



Report of Panel Discussion

# Empowering Youth Through Education

Challenging Xenophobia, Discrimination and Exclusion Among Youth in Europe



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION  
Portugal



ARIGATOU INTERNATIONAL | Ethics  
Education  
*All for Children*



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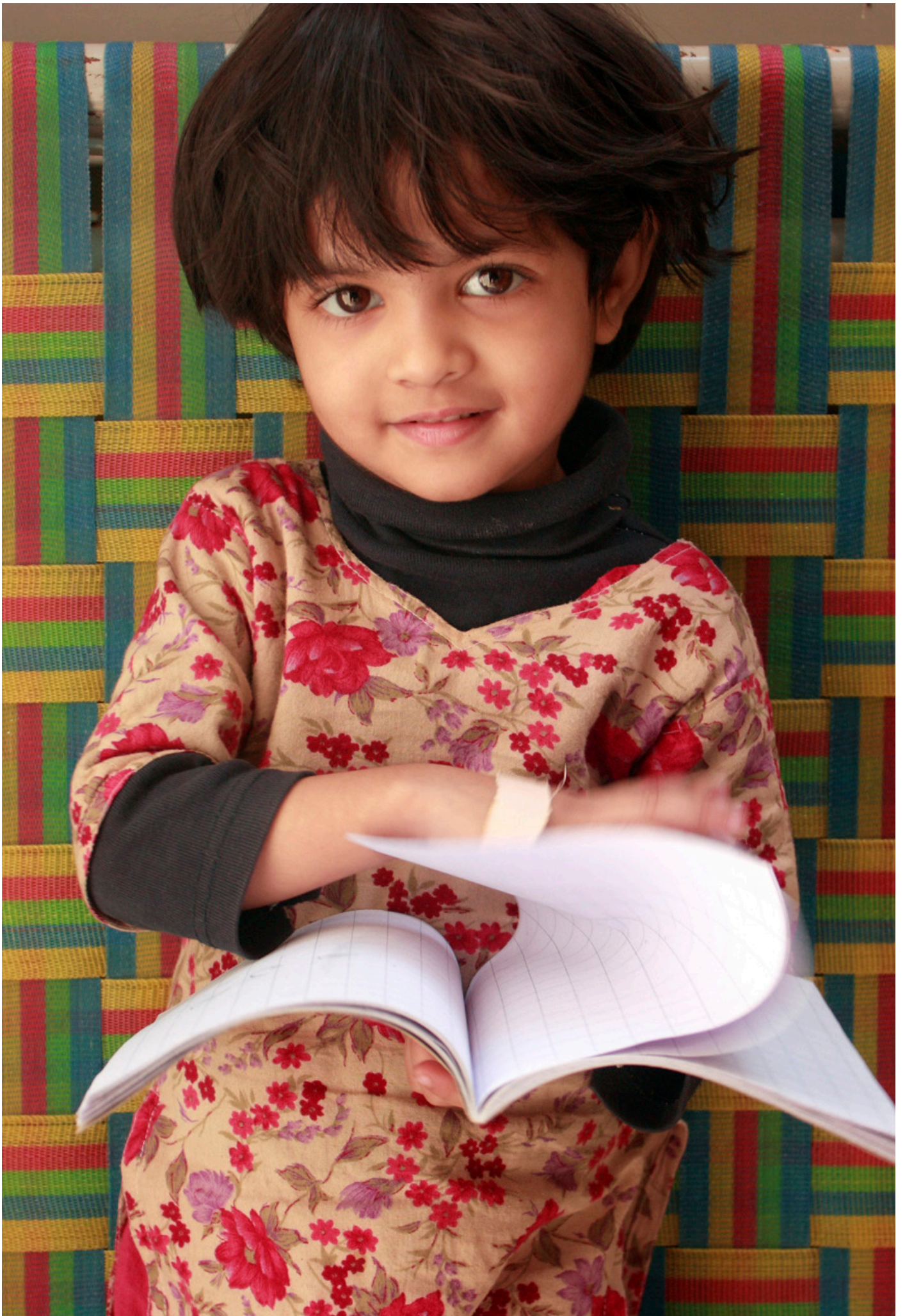
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## INTRODUCTION



On 24 September 2018, on the margins of the 39<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council session, the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal, Arigatou International Geneva, the European Wergeland Center and the Pontifical Foundation - Scholas Occurrentes, co-organized the side-event titled *“Empowering Youth Through Education - Challenging Xenophobia, Discrimination, and Exclusion among Youth in Europe”*. The event was co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations in Geneva and moderated by UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

Participants engaged in reflections about the role of education to foster learning to live together in Europe, particularly amidst the current climate of xenophobia and discrimination against migrants and refugees.

During the event, participants also presented good practices of programs and policies in Europe to promote education for global citizenship, to foster pluralism in schools, to support teachers training and development, and to create spaces where young people from different backgrounds can learn and connect without being afraid to encounter and embrace differences. The panelists also discussed tools for monitoring and evaluation of programs and for measuring the impact of education interventions to foster pluralism, interfaith and intercultural learning and inclusive values.

At the center of the discussions, was the need to foster democratic and inclusive education opportunities for all. The panelists highlighted how the main role of education is to build inclusive societies, helping to create spaces for encounter and dialogue.

## SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS



Mr. Philippe Cori, Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF Office for Europe and Central Asia, opened the panel presenting the objectives of the event and reflecting on the importance of fostering values for social cohesion, including harnessing the opportunity of working with young people to build inclusive societies.

The Opening remarks were delivered by Mr. João Pina de Morais, First Secretary – HR, Migration and Humanitarian Affairs, Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva.

The discussions included the participation of Ms. Alexandra Marques, Director of Education, Aga Khan Foundation Portugal; Mr. Lars M. Gudmundson, Deputy Director, The European Wergeland Centre; Ms. Marta Simoncelli, Vice-Secretary, Scholas Occurrentes International; and Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe, Director, Arigatou International Geneva.

## OPENING REMARKS

In his Opening remarks Mr. Pina de Morais emphasized the importance of upholding the universal right to education and how crucial it is to provide education opportunities for those populations affected by emergencies, conflicts or natural disasters, including for building community resilience.

He continued highlighting an important initiative launched in 2013 by the former President of the Republic of Portugal and that has the support of the Portuguese Government: the [Global Platform for Syrian Students](#). Since 2013, the Global Platform has awarded nearly 400 scholarships and has contributed to three main aspects: i) to ensure the resettlement of students: be they registered refugees or not, the platform facilitates the administrative procedures in order to ensure students are granted full protection and are entitled to health care, legal access and stay; ii) to expedite the admission process namely to those students who may not be able to produce legal or certified copies of their certificates and transcripts of marks and iii) to support the social integration of students providing mentoring and facilitating their psychological well-being.

Building on the success of the Syrian scholarship program, the Platform has recently launched a Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education that seeks to provide larger, better and faster academic opportunities for students in crisis situations at large, who are either in vulnerable situations or face humanitarian emergencies created by wars, conflicts and natural disasters.

He closed his remarks mentioning the importance of this new Rapid Response Mechanism for Higher Education in Emergencies to continue supporting the integration and empowerment of the young generations for a better future.



## QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

### **Ms. Alexandra Marques**

Director of Education

Aga Khan Foundation Portugal

**Q1:** What role does education play in fostering respect for pluralism in Europe? and conversely, how can education be used to promote xenophobia and discrimination?

Ms. Marques started by looking at contemporary societies and the changes societies are facing: social changes linked to globalization that includes increased migration, the role of technology in daily life, and increased interdependency of people. Globalization has not necessarily translated into the creation of a more pluralistic society, whereby with pluralism we intend the cosmopolitan view of the world and the sense of universal belonging. However, to build social cohesion and to respond to today's challenges, we need to develop holistic interventions that target the overall well-being of the learners promoting shared values for

a common humanity: education cannot be limited to what happens in schools but has to involve the parents and the communities.

Indeed, in some cases, education promotes xenophobia and discrimination especially if the curricula, textbooks, and pedagogies are not inclusive and embracing of diversity, but also when the teachers are not equipped to be sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of the learners. If teachers are not duly trained and self-aware of their biases and stereotypes they will be transmitting them to the learners.

If curricula and textbooks do not include different narratives and perspectives, they will be contributing to excluding, marginalize and silence minorities.

She concluded stressing the importance of developing evidence-based programming to understand the changes and the needs of educational programs to foster pluralism.

### **Mr. Lars M. Gudmundson**

Deputy Director

The European Wergeland Centre

**Q2:** What are the key challenges and opportunities of national education policies and programs in Europe for children to learn to live together given the increasing diversity but also the rise of xenophobia?

Mr. Gudmundson explained that in Europe several policies and programs have been developed to address increased diversity and the rise of xenophobia.





He cited the OECD PISA 2018 Global Competence Framework and Council of Europe Competences for Democratic Culture and Intercultural Dialogue. He continued highlighting the concrete example of the Ukrainian Curriculum Reform and the inclusion and integration of democratic competencies in all the school subjects.

There is a strong recognition at the policy level of the role of education to foster democratic and inclusive societies, however, there are several interventions that are necessary; these include pre-service and in-service training for teachers and training for school managers. The inclusion of participatory methodologies in the classroom to allow students to fully participate in the learning and to hear their voices and concerns. He mentioned also the importance of working with parents and communities.

He concluded mentioning the new education campaign *“Free to Speak, Safe to Learn” Democratic Schools for All*. The campaign aims to highlight the commitment to democratic values and principles in the life and culture of schools while identifying and sharing good practices from all Council of Europe member States. The campaign will be launched at a conference in Oslo, in November 2018.

## Ms. Marta Simoncelli

Vice-Secretary

Scholas Occurrentes International

**Q3:** Scholas Occurrentes has been working in Europe to support the integration of European students and refugees, how do students feel about this? What are the challenges they face when they meet each other?

Ms. Simoncelli reflecting on the experiences of Scholas shared some concrete examples from working with young adolescent students on the topics of diversity, migration, and encounters. She explained how by creating concrete opportunities for encounters, young people let go of the “labels” they have acquired in terms of stereotypes about migrants and refugees portrayed by the media, their families, and their peers. These young people, after experiencing concrete encounters with refugees, let go of their fear of “the other” and enjoy concrete shared experiences like playing together or painting together. Scholas creates spaces of natural sharing and encounter to enable young people from different backgrounds to come together and through experience challenge their prejudices and fears. Scholas has brought together young people from Madrid and Rome with refugees and has created meaningful spaces for encounter and exchange that have greatly impacted the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of the young people and their view of the refugees coming to their countries.



## Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe

Director

Arigatou International – Geneva

**Q4:** Arigatou International promotes intercultural and interfaith education and collaboration, how can interfaith learning become part of education policies and programs in the context of rising xenophobia and populism in Europe?

Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe focused on the importance of interfaith education to foster encounters with the other, in a safe space, that allows sharing of religious or non-religious identities, getting into dialogue, challenging prejudices, discovering of oneself in relation to others and moving together to collective action. She made a distinction between learning religion (confessional), learning about religion (comparative) and learning from religion (interfaith learning).

She continued reflecting on how interfaith education can play a critical role in reversing this trend of rising xenophobia and discrimination on religious grounds. She concluded providing four concrete recommendations to make interfaith education effective:

1. The inclusion of innovative pedagogical approaches to create interfaith dialogue (for pre-service and in-service teacher training);
2. Adoption of a dialogical pedagogy for religious education as well as for civic, human rights or ethics education;
3. Development of holistic approaches to integrating interreligious education, as well as intercultural education in formal and informal educational institutions

(these are not a single curricular item to be introduced in one specific grade);

4. Reach-out to the media to challenge hate speech and xenophobia; create spaces in the classroom for the use of media to create positive images of the other and examples of mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration.



## DISCUSSION



During the Q&A time, several concrete examples were presented including a comprehensive study by the University of Geneva on the positive impact of Human Rights Education in influencing the socialization skills of children.

Further, the Mission of Albania presented the results of a pilot program developed to introduce interfaith education in 15 schools. The Government of Albania is committed to including interfaith education to foster respect and mutual understanding among young people in Albania, but also as a response to develop resilience against recruitment of young people from violent extremist groups.

A last reflection during the Q&A focused on the importance of developing effective monitoring and evaluation tools, to measure the impact of education programs focusing

on fostering pluralism, intercultural and interfaith learning, and inclusive values. The panelists presented several assessment tools to measure the positive changes within the school environment (both in terms of changes affecting the management of the schools, as well as the environment in the classroom and the increased engagement and involvement of the learners). The changes include for example the reduction of violence in the schools and the reduction of bullying.

The correlation between an inclusive environment and an improved overall performance of the learners was also explored.

Another tool presented included the measurement of the impact for changes in attitudes using the Most Significant Change methodology.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

### **Ms. Alexandra Marques**

Director of Education

Aga Khan Foundation Portugal

**Q5:** What kind of strategies can contribute to foster collaboration between governments and civil society organizations to contribute to foster intercultural education and social cohesion in Europe? Can you share some examples of the work of the Aga Khan Foundation in Portugal?

The panel resumed with Ms. Marques presenting the work of the Aga Khan Foundation in Portugal and focusing on the collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the local communities to foster intercultural education. In particular, she cited the Intercultural School Seal initiative created in 2012 and consisting of a certificate and a digital stamp that distinguishes schools developing projects that promote the recognition and appreciation of diversity as an opportunity and a source of learning for all. Presently a network of intercultural schools is active in Portugal. These schools have developed holistic projects that integrate intercultural aspects not only in the curriculum

of the school but in all the activities, including the recruitment of staff, the preparation of meals inspired to diverse cultures and the involvement of parents in these activities.

### **Mr. Lars M. Gudmundson**

Deputy Director

The European Wergeland Centre

**Q6:** What kind of programs does the European Wergeland Centre have to challenge xenophobia, discrimination and contribute to the prevention of violent extremism through education?

Mr. Gudmundson continued reflecting on the programs developed by the European Wergeland Centre to support the Member States of the Council of Europe to integrate democratic competencies in their education systems. Additionally, Mr. Gudmundson reflected on the concrete experience of Norway after the terrorist attack in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011. He described how this experience prompted an immediate response in the Norwegian society to understand the reasons beyond the attacks in order to prevent this from happening again.

Mr. Gudmundson concluded mentioning how now the island of Utøya has become a center for educating young people for democracy and human rights. Not only to prevent hate speech, hate ideologies, and violent extremism but to promote democracy and active citizenship. The programs implemented in Utøya include workshops, training sessions, and accessible learning resources which



aim to empower young people in Europe, and those who work closely with youth, to create a safe environment where participants learn about the attacks of 22 July 2011 and at the same time work together and discuss controversial issues connected to human rights, hate speech, and extremism.

## Ms. Marta Simoncelli

Vice-Secretary

Scholas Occurrentes International

**Q7:** What kind of local responses do you think prove effective in fostering education that protects children's rights and supports social cohesion, citizenship, and dialogue? What is the experience of Scholas in this?

Ms. Simoncelli reflected on the experience of the Scholas Citizenship program and in particular, she focused on the importance of providing spaces where young people can meaningfully participate and contribute to the decisions that affect them. She mentioned how the Scholas Citizenship programs bring together different groups connecting young people, religious leaders, and local government representatives to work together and to find sustainable solutions for the challenges affecting their communities.

## Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe

Director

Arigatou International Geneva

**Q8:** How is Arigatou International working to empower young people to learn to live together? What has proved successful?

Ms. Uribe focused on [Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education](#) developed and launched in close collaboration with UNESCO and UNICEF in 2008.

She described how the Programme articulates theory and practice for nurturing children's ethical values to help them strengthen their identities and critical thinking, build constructive relations with others, and work collectively towards positive change.

She explained how, during the last 10 years, this program has helped address a wide range of themes, including prevention of violence, racism, discrimination or exclusion, but also youth empowerment, conflict transformation, reconciliation, interfaith collaboration, and social cohesion. She briefly mentioned the experiences of implementation in Romania (where the program is being accredited by the Ministry of Education), in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Greece.

The Learning to Live Together Programme has been translated into 13 languages and has been implemented in more than 30 countries in five continents, reaching more than 450,000 children and youth.



## CONCLUSIONS



The panel concluded with some final reflections on the importance of continuing to implement concrete strategies within formal education to foster spaces for learning to live together, respect for human rights, peace, and non-violence; including creating opportunities for schools and communities to join forces and work together to prevent hate speech, xenophobia, and violence.

Before closing the panel, Mr. Philippe Cori, Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF Office for Europe and Central Asia, thanked the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations Office and other International

Organizations in Geneva for sponsoring the event. Mr. Cori also thanked the speakers for their reflections and sharing.





**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US**

**Ethics Education for Children**

Arigatou International — Geneva  
1, Rue de Varembé 1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 734 9410 Fax: +41 22 734 1926

🌐 [ethicseducationforchildren.org](https://ethicseducationforchildren.org)

✉ [geneva@arigatouinternational.org](mailto:geneva@arigatouinternational.org)

f [/EthicsEducationforChildren](https://www.facebook.com/EthicsEducationforChildren)

🐦 [@arigatougeneva](https://twitter.com/arigatougeneva)

**“May every day find every  
one of us continually  
embraced in growing peace”**

*—Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President of Arigatou  
International, September 21, 2015*

**Ethics Education for Children**

Arigatou International — Geneva  
1, Rue de Varembé 1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 734 9410 Fax: +41 22 734 1926  
geneva@arigatouinternational.org