United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth 2014-2021

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Introduction

1. Around the world, young women and men are driving change and claiming respect for fundamental freedoms and rights; improved conditions for them and their communities; opportunities to learn, work and participate in decisions that affect them. At the same time, due to persistent crises, they are faced with acute challenges affecting important aspects of their lives. More than ever, it is now time to improve investment in research, policies and programmes to create an enabling and rights-based environment where youth prosper, exercise rights, regain hope and a sense of community, and engage as responsible social actors and innovators.

2. The 36th session of the UNESCO General Conference requested "*the Director-General, in preparing draft document 37 C/4, to consider the necessity and examine the feasibility and implications of including youth as a new global priority, and determine the best modality for implementation in the next C/4 document*".[1] In her preliminary proposals for the UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021 (37C/4), the Director-General explained that she *"will propose to the Executive Board at its 191st session an operational strategy"*[2] on Youth. Building on the above and further to the Director-General's consultation meeting with UNESCO Member States on 21 November 2012, the Secretariat has elaborated the present operational strategy, in a participatory manner, engaging with UNESCO sectors, bureaux and youth focal points in field offices.

1 36 C/Resolution 79.

2 190 EX/19 Part I, para 26.

I. Learning from the past

3. UNESCO's longstanding commitment to youth has taken a new impetus with the recognition of youth as a priority group for the Organization's action[3] and the UNESCO Strategy for Action with and for Youth in 1998.[4] Since 2008, the Secretariat has undertaken exercises[5] to review UNESCO's work on youth and analyse information that would allow identifying UNESCO's comparative advantage, positioning and role in this field. The cross-analysis of the results of these exercises has revealed important findings that are addressed throughout the present document.

4. UNESCO's intervention on youth has been addressing a diversity of themes, disciplines and issues: from education to culture, sciences, humanities and communication. Strategic and economy of scale initiatives that are interconnected and address both the upstream (policy/governance) and the downstream (societal/grass-roots) level proved more efficient than one-off, small scale projects that were disconnected from the overall policy environment on youth. Such strategic initiatives correspond to UNESCO's mission, functions and intergovernmental nature and can deliver both quantitative and qualitative results. As such, they need to be prioritized, through a holistic and more focused approach in UNESCO's work on youth, which will consolidate the multidisciplinary expertise within and across UNESCO's thematic streams.

3 1993 General Conference resolutions and consecutive Mid-Term Strategies from 1995 onwards.

4 1998 UNESCO Strategy with and for Youth, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001189/118914mo.pdf

5 These exercises are: (i) elaboration of a "State of the art of the intervention on youth: UNESCO, sister United Nations agencies, major IGOs and NGOs" (2008); (ii) analysis of the work of global and regional actors on youth (2008–2012); (iii) Thematic Working Group on Youth – key findings and recommendations (2010–2011); (iv) mapping of national policies on youth and youth representation structures (2010-2012); (v) analysis of the evolution of the international community's approach to youth since 1995 (2012); (vi) examination of the situation of youth globally and of the evolution of youth organization patterns (2012); (vii) assessment of UNESCO's action on youth to date based on review of previous EX/4 documents and on information provided by sectors, bureaux and field offices (2010-2012).

5. While UNESCO recognizes youth as equal partners and actors for development and peace,[6] this has not been sufficiently reflected within all programmatic aspects. The Organization's work needs to promote effective methodologies and mechanisms for Member States to engage youth in policy and programme design and delivery, particularly through youth organisations. UNESCO's work on youth, including with national governments, should also promote youth-led action, strengthen the capacities of young leaders and youth-led organizations, as well as enable partnerships with them on programme activities, particularly at country level and within UNESCO Country Programming (UCP) exercises.

6. Cooperation with United Nations sister agencies as well as IGOs, NGOs and private sector entities has proven more cost-effective than individual, isolated activities, which lead to duplication of efforts both within and outside the United Nations system. Such cooperation should be enhanced, particularly within UNDAF and UCP work, as it increases the visibility of UNESCO's work on youth, the impact of its advocacy work and the outreach capacity to diversified groups of youth and to donors.

6 1998 UNESCO Strategy with and for Youth, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001189/118914mo.pdf

II. Looking ahead: a renewed focus for the 37 C/4 period (2014-2021)

UNESCO will act towards ensuring that young women and men are engaged in policies and programmes affecting them and lead action to promote peace and sustainable development in their countries and communities.

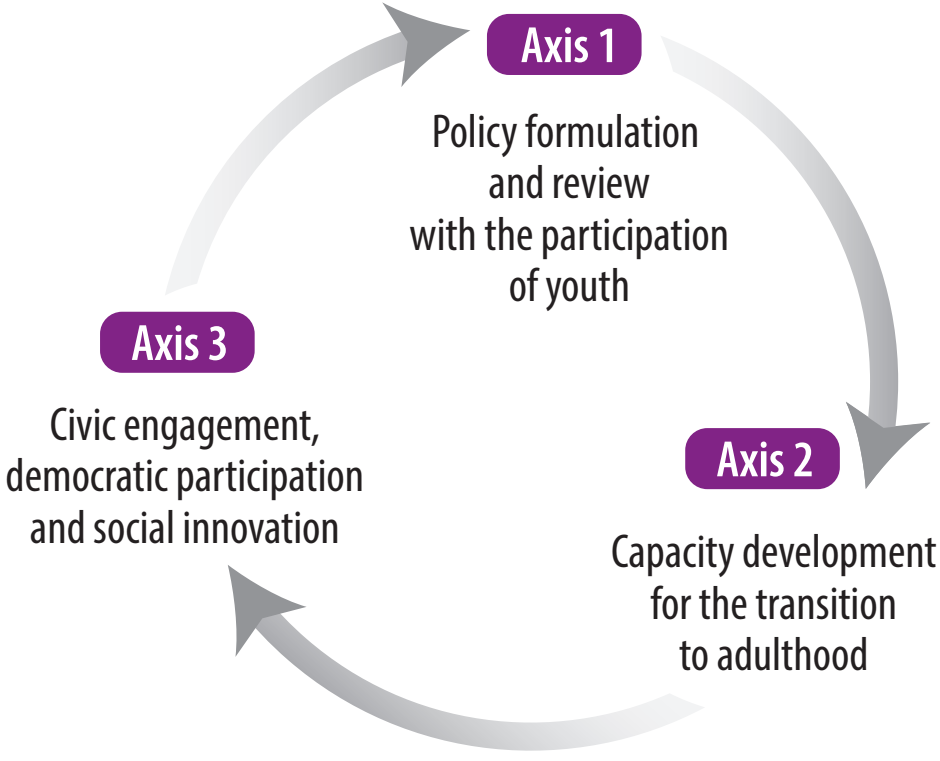
7. UNESCO will apply a comprehensive and future-oriented vision recognizing youth as agents of change, social transformations, peace and sustainable development. Such vision embodies the ways in which youth are concerned or affected by UNESCO's work: as beneficiaries of services and activities; as independent actors; as partners through their organizations. The work on youth will allow to: (i) capitalize on their creativity, knowledge, innovation and potential to drive change; (ii) address challenges affecting their development, both at governance and societal levels; and (iii) reach the unreached and those who have lost a sense of community and hope in the future.

8. UNESCO's vision on youth contributes directly, in a complementary manner, to both Overarching Objectives of the Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021. The end goal is to allow duty-bearers and rights-holders to create and sustain an enabling environment for youth to fulfil their rights and responsibilities, to prosper as human beings, to be heard, engaged and valued as social actors and knowledge holders in specialized fields. These conditions are key to unleashing their potential to promote a culture of peace and sustainable development and to eradicate poverty. With respect to the efforts around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 development agenda, such perspective on youth has a double-faceted value: it not only contributes to addressing development challenges and inequity that affect youth development prospects, but it also provides the necessary environment and conditions to empower and engage youth, so that they can, in turn, contribute to the MDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.

9. The UNESCO-wide vision on youth will be operationalized through three complementary and transversal axes of work which will guide programmatic action, identified on the basis of existing competence within UNESCO. The proposed axes respond to the need for a holistic

approach and for comprehensive interventions, as outlined in paragraph 4. These axes are aligned with UNESCO's functions in terms of (i) *providing advice for policy development and implementation, and developing institutional and human capacities*; (ii) *serving as a laboratory of ideas and generating innovative proposals and policy advice in its fields of competence*; (iii) *setting norms and standards in its fields of competence and supporting and monitoring their implementation*.[7]

7 UNESCO functions identified in 190 EX/Decisions, page 29.



Axis 1: Policy formulation and review with the participation of youth[8]

10. A public policy on youth provides the overarching vision for youth programming and touches upon multiple public fields and issues: from education to employment, from social development to democratic representation, from scientific research to innovation, from culture and sports to communication, among others. UNESCO will provide upstream policy advice for the development or review of transversal and inclusive *public policies on youth*, in line with national needs and through an integrated and youth-sensitive analytical approach. In parallel, technical assistance and youth-sensitive policy advice will be provided for *other public policies in fields that affect youth* within UNESCO's competence, for example educational policies (policies on Technical and Vocational Education and Training – TVET, Higher Education – including recognition of degrees, diplomas and certifications- Education for Sustainable Development, among others), science and cultural policies (policies on Science Technology and Innovation – STI, policies relating to cultural and creative industries and to the implementation of the cultural heritage conventions,[9] among others) and policies for access to information and cyberspace.

11. At global level, UNESCO will enable the exchange of good practices and knowledge among countries and regions and will facilitate and inform related policy debates. At national level, building the capacities of decision-makers and of personnel of related institutions will be an integral part of UNESCO's action under this axis. Issues of particular attention include: inter-ministerial collaboration and coordination; governance and funding; implementation plans, including partnerships, monitoring and evaluation; critical thinking, human rights-based and evidence-based policy development, including engagement of young researchers; articulation between the national policy, international standards and local/municipal laws. In parallel, UNESCO will guide national governments in applying participatory processes, engaging all related stakeholders, particularly young women and men. Specific focus will be placed on the creation or strengthening of national youth structures (Youth Councils or other) to ensure representation of different groups of youth, including vulnerable and marginalized groups.

8 For example, see the working document prepared for the Director-General's consultative meeting with the UNESCO Member States (21 November 2012) at http://bit.ly/XozqNf

9 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property; 1972 World Heritage Convention; 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage; 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Outcome for Axis 1 for 2014-2021	Targets for 2014-2021
Supported Member States provide a comprehensive policy environment for inclusive youth development and participation	• Supported Member States adopt and implement inclusive and transversal public policies on youth, applying a multi-stakeholders' approach and with an inclusive participation of youth. • Inclusive and representative national youth-led entities engage in public policies affecting youth in supported Member States. • Supported Member States integrate youth concerns and youth participation processes in public policies within UNESCO's fields of competence.

Axis 2: Capacity development for the transition to adulthood[10]

12. Complementary to the upstream policy work (under Axis 1), UNESCO will work with Member States and youth development actors, including youth organizations, young researchers, teachers and trainers, on a variety of interventions to provide an enabling learning environment that can equip youth with skills and competencies to go through four major interconnected life transitions:[11] continuing to learn; starting to work; exercising citizenship; and developing a healthy lifestyle.

13. UNESCO will support Member States in up-scaling effective youth and adult literacy programmes, through advocacy, capacity building, research and innovative technology. The media and information literacy curricula and the youth-friendly toolkits designed by UNESCO for youth to understand basic universal principles of freedom of expression will be further promoted to empower youth to access and engage in a knowledge-based society. Initiatives to improve access to multilingual information and knowledge sources, strengthen ICT skills and enable youth with disabilities to access ICT training will also be pursued.

14. Member States' capacities in TVET will be further developed, including in terms of addressing youth unemployment and supporting transition from school to work,

10 See the document prepared for the Director-General's consultative meeting with UNESCO Member States (21 November 2012) at http://bit.ly/XozqNf

11 In 2007, the World Development Report on the theme "Development and the next generation", identified five pivotal phases of life (transitions) that are key in youth development: continuing to learn, starting to work, developing a healthy lifestyle, beginning a family and exercising citizenship. http://bit.ly/RxDE4k

career guidance, qualifications, curriculum development, teacher training and gender mainstreaming. Entrepreneurial and cultural management skills will be introduced in higher education programmes and entrepreneurship training will be provided for young cultural practitioners, in particular through targeted partnerships. Support for arts education programmes for young artists, designers and artisans will be maintained, particularly via fellowships for exchange programmes.

15. UNESCO will promote science education, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, with emphasis on young women. Such work will support the updating of curricula, providing hands-on workshops, kits and guidebooks, training teachers and students, encouraging the popularization of science among youth and assisting Member States in ensuring that Science is neither unreachable nor a privilege but a basis of education for youth and of social development. Opportunities encouraging youth to pursue studies and careers in the field of STI and to use ICTs as a tool for innovation will be provided. Bioethics will be promoted as an indispensable component of science education, especially in institutions of higher learning. The universal curriculum developed by UNESCO for teaching bioethics will be introduced in universities around the world, accompanied by training courses for up-and-coming ethics educators. The multidimensional and cohesive capacity-building programme in bioethics education will include modules developed for specific audiences that play key roles in bioethical deliberation, such as young researchers, health care personnel and journalists.

16. As part of the post-2014 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programme framework, UNESCO will support the integration of ESD into education plans and curricula, including in non-formal education and life-long learning, with a focus on the key sustainable development challenges of climate change, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity. Youth will be addressed both as beneficiaries and drivers of sustainable development throughout these activities.

17. Support to Member States in integrating peace, human rights and global citizenship education into education systems, particularly through national curriculums, teacher education, teaching materials and learning environments, will be scaled up. Civic education training to educational, civil society and youth development actors will be provided to strengthen youth engagement in democratic transitions.

18. UNESCO will also promote good quality comprehensive HIV, sexuality and health education, through school health programmes, and in informal and non-formal settings.

Support will also be provided to Member States to introduce or scale-up good quality comprehensive sexuality education programmes. These efforts respond to consistently expressed demands by young people for sexuality education, enable them to prepare for and lead healthier adult lives and contribute to achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care.

19. Across all areas above (paras. 13-18), strengthening solidarity between generations will be emphasized, including through teacher training, apprenticeship and other forms of work-based learning. Greater focus will also be given to marginalized groups such as out of school young people, rural young people and poor urban youth to enhance their access to skills development programmes for better work opportunities and lifelong learning.

Outcome for Axis 2 for 2014-2021	Targets for 2014-2021
Improved educational and learning environment for youth to acquire skills and competencies for the transition to adulthood	• Supported Member States upscale successful education and learning programmes in the areas addressed by UNESCO (paras. 13-18). • Youth-sensitive content, within the areas addressed by UNESCO, is integrated in national curricula and in pedagogical and youth-focused learning tools. • Improved capacity of teachers and educators is observed on the areas addressed by UNESCO, in the supported Member States. • Associated stakeholders develop informal and non-formal education programmes with and for youth, including specific scopes for disfranchised youth cohorts, within the areas addressed by UNESCO. • Youth-adult partnerships are implemented to support educational objectives within the areas addressed by UNESCO.

Axis 3: Civic engagement, democratic participation and social innovation[12]

20. In collaboration with international experts, youth organizations and other youth development actors, UNESCO will develop and advocate on the concept of youth civic engagement, its impact on youth and community development and its correlation with democratic consolidation and social innovation. The consolidation of case studies, successful experiences and policy briefs will be used to inform policy and programme development on youth, linking to the work under Axes 1 and 2. In parallel, UNESCO will focus on three specific types of youth engagement:

(i) *Youth participation in decision-making and democratic consolidation:* complementary to axis 1, UNESCO will advocate for, associate its networks to, and facilitate the development of youth participation processes from the local (school, community, municipality) to the global level (regional and international fora, consultation processes etc.), emphasizing leadership development opportunities for marginalized youth. These efforts will be complemented by initiatives enabling youth to express themselves, understand their rights and responsibilities and play an active role in democratic processes, including through ICTs, youth media or forms of cultural expressions.

(ii) *Youth leadership, entrepreneurship and innovation for sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction:* UNESCO will mobilize partners and networks and will provide technical advice and training to support young women and men in leading action for sustainable livelihoods and community development. Support will be provided to three categories of youth: (i) young innovators that have initiated a social project or NGO and who need support in scaling it; (ii) mainstream youth, young creators or innovators that have an idea for a start-up in UNESCO's fields of competence; (iii) highly vulnerable and marginalized youth engaging within their communities. Across these activities, opportunities for cultivating youth creativity will be provided, particularly through ICTs.

(iii) *Youth engagement to promote mutual understanding, prevent conflict and participate in building and consolidating peace.* UNESCO will develop comprehensive rights-based interventions, engaging youth through artistic, cultural, entrepreneurial and sport activities, as a means to prevent violence affecting them. Youth engagement in conflict prevention, reconciliation and the consolidation of peace, particularly in countries in transition, will be

12 See the document prepared for the Director-General's consultative meeting with UNESCO Member States (21 November 2012) http://bit.ly/XozqNf

supported through evidence-based training, youth exchanges, dialogue initiatives and action-oriented research, including via non-formal vectors (museums, artistic and sport interventions etc.). UNESCO will engage youth in leading dynamic heritage preservation projects and in volunteering in awareness-raising in this field as a vector of dialogue and inclusion. The role of youth in promoting a culture of peace and non-violence will also be prioritized within the 37 C/4 Priority Africa flagship programmes.

Outcome for Axis 3 for 2014-2021	Targets for 2014-2021
Young women and men engage as active citizens towards democratic consolidation, sustainable communities and peace	• National and municipal authorities develop policies and programmes to promote inclusive youth civic engagement, as a means to consolidate democracy, develop communities and prevent violence and social conflict. • Improved participation of youth in democratic processes is observed in countries in transition. • Supported youth-led projects contribute to sustainable livelihoods and community development (including initiatives led by vulnerable youth). • Associated youth-led and youth-focused projects contribute to preventing violence and conflict, strengthening mutual understanding and a culture of peace.

III. Making it happen: implementation modalities

III.a Guiding principles, target groups and countries:

21. UNESCO's work will be designed to contribute to national development plans and international development goals and commitments, including the United Nations Secretary-General's 5-year Agenda and the World Programme of Action on Youth. It will apply and promote (i) rights-based approaches; (ii) gender equality and non-discrimination; (iii) a focus on reaching vulnerable and marginalized youth; (iv) youth participation in the development of initiatives affecting them; (v) intergenerational dialogue and youth-adult partnerships; (vi) foresight and anticipation approaches.

22. Across the three axes of work and subject to contextual analysis and assessment of needs and capacity gaps for each activity, specific attention will be placed to benefiting and engaging with, *inter alia*, young leaders, entrepreneurs and members of community youth organizations, adolescent girls and young women, vulnerable and marginalized youth and youth with disabilities. Priority will be given to African countries, in line with the African Union Decade on Youth Empowerment and Youth Development (2009-2018) and the International Decade for People of African Descent (2013-2023), and building on the UNESCO Strategy on African Youth (2009–2013). Least-developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) will also benefit from the Youth programme work. In specific cases, a combination of settings (high-, middle- and low-income countries; countries in transition) will be favoured as a means to build critical and comparative mass.

III.b Engaging youth in UNESCO's work

23. As shown in Section I (para. 5), UNESCO needs to further improve its methods of engaging youth as true actors and partners in the design, delivery and review of the Youth programme. A key step in this direction is to capitalize on the *UNESCO Youth Forum*. An integral part of the General Conference, the Forum was initiated in 1999 to bridge the gap between UNESCO's work and youth organizations. More than an event, the Forum is a process that enables youth to submit

their recommendations to representatives of 195 Member States, while at the same time mobilising these youth in undertaking follow-up action for the implementation of their ideas. As such, the Forum can *engage youth* both (i) at global decision-making level, through its link to the governing bodies; and (ii) at local level, through its follow-up process. To harness this potential, the Youth Forum will be further innovated to allow youth to showcase policies and programmes affecting them and to identify and lead follow-up action projects in their countries and communities. Methods to increase representation of different groups of youth in the Forum, also leveraging digital technologies, and to link it to other youth fora in UNESCO and the United Nations system will be introduced.

24. In parallel, UNESCO will collaborate with *partners that can channel the voice of youth* to UNESCO's activities. Such partners include youth NGOs, student associations, youth clubs and centres, youth networks of sister United Nations agencies. At global level, the cooperation with the Joint Programmatic Commission on Youth of the UNESCO-NGO Liaison Committee will be anchored to the implementation of the Youth programme. Existing youth desks or representation structures in National Commissions for UNESCO will be key in engaging youth in UNESCO's work at country level, including within UNDAF and UNCP exercises. Efforts to enhance or establish such structures will be pursued, by improving related advocacy, sharing successful practices and facilitating peer-to-peer mentoring and youth-adult partnerships. Media and high profile personalities will also be mobilized to engage youth in UNESCO's work.

III.c UNESCO-wide programme planning and delivery

25. The UNESCO Youth Programme, as presented above, will be delivered through activities implemented in and across all Major Programmes. The coordination of this UNESCO-wide Youth Programme will be undertaken by the Youth Programme Team, in the Social and Human Sciences' (SHS) structure, which will be specifically and adequately mandated for this purpose, in parallel to the management of the SHS-related youth programmatic activities. This Team will also ensure global advocacy and UNESCO-wide representation vis-à-vis the United Nations system (including the Interagency Network on Youth Development) and international and regional actors on youth. Designated Youth Focal Points in all programmes will collaborate with the Team to consolidate and share information on their respective programme's work on youth and to support outreach with youth organizations. Opportunities to creatively associate Young Professionals to the work of the UNESCO Youth Programme will be envisaged.

26. To operationalize the Youth Programme in a comprehensive manner, the Youth

Programme Team will develop, at the beginning of each programme (C/5) cycle, a budgeted implementation plan/roadmap, with contributions by all sectors, bureaux and field offices. The plan will present the activities that all Major Programmes in UNESCO will deliver – in line with their respective C/5 expected results – under each of the three axes of work of the Youth Programme (see para. 9). For each activity, the Plan will indicate responsible and contributing entities(s), timelines, budget allocations and their links to the C/5 expected results of respective Major Programmes. Participation programme requests will be included in the plan and will be evaluated based on their relevance with the three axes of the Youth Programme. The Youth Programme Team will be responsible for regularly updating the plan and monitoring its delivery (see para. 29).

27. The implementation of UNESCO's Youth Programme will leverage existing regular resources assigned to youth-specific activities in all programmes and reflected in the implementation plan. The mobilization of extrabudgetary resources and in-kind support will strengthen the implementation, broaden the outreach and deepen the impact of the Youth Programme to a greater number of countries and groups. Such mobilization should be done at all levels: Member-States; Partners; Secretariat (including through greater intersectoral and intrasectoral cooperation). The target should be to raise, in extrabudgetary contributions, between 40% and 60% compared to the Regular Programme resources earmarked for youth activities. To increase human resources' capacities, cost-effective methods for youth-specific training will be envisaged, particularly using ICTs. Exchange of practices, knowledge and expertise, and network-sharing, will be enabled through improved communication channels and regular consultations both between Headquarters and field and between field offices in different regions.

28. Rather than developing isolated actions, UNESCO will prioritize rights-based scale economy interventions with critical mass impact that can engage its vast network of partners,[13] *strengthen international and regional cooperation within the areas of its mandate, and foster alliances, intellectual cooperation, knowledge-sharing and operational partnerships.*[14] Existing key partnerships will be reinforced and new ones will be pursued, through increased advocacy and a comprehensive communication strategy, leveraging ICTs and media. North-South-South approaches and inter-regional collaboration will be prioritized. Continued *interagency collaboration*, particularly through the Interagency Network on Youth Development and at UNDAF level, will be pursued to avoid duplications and maximize results. Cooperation with *National Commissions* will be strengthened

13 National, local, municipal authorities; youth constituencies; academia (particularly UNESCO Chairs); UNESCO institutes and centres; international and regional intergovernmental organizations; non-governmental organizations, including UNESCO clubs; high-level advocates; media and the private sector.

14 UNESCO functions identified 190 EX/Decisions, page 29.

in terms of: (i) advocating with national governments; (ii) supporting field projects; (iii) developing youth-focused or youth-led initiatives, including through the Participation Programme; (iv) supporting mechanisms for young women and men to participate in UNESCO's work; (v) reaching out to different categories of partners at national and regional level to support UNESCO's work on youth; (vi) developing and sharing experiences and good practices.

29. Monitoring of the UNESCO Youth Programme will be conducted along the same procedures and timelines as those foreseen for the programmatic part of the C/5. The inclusion of qualitative indicators at activity level (e.g. effectiveness in convening and influencing stakeholders; impact of evidence-based research on the quality of youth-specific policy-making and programming; progress relating to the policy and normative environment affecting youth in given countries or contexts), alongside the quantitative ones (e.g. ratio of investment in policies affecting youth as part of national GDP), will be examined. To the extent possible, risk analysis will be conducted for the different activities under the UNESCO-wide Youth Programme at the beginning of the C/5 cycle, informing the monitoring process.

30. The UNESCO Youth Programme will undergo a mid-term review at the end of the 37 C/5 cycle and a final evaluation at the end of the 37 C/4. Within the C/5 cycles, youth-specific activities will foresee internal or self-evaluation, with feedback by partners and beneficiaries, including young women and men and youth organizations. To the extent possible, major youth activities led by UNESCO in the past and carried forward in the 37 C/4 will be evaluated.

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