepared when addressing cultural and religious diversity in school settings and are lacking competences for the development of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, which is essential for achieving quality education for all⁶. As a part of a comprehensive approach towards the development of competences for democratic culture⁷, the capacity to engage in intercultural and interfaith dialogue is fundamental⁸.

By teaching ethical attitudes, such as respect and responsibility, as well as skills such as critical thinking, educators can empower young learners to become global citizens who will contribute to more peaceful societies. Education for global citizenship, also understood as Global Education, focuses on reflective learning, multiple perspectives, and the development of critical thinking as a main goal of the education process. This process also deals with the challenges posed by the new forms and the new ways of communication, and with the emergence of a generation of digital natives.

Schools, as the main academic reference where competences are taught and learnt, are spaces for dialogue where the local community and all the relevant actors (learners, families, teachers, civil society organisations and national institutions) meet global phenomena in and around the classroom. They represent a reality where specific competences are needed to practise intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

The reinforcement of these competences is not limited to formal curricula programmes. Formal and non-formal education can be mutually reinforcing in addressing contemporary challenges – such as radicalisation, migration, climate change, inequality – that are extremely complex and require a holistic and inter-disciplinary approach. It is in this context that civil society organisations can play an important role complementing formal education curricula to fill skills gap, through capacity-building programmes or project work in global citizenship education.

Seminar Programme

Opening session

The participants were welcomed by [Ms Eduarda Marques](#), Director of the [Lisbon Youth Centre](#), Portuguese Institute for Sports and Youth (IPDJ) and [Mr Adelino Silva](#), Executive Director of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

[Reverend José Miguel Fraga Cardoso](#), representing the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See, evoked in his opening remarks the importance of “critical universalism” and of uniting people under a common set of inclusive and common values in a world affected by individualism and relativism.

⁵ See statements and reports from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well recent Statements by the United Nations High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations (2022)

⁶ Shuali Trachtenberg, T., Bekerman, Z., Bar Cendón, A., Prieto Egido, M., Tenreiro Rodríguez, V., Serrat Roosen, I., Centeno, C., *Addressing educational needs of Teachers in the EU for inclusive education in a context of diversity, Volume 1. Teachers’ Intercultural Competence: Working definition and implications for teacher education*, EUR 30323 EN

⁷ Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2018), Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

⁸ Barrett, M. & Byram, M (2022) *Autobiography in intercultural encounters Concepts, Contents and Theory*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Increased human mobility and the so-called “information society” opened young generations to many cultural perspectives, yet the coexistence of cultures could give rise to a sense of threat based on preconceptions. He called for the formation of new citizens and underlined the role of schools in promoting civic education, providing young people with spaces for discussion and personal engagement and above all, giving them the means to deepen the culture of dialogue. To embrace a *culture of fraternity*, it is necessary to form men and women capable of mediation and reconciliation, of building a social fabric marked by encounter and solidarity. For this, knowledge is essential, but it is also desirable to enter a dimension where reason includes love. In other words, it is a matter of moving from a cold soliloquy to the warmth of dialogue since the human person is only realised in truth and love. In this sense, education fully achieves its purpose when along with the mind it involves the heart and hands, educating our reason, emotions, and life. Education is at its best then, when promotes the “communal” dimension, a culture of encounter, and wonder in front of dialogue and the creativity of each person.

Mr Muzhdad Hasanov of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan stated that true peace and harmony were based on mutual respect, which came from understanding and this required knowledge. He recalled that on many occasions through history education had been manipulated to attain selfish goals. And still today, education was still often used to promote one-sided and biased interpretations of history, to stress the exclusiveness of a particular ethnic, or religious, or social group, thus sowing the seeds of enmity, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. Addressing the example of Azerbaijan, he underlined the country’s tradition of tolerance and respect for other cultures, which were considered part of the national heritage. Specific targets on global education were included into the education standards, and subjects devoted to multiculturalism were included at all levels in vocational schools and higher education. National minorities were granted the rights to study and teach in their native languages, covering 384 schools and 34 000 learners in 2023. The Azeri government also had a wide-ranging programme of scholarships to allow Azeri students to diversify their experience abroad and a programme to receive up to ten thousand international students from 110 countries to study in Azerbaijan, including some refugee students.

[The full text of the opening speeches available here](#)

Panel discussion on the state of play of managing cultural and religious diversity in the educational sector

The first panel discussion provided an exchange of views on national policy frameworks aimed at achieving social cohesion through intercultural and interfaith dialogue *versus* some of the experienced realities of intercultural integration in school settings.

Moderator:

- Mr Nami Isaki, Executive Director of the Centre for Intercultural Dialogue, Republic of North Macedonia.

Panellists:

- Prof. Jonas Otterbeck, Professor of Islamic Studies, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, Aga Khan University
- Prof. Tamar Shuali - Trachtenberg, Director and Head Researcher, European Institute of Education for Democratic Culture, Universidad Católica de Valencia
- Ms Maria Lucia Uribe, Executive Director, Arigatou International, Ethics Education for Children

The main findings of the panel discussion were:

The hegemonic culture and core foundational values of the State have an impact on religions and how religion is taught. While some States leave religion fully out of the public education system, others consider religion as a discipline taught in school. The history of the relation between States and religion can create “political opportunities”. For example, while the separation of the State and religion in some countries led to the creation of a wide network of private religious schools in those same countries. Conversely, religions have an impact on the organisation of the State: religious traditions create patterns and normalises citizens way of life. One example is how it shaped the structure of the week and defined the calendar of holidays, that affects the calendar of schools and of their culturally diverse communities.

Political decisions can have a significant impact on the acceptance of the religion of a minority. For example, the change of the law on citizenship adopted in Germany in 2000, resulting in thousands of Turkish descendants becoming German citizens, also resulted in Islam being accepted as one of the religions of Germany to be taught in schools, as well as Islamic studies to be taught in universities.

Education is the means to develop an inclusive society which is based on shared values and a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging is created by being together and by feeling as being part of the community. There are many examples of communities that are an integral part of the national culture, yet their individual members do not feel they belong to the national dominant group. School education has a fundamental role in the development of a sense of identity and adherence to a community or a project.

Inter-faith education is critical to achieving peace in our polarised world. We need to reinvent education to address the world challenges: war, poverty, injustice. Education can contribute to building social cohesion by including and understanding the others. Interfaith education is not only learning about religions (comparative), but rather learning from religions (experiential, providing interconnections). The underlying approach for interfaith intercultural education should be based on the development of critical understanding of political, social, and cultural context, developing tolerance for ambiguity, being able to identify core values related to human life and human dignity. There are tools and conceptual frameworks developed specifically for educators which can be easily adapted to different social and cultural contexts.

The main challenges are related to the practical implementation of intercultural and interfaith education in formal education settings. The knowledge is there, yet the challenge is to equip schoolteachers with the right competences to deal with religious diversity. In several countries there is the concern that interfaith education will replace religious education. Furthermore, good practices are not emphasised for lack of sustainability, financial support, and lack of dialogue between different actors and stakeholders. Policy support is fundamental to integrate intercultural and interfaith as a curricular priority. This is also what ensures the allocation of financial support and teacher education which is crucial for the implementation. The formal acknowledgment by Ministries of teacher continued development (CPD) is also paramount. Another factor in a successful implementation is the development of school educational leadership, which means giving teachers more space and ownership to work with the given curriculum and to contextualize it, addressing intercultural and interfaith challenges within their own context also engaging local communities and developing a “whole school approach”.

Another solution is to recognize the **huge potential of non-formal education** to complement formal education, especially with regards to creating a sense of belonging among learners. Educators can draw on examples from popular culture (football, pop music) where activities are based on engagement, and which transmit positive

messages of diversity and social inclusion. In order to involve non formal educators there is a need to provide to them with quality training in partnership with universities and higher education institutes.

Panel discussion on schools

The second panel discussion reflected on the school as a space for dialogue, a space where the local community and all the relevant actors (learners, families, teachers, civil society organisations and national institutions) meet global phenomena, such as migration; a place where formal education meets non-formal learning; a reality where specific competences are needed to practise intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

Moderator:

- **Ms Anna Weinrich**, Board Member of the Organising Bureau of the European School Students Union (OBESSU), representing the voice of school students in Europe.

Panellists:

- **Prof. Martyn Barrett**, Professor of Psychology, and Lead Expert for the Council of Europe Education Policy Advisors Network
- **Prof. Scherto Gill**, Director, Global Humanity for Peace Institute, University of Wales TSD, and Chair of G20 Interfaith Forum Education Working Group
- **Ms Mayssam Imad**, Head of the Education Unit, Adyan Foundation for Diversity, Solidarity and Human Dignity
- **Ms Lantana Bako Abdullahi**, Fellow of the International Dialogue Centre KAICIID.

The main findings of the panel discussion were:

Schools are potentially an ideal environment for enabling intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, as well as dialogue about global phenomena and issues. To engage in successful dialogue, the classroom needs to be an open and safe space where learners can engage in dialogue and develop competences, such as listening skills, communicative skills, openness towards other cultures, empathy, respect for cultural differences and tolerance of ambiguity.

Competences to engage in dialogue can be developed through cooperative or project-based and inquiry-based learning activities within the classroom, in which learners work together in small groups to engage in dialogue, and to reflect critically on their own learning processes. In the case of schools that do not have an ethnically diverse population, they can set up school-community links and partnerships that involve intercultural contact, either with learners going out into the community (e.g., to visit community centres or places of religious worship) or community members coming into the school to work with learners in the classroom. Teachers can also set up internet-based intercultural collaborative projects with learners elsewhere in the world. And schools can also help to facilitate and support periods of study abroad for their learners.

The aim of education must be reconsidered, taking into account a human-centred approach, placing humanity and well-being at the core of the project. How can school provide competences to students for a structural change? Knowledge without understanding is empty and understanding requires entering dialogue and experimenting other realities. In most schools, the aim for the teachers and for learners continues to be the passing of exams and receiving a grade. Teaching should be a vocation; the final goal should not be just passing the exam. Teachers should be given the space to address values and to place the children at the centre of the project, by teaching them to become happy individuals.

School curricula do not address properly our human diversity, our shared history, our social and cultural multiplicity. The absence of a curriculum on religious diversity or religious education in the public sector may lead to some extremist teachings with little or no censorship on the content, particularly in countries with a strong national religious

ideology, for example in some countries of the Middle East region. In some European and African countries, the issue of teaching the history of colonies remains highly sensitive, with some outdated schoolbooks conveying positive messages on the era of colonization and reproducing messages about cultural superiority.

The training of teachers in teaching religious diversity objectively is fundamental in countries on which religious schools welcome learners mainly from other faiths. This is the case for example in Lebanon where 40% of schools are affiliated with a religious group. In Lebanon's 35 evangelical schools the student bodies are two third Muslims. The issue of religious diversity is further exacerbated in this region with the massive influx of refugees, post-war trauma, and on-going tensions among religious groups.

Schools should aim to provide the open and safe space where children can experiment diversity, raise issues that are interest to them, discuss these issues openly, listen to different perspectives and opinions, make up their own minds. Simple activities, such as visiting a place of worship can break down many preconceptions and bring understanding for other religions and cultural traditions.

Parents also need to be involved as complementary actors in the learning path. Parents often transmit fear and prejudice towards other religious groups. The main fear of parents relates to losing their own identity by opening to other cultural and religious groups. Educators need to convince learners that understanding and being tolerant towards others can be achieved without renouncing to one's own beliefs and religious convictions.

Interfaith education should not be limited to schools and be taught through non-formal education channels as well. This is particularly true in some countries of the global South, such as Nigeria, where about 10.5 million children are not schooled even though primary education is officially free and compulsory. Only 61% of children aged 6-11 regularly attend primary school. In the North of the country, the picture is bleaker, with an attendance rate of 53%. In this region, a third of children receive only koranic education. The impact of the insurgency on the northeast presents significant challenges. Introducing interfaith dialogue in Madrassas, as well as in evangelic Sunday schools, is essential in view of shaping a new generation of peace-building young people.

Social media is increasingly responsible for spreading hatred and prejudice among religious groups. Educators would benefit from specific training to alert children and young adults on the use of social media, focusing on the disinformation, hate speech and the perverse influence of fake news.

Best practices and resources for intercultural and interfaith dialogue

An interactive roundtable session provided the opportunity for participants to present examples of **tools and resources for education practitioners** to manage intercultural and interfaith dialogue in formal and non-formal educational settings.

The dialogue was structured around four roundtables of 8-12 participants each, bringing together experts, government representatives and representatives of civil society.

The tools and resources presented are listed below:

Nation-wide projects	
<p>School for Global Education Competition Nation-wide initiative, implemented by BPID with the support of the Ministry of Education and Sciences. The winners receive the label of “Global Education School”. WWW.BPID.EU</p>	<p>Rumen Valchev Bulgarian Platform for International Education</p>
<p>School Network for the Support of Antiracist Policy Implementation, empowers, supports and trains teachers from schools of all levels wishing to participate in the network while their school implements the MOESY antiracist policy. The network for 2022 - 2023, consists of 35 schools of all levels. www.moec.gov.cy www.pi.ac.cy</p>	<p>ELENA PAPAMICHAEL Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (Ministry of Education)</p>
<p>The National Charter for Education on Living together in the framework of inclusive citizenship embracing religious diversity aims at expressing the common will of all relevant parties (including students, their parents, and teachers as well as trainers, directors, policy makers and developers of educational curricula in the private and public sectors and within the civil society institutions), to develop citizenship values embracing the cultural and religious diversity. https://adyanfoundation.org/library/reports/national-charter-for-education-on-living-together/</p>	<p>Mayssam Imad, ADYAN FOUNDATION Lebanon</p>
<p>School project on inter-faith education in Nigeria</p>	<p>Lantana Bako Abdullahi The international Dialogue Centre (Kaiciid)</p>

Resources and tools for education practitioners	
<p>Educational tools developed by the Council of Europe</p> <p>Autobiographies of Intercultural Encounters (2nd revised editions)</p> <p>Portfolio of Competences for Democratic Culture</p>	<p>Prof. Martyn Barrett, University of Surrey, and Council of Europe Education Expert</p>
<p>A board game for supporting the Intercultural Education in formal and informal educational contexts to promote values of tolerance and mutual understanding among different cultures and traditions. https://gemin-game.eu/</p>	<p>Panagiotis Kosmas CARDET, Cyprus (GEN)</p>
<p>“Reflections” - web platform for critical thinking, inclusive societies and dynamic engagement Specifically, educational modules on cultural and religious diversity of the multilingual educational platform The educational modules are easily replicable for teachers as they are ready-to-use and available in 6 EU languages already. https://reflections.eduskills.plus. https://www.facebook.com/eduskills.plus/</p>	<p>Susanne Loher, Südwind, Austria (GEN)</p>
<p>Handbook for educators who are interested in facilitating students dialogue groups as part of their Social Emotional Ethical and Spiritual (SEES) development. Human-Centred Education: A Practical Handbook and Guide by Scherto Gill & Garrett Thomson, Ethical Education: Towards an Ecology of Human Development by Scherto Gill & Garrett Thomson</p>	<p>Prof. Scherto Gill, Director, Global Humanity for Peace Institute</p>
<p>“More than one story” are a set of cards used as a didactic tool in a method of challenging critical thinking. They are used to encourage participants to tell their personal stories, which stimulates empathy between participants, breaks down prejudices and strengthens the bond between them. The cards can be used by friends, families, students, colleagues or event participants who wish to get to know each other better, to hear each other's story. The cards are useful in working with vulnerable groups, in various group settings. https://sloga-platform.org/glasniki-strpnosti-gremo-naprej/</p>	<p>Patricija Vrtič SLOGA, Slovenia</p>
<p>Learning to Live Together - An Intercultural and Interfaith Program for Ethics Education. https://ethicseducationforchildren.org/learning-to-live-together</p>	<p>Maria Lucia Uribe, Arigatou International,</p>

Non-formal education	
<p>Arts and dialogue</p> <p>Case study of a photographer (Peter Sanders) who has worked re for 20 years with a photo art based dialogue (presenting Muslims to others).</p> <p>Case study of music as a bridge-builder: "The Awakening of Islamic Pop Music" by Prof. Jonas Otterbeck</p> <p>https://www.gqmiddleeast.com/culture/peter-sanders-journey-through-photography</p> <p>https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-the-awakening-of-islamic-pop-music.html</p> <p>Spotify Playlist of 103 songs:</p> <p>https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6ay5kGjZAgpA1aX1YzvbDX?si=RpFvVzJOQIC9Cl9v3zHuQA&nd=1</p>	<p>Prof. Jonas Otterbeck, Institute for the Studies of Muslim Civilizations (Aga Kahn University)</p>
<p>Sports and dialogue</p> <p>BORN 2 RUN: Running races organised at local level to bring together youth from different communities and religions</p> <p>https://cid.mk/category/multikulti</p>	<p>Nami Isaki Intercultural Centre, North-Macedonia</p>
<p>Youth and dialogue</p> <p>"IMAGINE: Imagine: Learning to live together addressing controversial issues"</p> <p>Seminar designed for youth (16-25 years old) to acquire intercultural/interfaith competences through peer-to-peer learning</p> <p>IMAGINE: Learning to live together addressing controversial issues ECUDEM (ucv.es)</p>	<p>Prof. Tamar Shuali Trachtenberg, University of Valencia</p>

Best practices from Portuguese civil society organisations presented during a study visit on 17 May

The national coordinators of the Global Education Network were invited to a study visit on 17 May at the High Commission on Migration. Key governmental and civil society organisations were invited to present projects and best practices related to intercultural dialogue in Portugal.

Organisations	Projects presented
High Commission on Migration	Presentation of the specialized services developed by the High Commission to meet the needs of migrant communities in Portugal (legal help, job search, residency)
APEDI (Association of Professors for Intercultural Education) - in partnership with High Commission on Migration and Instituto Camões	Training course on “migrations and interculturality” offered to schoolteachers as part of their in-service training.
Fundação Cidade de Lisboa , in partnership with academia-cv and Renovar a moraria	Project to integrate migrant children in Portuguese schools, including training of volunteer tutors, training of teachers and interculturality workshops for classrooms that have a high cultural diversity.
Portuguese Refugee Council	Presentation of the role of the refugee council, the reception centres and training opportunities offered to refugees.
Local Council for Migrants , in partnership with the European Anti-Poverty Network Portugal	Initiatives to promote the social inclusion and civic participation of migrant populations in the Lisbon area (institutional visits, training, discussion groups).
Rosto Solidario	Projects of intercultural dialogue involving migrants and the Portuguese local population, using arts. These projects allow to reflect on the challenges that migrants face, namely in terms of discrimination and prejudice.

Conclusions of the Seminar and follow-up

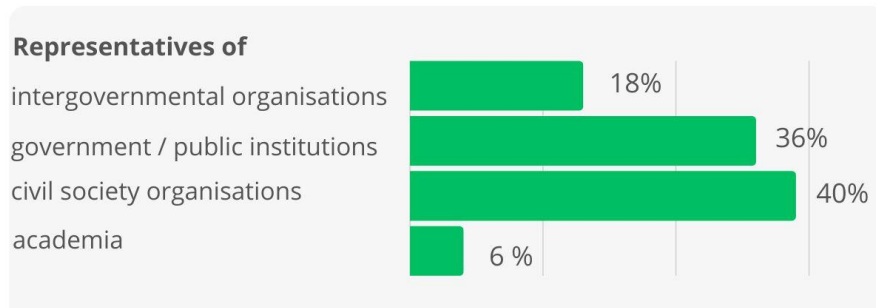
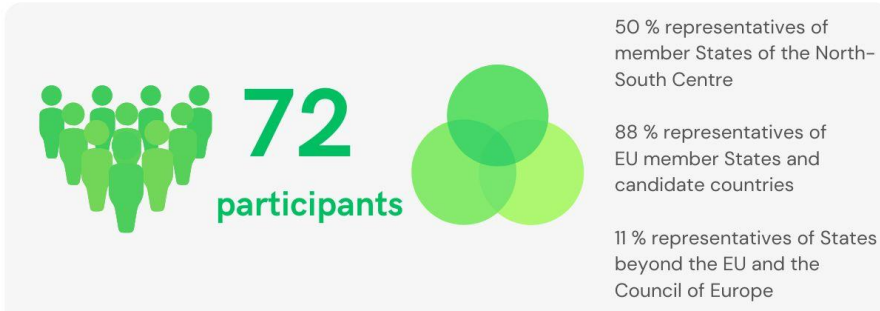
The Seminar was closed by Mr Adelino Silva, Executive Director of the North-South Centre, and by Mr Jorge Orlando, Director for Communication, Information and International Relations of the Portuguese Institute for Sports and Youth (IPDJ).

This Seminar was the first activity of the new joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe [iLEGEND III: Intercultural Learning Exchange through Global Education, Networking and Dialogue \(2023-2026\)](#) implemented by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

The recommendations, best practices and resources shared during this Seminar will feed into the new [Tutored Online Training Course on Global Education and Intercultural/Interfaith Dialogue](#), which will be developed during 2023 by the North-South Centre and partner organisations. The main aim of the course will be to introduce concepts, principles, and methodology of Global Education, Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue and explore their interrelations.

The courses offered by the North-South Centre are designed to be *intercultural experiences in themselves*, by bringing together participants from various cultures to interact and learn from one another. Two of the North-South Centre's flagship projects, the summer University on Youth and Development which takes place every year in Spain, and the African University on Youth and Development, which takes place every second year, are designed to bring together youth representatives from various continents and cultural backgrounds to experience interculturality and thereby foster understanding and dialogue.

Facts and Figures



The North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

The European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, more commonly known as the [North-South Centre](#), is an Enlarged Partial Agreement of the [Council of Europe](#) created in November 1989. The North-South Centre was the result of a European public campaign which aim was to raise public awareness of the complex structural relationship which affected European and Southern countries, and to promote policies of solidarity

The North-South Centre develops multilateral, regional, and interregional cooperation projects that include field activities around three main programmatic areas: [global education](#), [youth cooperation](#) and [women empowerment](#). The main mechanisms of intervention are:

- Advocacy and confidence-building: encouraging a structured dialogue among elected representatives and other sectors of society to act on legislation for everyone to enjoy their universal rights in a more sustainable planet.
- Capacity building: expanding expertise, knowledge and critical understanding through dialogue, peer education and intercultural learning.
- Awareness-raising: spreading the message that every individual has a role and responsibility in building inclusive and sustainable societies.

The activities of the North-South Centre gather four main partners: governments, parliaments, regional and local authorities, and civil society. The latter is especially relevant to the work of the North-South Centre, which aims at taking its lead from experiences at the grassroots level by empowering, supporting, and working hand in hand with civil society, in particular with women and youth organisations.

Disclaimer

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