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# IFRC: LEADING HUMANITARIAN WORK

**PROTECTING  
COMMUNITIES**  
IN SOMALIA

**HUMAN  
CONNECTIVITY**  
IN ACTION

**IMPACTS OF  
DIGITAL  
GOVERNANCE**

**THE UNITING  
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**COLD WATER:  
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**I**n the aftermath of the First World War, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was founded in 1919, under the name ‘League of Red Cross Societies.’

Its founder, Henry Davison, then President of the American Red Cross War Committee, brought Henry Dunant’s humanitarian vision to life, which had been evolving for more than 50 years following the Battle of Solferino.

The League’s main aim was to improve public health in countries affected by war, strengthen existing national societies, and help establish new ones.

In 1983, the organization became the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. It adopted its current name in 1991: the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Today, the Federation brings 191 National Societies together from around the world with the help of its 16 million volunteers. They work together to support vulnerable populations, improve health conditions, prevent and ease human suffering, respond to disasters and crises, and strengthen communities’ resilience.

This issue of the magazine offers an inside look at the Federation, featuring an interview with its Secretary General, Jagan Chapagain, alongside a range of other articles for you to explore.

**L**a Fédération internationale des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge fut fondée au lendemain de la Première Guerre mondiale, en 1919, sous le nom de « Ligue des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge. »

Son fondateur, Henry Davison, alors président du Comité de guerre de la Croix-Rouge américaine, concrétisa une idée qui existait déjà depuis plus de cinquante ans. En effet, Henry Dunant avait posé les bases du mouvement à la suite de la Bataille de Solferino.

L’objectif premier de la Ligue était d’améliorer la santé des populations dans les pays touchés par la guerre, de renforcer les sociétés nationales existantes et d’en créer de nouvelles.

En 1983, la Ligue devient la Ligue des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge, avant d’adopter, en 1991, son nom actuel : la Fédération internationale des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge.

Aujourd’hui, la Fédération compte 191 sociétés nationales à travers le monde et environ 16 millions de volontaires. Tous s’activent à atteindre ses objectifs humanitaires : porter secours aux populations vulnérables, améliorer les conditions de santé, prévenir et atténuer les souffrances humaines, intervenir lors de catastrophes et de crises, et renforcer la résilience des communautés face aux risques.

Ce numéro du magazine vous plonge au cœur de la Fédération, notamment à travers un entretien avec son secrétaire exécutif, Jagan Chapagain, ainsi que d’autres contributions que nous vous invitons à découvrir.

*Prisca Chaoui*

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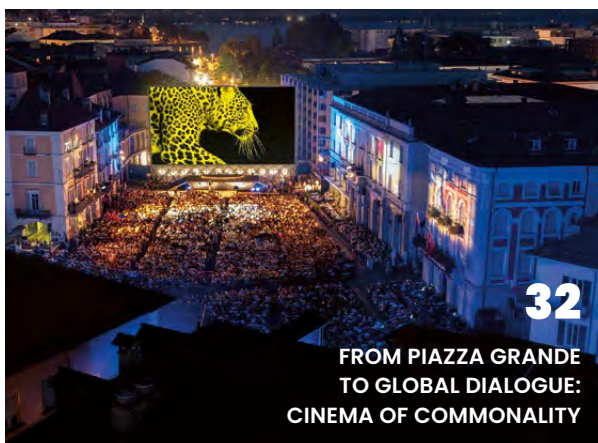
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>  
 Jagan Chapagain,  
 Secretary General  
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 International  
 Federation of Red  
 Cross and  
 Red Crescent  
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# On the frontlines of humanity

How does the IFRC’s Secretary General, Jagan Chapagain, shape the strategic direction of humanitarian response?

MOLLIE FRASER-ANDREWS \*

**A**t a time of increasingly complex humanitarian challenges, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Jagan Chapagain, stands at the helm of the world’s largest humanitarian networks. Read how he is guiding efforts to deliver timely, principled, and effective assistance across diverse crisis settings.

**You’ve led IFRC through overlapping crises: pandemics, conflicts, climate disasters. What kind of leadership do these times demand that traditional humanitarian models didn’t?**

Today’s crises are no longer linear. They are interconnected, overlapping, long-lasting, and fast-evolving. This is very different from the more stable and

predictable environments that traditional humanitarian models were designed for.

One of the biggest lessons has been the need for highly adaptive leadership. Leaders must respond quickly to constant change and uncertainty. It is also essential to take a systemic view. Issues like climate change, migration, and health crises are not isolated. They are deeply interconnected and must be addressed in that way.

Collaboration is critical. No single organization or government can tackle these challenges alone, so leadership must create space for partnership rather than competition.

At the same time, incremental improvements are no longer enough. With crises multiplying and resources shrinking, humanitarian organizations must be willing to transform and reimagine their approaches.

Digital fluency is another key requirement. With rapid advances in technology and artificial intelligence, leaders must understand and use these tools effectively. Finally, humility is essential. No one has all the answers in such a fast-changing world. Accepting this allows leaders to collaborate more openly and effectively.

In short, today's leadership must be adaptive, systemic, collaborative, transformative, digitally fluent, and grounded in humility.

**In an increasingly polarized world, how does IFRC maintain trust and neutrality on the ground?**

Maintaining trust and neutrality has become significantly more challenging in recent years, particularly as conflicts intensify and polarization grows.

For the IFRC, everything starts with anchoring actions in its fundamental

principles: humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality. While some question whether neutrality is still relevant, it is more important than ever. Without it, access to vulnerable communities and the safety of staff and volunteers would be at risk.

Trust is also built through consistency. This means doing what you say and not overpromising. Keeping commitments over time is essential.

Another key factor is localization. Trust is built within communities, not from global headquarters. With millions of volunteers embedded locally, the IFRC relies on these connections to maintain credibility and access.

Transparent communication is equally important, particularly in combating misinformation and disinformation, which can erode trust and undermine humanitarian work.

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ULTIMATELY,  
MOTIVATION  
IS NOT THE  
PROBLEM



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Finally, the IFRC practices quiet diplomacy. While this approach is sometimes criticized for not being vocal enough, it allows for more effective engagement behind the scenes without adding to already heightened tensions.

Together, these approaches help sustain trust and neutrality in a highly polarized world.

**Humanitarian needs are rising faster than funding. Is the current funding model still fit for purpose?**

The short answer is no. The current funding model is not fit for purpose, and this has been recognized for some time.

One major issue is that funding is often short-term, tightly earmarked, and reactive. This limits flexibility and reduces impact. In contrast, many crises, especially climate-related ones, are predictable, making pre-arranged and multi-year funding both possible and necessary.

Another challenge is that funding rarely reaches those closest to the crisis. Local organizations, which are often the most effective responders, receive only a small fraction of total funding despite global commitments to increase their share.



IFRC field assessment and coordination team leader, Colin Chaperon

The system is also fragmented. Humanitarian, development, and climate funding operate in silos, while communities experience these challenges as interconnected issues.

Additionally, funding flows through multiple intermediaries. This reduces efficiency and shifts risk downward. By the time resources reach local actors, a significant portion has already been absorbed, while those actors carry the greatest risk.

Solutions are well known. These include more flexible, predictable, and locally directed funding, better integration across sectors, and fewer intermediaries.

There is also a need to move beyond grant-based funding alone. Partnerships with the private sector, innovative financing models, and mechanisms like insurance can all play a role.

Ultimately, the challenge is not a lack of solutions, but a lack of collective resolve to implement them.

**As IFRC relies heavily on volunteers, how do you keep younger generations engaged amid burnout and crisis fatigue?**

Volunteers are at the heart of the IFRC, both emotionally and economically. Their contribution is immense.

To keep them engaged, the most important factor is impact. Volunteers want to see that their efforts make a real difference. Demonstrating this impact clearly is key to sustaining motivation.

At the same time, organizations must recognize that volunteers themselves need support. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of investing in volunteer safety, training, and psychosocial wellbeing.

Burnout is a real risk, especially because volunteers are highly motivated. Strong volunteer management systems are essential to ensure they are protected and supported.





Localization remains central. Empowering local actors to lead responses ensures more effective and sustainable outcomes.

In parallel, the organization is modernizing its financing approaches, exploring innovative and blended funding models, and engaging more deeply with the private sector.

Finally, digital transformation is a key priority. Ensuring that all parts of the organization can use digital tools effectively is essential to avoid widening inequalities and to respond to modern crises.

◀ Families hit by destruction after Typhoon Haima, Santo Niño, Cagayan

This includes providing safety equipment, offering mental health support, and supporting families of volunteers who lose their lives.

A sense of belonging is also vital. Volunteers should feel they are valued partners, not just a workforce.

For younger generations in particular, purpose matters deeply. Aligning volunteer opportunities with issues they care about, such as climate change, health, and migration, helps maintain engagement.

Ultimately, motivation is not the problem. Support, recognition, and meaningful impact are the keys.

### What strategic priorities are guiding IFRC's evolution in response to increasingly complex emergencies?

One major shift has been moving from reactive response to anticipatory action. With many crises now predictable, investing in preparedness is both more effective and more sustainable.

Closely linked to this is a stronger focus on resilience, helping communities withstand and adapt to shocks rather than repeatedly responding after disasters occur.

The IFRC is also working to integrate climate, health, and migration into a unified approach, reflecting how these challenges intersect in reality.

Another priority is strengthening trust and ensuring respect for humanitarian principles, particularly in a polarized and conflict-affected world.

### Looking back on your journey from your early career to your current role as Secretary General, what values have remained constant in guiding your decisions?

From the very beginning, as a young volunteer, the core belief has been that every person deserves dignity and compassion. This understanding of people has remained a constant guiding principle.

Trust has also been fundamental. It must be earned through integrity and consistent action. Leading with integrity is important, but succeeding with integrity is what truly matters.

Another enduring principle is the importance of adaptability, captured through the idea of listening, learning, and leading. Effective leadership requires the courage to listen, the willingness to learn, and the ability to adapt based on that learning.

These values, dignity, compassion, integrity, and the courage to adapt, have shaped the journey from a young volunteer to a global leadership role, and continue to guide decisions today. ■

“ LEADERS MUST RESPOND QUICKLY TO CONSTANT CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY



Mollie Fraser-Andrews is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.

# Truth, trust and the new risks facing humanitarian action

Humanitarian crises are no longer shaped only by what happens on the ground, but by what people believe is happening

XAVIER CASTELLANOS \*

**W**hen a disaster strikes, the first questions are often: how severe, who is affected and where is help available? The answers depend on data. But increasingly, they also depend on trust - a component around data that's less visible, and, increasingly, more fragile.

The World Disasters Report 2026, recently published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), is dedicated entirely to the recent explosion in misinformation in the humanitarian space. It argues that harmful information is no longer just a communications problem. It is a humanitarian risk, one that erodes trust and blocks life-saving operations.

Local teams in Colombia assist 9,900 people affected by flooding in the departments of Córdoba and Antioquia

An example: in 2018 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Red Cross volunteers were working on slowing the spread of Ebola when rumors began, blaming the volunteers for bringing the virus into communities. This misinformation fuelled mistrust, leading at times to violence against Red Cross teams, particularly those conducting safe and dignified burials.

Or take the case of Canada in 2024, when wildfires devastated the small mountain town of Jasper, Alberta. The Canadian Red Cross responded immediately, providing shelter, financial assistance and a range of personal support services to evacuees. During the response, however, a coordinated disinformation campaign emerged, falsely claiming that the Canadian Red Cross was absent locally and that funds would not benefit the community.

When communities believe rumors more than the people trying to help them, neither the best medicine nor the best support services can do their job.

So it's vital to push back.

In the DRC, the DRC Red Cross placed community engagement at the centre of its strategy. Volunteers went door to door sharing information on how to prevent, detect and respond to Ebola, hosted radio talk shows, organized mobile cinemas and conducted outreach to vulnerable groups.



This approach had a measurable impact: community resistance and aversion to burials dropped drastically from 79% in the first two months of the operation to just 8% in September 2019.

In Alberta, the Canadian Red Cross challenged and corrected the disinformation in real time, highlighting its successful emergency relief operation and the impact on the community. Results from pulse surveys showed increased levels of trust in the Red Cross throughout the area.

Pushing back, therefore, takes time and uses resources. The World Disasters Report argues that reliable information – and the establishment of trust – has become a basic humanitarian need. Alongside food, water, shelter and healthcare, people in crisis must trust those guiding life-changing decisions, or vaccines may be rejected and evacuation warnings ignored.

Today, we cannot assume trust as a given. It must be built in a reinforcing loop: from belief, to proof, to consistency. It must be earned repeatedly and through transparency. Local Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers are well-placed to achieve this. Their proximity and credibility can be a huge asset.

But of course, trust is no longer relevant only in physical communities. It appears in digital spaces – group chats, social media networks and online forums where narratives spread rapidly and shape public perception. False claims, rumors and manipulated narratives can travel faster than accurate assessments, shaping attitudes against those willing to help.

For humanitarian organizations like the IFRC, this nuance changes the meaning behind “local.” Showing up physically is simply no longer enough if the real conversation is happening online.

Instead, being present in communities now also means being present in the information spaces where people form opinions and, subsequently, make decisions.



Efforts by Iranian Red Crescent rescuers to provide relief and rescue people injured following the recent escalation of hostilities in Iran, April 2026

The World Disasters Report argues that harmful information must be treated as an operational risk – something anticipated and managed just like logistics, security or access constraints.

It also calls for a broader shift: recognizing that information itself is a form of aid.

Providing communities with trusted, actionable information can be as life-saving as medicine or food. That means investing far more in community engagement. Nowadays, we too often think artificial intelligence has all the answers. In fact, stronger “humanitarian intelligence” – understanding how information moves and where trust is built or broken – is more important than ever.

But ultimately, addressing harmful information cannot fall to humanitarian organizations alone. Other international organizations, governments, technology companies, media and communities all play a role in shaping the information environments in which crises unfold.

Confronting this challenge requires stronger cooperation across sectors – from improving early warning and verification systems to investing in community engagement and ensuring trusted information reaches those who need it most. At a time when humanitarian needs are rising, protecting the integrity of information is essential to protecting lives. ■



**Xavier Castellanos** is Under Secretary General for National Society Development and Coordination at the IFRC.

To read the full World Disasters Report 2026, visit:

[www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

# Celebrating the volunteers of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

In today’s crises, the most important humanitarian resource is not what is delivered, but who shows up

NENA **STOILKOVIC** \*

**D**uring a crisis, often the first face people see is not an international delegate or a convoy of trucks. It is a neighbour in a red vest.

Across 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, more than 17 million volunteers form the backbone of the Red Cross and Red Crescent network – the world’s largest humanitarian network, coordinated globally by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Secretariat. As the world marks International Volunteer Year 2026, the IFRC is celebrating these volunteers under one simple banner: “Local, Everywhere.”

The phrase captures what sets the Red Cross and Red Crescent apart. While the IFRC connects and supports National Societies globally, it is those National Societies, rooted in their own communities, that mobilize volunteers. They are not outsiders arriving after a crisis. They are teachers, parents, students and community leaders who step forward when their communities need them most.

### From classrooms to crisis response

In Mandalay, Honey Thin – affectionately known as “Teacher Honey” - is, outside school hours, a volunteer with the Myanmar Red Cross Society. So when devastating floods, followed by a powerful earthquake struck her community in 2025, she didn’t hesitate. Swapping her

classroom role for a humanitarian one, she distributed essential supplies and helped families navigate the aftermath of disaster.

Her story reflects a defining feature of the IFRC network: volunteers are embedded in everyday life. They are present before disaster strikes and remain long after headlines fade.

In Egypt, volunteers from the Egyptian Red Crescent have been supporting families evacuated from Gaza. In one shelter, a volunteer sits with children during a drawing activity, a simple act that offers comfort and stability amid unimaginable trauma. In northern Nigeria, Pwavi Sanagon Kushi, a father and community leader, helps run a “Papas’ Club,” bringing fathers together to address chronic malnutrition affecting their children.

In the mountainous regions of Afghanistan, a young Red Crescent volunteer named Sharifa provides essential health care to remote communities cut off by earthquake damage.

These stories span continents and contexts, but they share a common thread: volunteers are trusted and deeply connected to the people they serve. They are local, everywhere.

### Why the volunteer model matters

Humanitarian needs are rising at an unprecedented pace, driven by climate shocks, conflict, displacement and health emergencies. At the same time, mistrust and polarization are growing in many societies.

“  
HUMANITARIAN  
NEEDS  
ARE RISING  
AT AN  
UNPRECEDENTED  
PACE



The Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteer model offers a powerful response to both challenges.

First, it enables speed and scale. When a typhoon struck parts of the Philippines just months after a catastrophic earthquake, local volunteers were already on the ground, organizing evacuations, distributing relief and supporting recovery. Their proximity allows for immediate action, often within hours.

Second, it builds trust. Volunteers are not perceived as external actors; they are neighbors. They speak the language, understand cultural norms and know which households may be most vulnerable. This local presence strengthens acceptance, reduces barriers to assistance and fosters social cohesion.

Third, it shifts the narrative from aid delivery to community resilience. Volunteers do not only respond to emergencies. They train communities in first aid, promote vaccination campaigns, conduct early warning outreach, support climate adaptation initiatives and counter

misinformation. Their work helps prevent hazards from becoming crises and crises from becoming catastrophes.

#### Standing in solidarity with volunteers

But, in the midst of celebrating volunteers, it's also vital to call out how they are being threatened.

This year, across the IFRC network, National Societies are amplifying volunteer voices to ensure they get the recognition they deserve. But recognition alone is not enough. Volunteers today are facing escalating violence. 2024 was the deadliest year on record for humanitarian workers globally. Across 2024 and 2025, 59 volunteers and staff from the IFRC network were killed while serving their communities, most as a result of violence. Local humanitarians, the very people who are first to respond and often the last to leave, bore the overwhelming brunt of these attacks.

Through the IFRC's global #ProtectHumanity campaign, the network is sending a clear message: those who save lives are not targets. Attacks on volunteers



Kenya Red Cross supporting families in Kenya's North Horr, Laisamis, and Moyale areas experiencing drought



▲ The Brazilian Red Cross delivering an anti-malaria program, 1987

are not inevitable tragedies, they are preventable violations under international humanitarian law. When a volunteer is killed, it is not only a life lost; it is a lifeline cut for an entire community. Without safe and unhindered access, humanitarian action cannot reach those who need it most.

“  
PROTECTING  
VOLUNTEERS  
MEANS  
PROTECTING  
HUMANITY

Protecting volunteers requires more than words. States and parties have a responsibility to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel and to respect the emblems that protect them. The IFRC is urging donors and partners to invest in the safety and well-being of local volunteers, including training, insurance, protective equipment and psychosocial support, as a fundamental responsibility, not an optional add-on.

If we truly value the contributions volunteers make, we must ensure they have the safety, support and respect needed to carry out their work, and return home to their families, safely and sustainably.

**Local action, global impact**

For more than 115 years, voluntary service has been at the heart of the Red Cross and

Red Crescent. The IFRC connects this vast network, enabling knowledge-sharing, surge support and coordinated action across borders. But the heartbeat of the network remains local.

In every evacuation before a storm, every vaccination campaign, every psychosocial support session with a displaced child, there is a volunteer choosing to act.

As the world marks International Volunteer Year 2026, the message is clear: protecting volunteers means protecting humanity. Their red vests symbolize more than assistance, they represent trust, solidarity and the belief that communities are strongest when they care for one another.

In a world facing overlapping crises, the most powerful humanitarian resource is not equipment or funding. It is people – local, everywhere. ■



**Nena Stoilkovic** is IFRC Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Diplomacy and Digitalization.

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# How digital lifelines keep our life running

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day on 17 May is an invitation to look differently at the everyday technologies we take for granted

MONIKA GEHNER \*

**W**hen the alarm goes off in the morning, most of us do not think about the invisible systems that make the day possible. We check the weather on our phone. We message family across borders. We tap a card to pay for transport or coffee. We join an online meeting, book a medical appointment, follow the news, or call for help in an emergency.

Our lives depend on something we rarely see but constantly rely on: digital lifelines.

This year's World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, observed on 17 May, shines a light on those essential systems under the theme "Digital Lifelines: Strengthening resilience in a connected world." Chosen by the Member States of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations agency for digital technologies, the theme asks a simple question with far reaching consequences: How do we make sure the digital networks and services we depend on are there when we need them most?

▼  
Connecting the world  
through digitization



## Digital lifelines support societies and economies

Digital lifelines are the networks and systems that carry information around the globe. They include mobile and fixed networks, undersea cables linking continents, satellites that support communication and navigation, and data centres that keep digital services running. Together, they form the backbone of modern societies.

These systems support essential services: banking and trade, education, healthcare, public safety, transport, emergency services and humanitarian response. When they work well, daily life flows smoothly.

## Resilience matters now

When digital lifelines fail, the impact can be critical. Our dependence on digital connectivity has never been greater. Nearly three-quarters of the world's population is now online.

While robust digital systems rebound quickly from minor glitches, they remain vulnerable to catastrophic disruptions. Core infrastructure—power grids, data centres, submarine cables, satellite systems and cloud services—are deeply interdependent, so a disruption in one layer can ripple widely. For example, extreme weather or environmental shocks affecting electricity supply can shut down telecommunications, computing and payment systems.

## The human side of connectivity

For people on the move, resilience is not an abstract concept. It is the difference

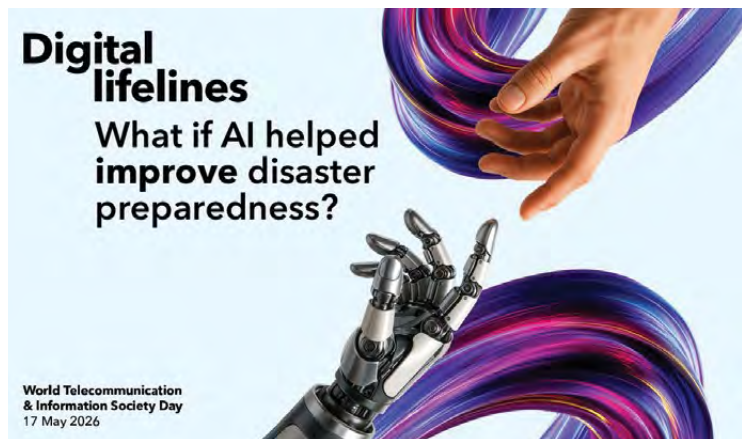
## MORE INFORMATION

For more information visit our website:

[wtisd.itu.int/2026](https://wtisd.itu.int/2026)

Help make the invisible visible. Tell us which digital lifelines play the greatest role in your work with the United Nations:

[wtisd.itu.int/2026/poll](https://wtisd.itu.int/2026/poll)



between being able to reach loved ones or being cut off. It determines whether early warning messages arrive in time, whether hospitals stay connected, and whether communities can coordinate relief and recovery.

For many in the United Nations system and the diplomatic community, digital infrastructure is part of professional life. Negotiations, reporting, coordination with capitals and field offices all rely on secure, stable connectivity. A resilient digital environment supports dialogue, diplomacy, international cooperation and multilateral action.

### Behind the scenes takes centre stage

For over 160 years, ITU has brought governments, the private sector and other partners together to coordinate how the world connects. Behind the scenes, the Union develops global standards, allocates radio frequencies, and supports countries in strengthening their digital infrastructure. For example:

- Every day, satellite and terrestrial navigation systems guide travel on land, at sea, and in the air. ITU coordinates radio frequencies, ensuring these essential signals remain safe and interference-free.
- ITU and partners advance the use of AI for disaster preparedness through the Early Warning Connectivity Map, identifying where and how many people can be reached via digital networks.
- Every year, the ITU Academy trains 5,000+ learners worldwide in topics such as digital

inclusion, connectivity, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, policy leadership and more.

When incidents affect digital infrastructure, behind the scenes takes centre stage.

### A shared responsibility

Resilience means that digital systems are designed to withstand disruption, adapt to changing conditions, and recover quickly when something goes wrong. It also means building in backup systems, international standards and cooperation across borders, so that a local failure does not become a global one.

We need to build resilience into digital systems from the start — in design, operation and recovery. But strengthening digital lifelines is not just a technical task. It is a shared responsibility that involves policy choices, investment, international cooperation and public awareness.

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day is an invitation to look differently at the everyday technologies we take for granted, recognizing the people and partnerships that keep them running across the United Nations and the countries they serve. ■



**Monika Gehner** is the Head of Corporate Communications at ITU.



The future impact of AI is limitless. How can we embrace it?



OUR LIVES DEPEND ON SOMETHING WE RARELY SEE BUT CONSTANTLY RELY ON: DIGITAL LIFELINES

# Réarmer la coopération multilatérale

La Genève Internationale et les projets à impact au service des ODD

THOMAS EGLI \*

“  
DES GLOBAL  
IMPACT  
PROJECTS,  
PORTÉS DEPUIS  
GENÈVE

**F**ace à des crises globales persistantes et une fragmentation croissante des efforts, une nouvelle pratique diplomatique émerge : la diplomatie de l'impact. Concrète, transversale et collective, elle permet d'identifier, structurer et financer des projets systémiques qui redonnent aux Nations Unies et à leurs partenaires un rôle moteur dans les transformations de ce siècle.

Alors que les réponses classiques aux crises mondiales peinent à convaincre, une pratique discrète mais puissante s'installe progressivement dans le paysage : la diplomatie de l'impact. Loin des discours, elle engage les acteurs à concevoir et co-financer ensemble des projets à impact systémique, portés par des coalitions hybrides, et enracinés dans une gouvernance internationale. Une diplomatie résolument opérationnelle, au service du bien commun.

▼  
Réconcilier ambition systémique et humilité de terrain

**Un contexte propice à l'émergence d'un nouveau modèle**

Depuis 20 ans, les grandes institutions du multilatéralisme se trouvent à la croisée des chemins : perte de financements traditionnels, fragmentation des mandats, lenteurs bureaucratiques, mais aussi surgissement d'initiatives privées, locales, entrepreneuriales. Dans ce paysage mouvant, le besoin d'un langage commun, d'outils partagés et de gouvernances ouvertes est devenu crucial.

C'est dans cet espace dédié aux projets à mission que le Geneva Forum œuvre depuis 2001. Chaque année, il réunit ONG, agences de l'ONU, diplomates, fondations, chercheurs, entrepreneurs sociaux, avec un objectif clair : rendre possible la coopération intersectorielle sur des projets concrets. C'est ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui la diplomatie de l'impact.

**De la vision à l'outil : une diplomatie ancrée dans l'action**

En 2025, la Geneva Foundation for the Future publiait après 3 années de travail collaboratif le livre blanc AGILE, qui formalise une méthodologie simple et robuste en cinq piliers (alignement – gouvernance – intention – leadership – efficacité) pour évaluer et accompagner les projets à impact. Ce cadre opérationnel est aujourd'hui utilisé pour faciliter la rencontre entre des porteurs de projets publics, des investisseurs privés, et des financeurs philanthropiques autour d'objectifs partagés.

Dans de telles conditions, un projet qui respecte sa mission, dispose d'un modèle économique viable et d'une gouvernance

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adaptée peut attirer jusqu'à 500 millions ou 2 milliards par an, tout en conservant son indépendance. Mais pour cela, encore faut-il savoir le structurer, le présenter, et le gouverner collectivement. C'est là que la diplomatie de l'impact devient essentielle.

#### Concrètement : des Global Impact Projects, portés depuis Genève

Le Geneva Forum anime désormais chaque mois à Genève des ateliers du management durable, où se conçoivent et progressent des Global Impact Projects répondant aux enjeux les plus critiques : sécurité alimentaire, accès à l'eau, éducation pour tous, économie circulaire, transition énergétique... Ces projets sont construits dès le départ pour croiser les silos, aligner les agendas et mutualiser les financements.

Chaque projet est porté par un groupe de co-responsables issus d'agences de l'ONU, d'ONG spécialisées, de fondations et parfois d'États ou de collectivités locales. Le financement repose sur une logique mixte : fonds publics internationaux, grandes philanthropies, finance à impact, et cofinancements techniques ou logistiques. La gouvernance reste collégiale, transparente, centrée sur un impact mesurable.

#### Réconcilier ambition systémique et humilité de terrain

Ce que propose la diplomatie de l'impact, c'est une voie humble, mais rigoureuse,

pour réenchanter l'action internationale. Humble, car elle reconnaît que personne n'a, seul, la solution. Rigoureuse, car elle exige de la droiture, des preuves, des grilles d'évaluation, des feuilles de route et des tableaux de bord.

Mais c'est aussi une diplomatie d'enchantement, car elle redonne foi en la capacité collective d'agir, loin des logiques d'annonce ou d'influence. Elle recentre l'énergie des institutions sur ce qu'elles peuvent concrètement réussir ensemble, en partant du réel, en mobilisant le meilleur de chacun, et en s'inscrivant dans la durée.

#### À suivre et à rejoindre

Le Geneva Forum ouvre ses ateliers à toute organisation des Nations Unies, ONG internationale ou État membre souhaitant proposer, rejoindre ou financer un projet à impact.

Tandis que les méthodes sont open source et les coalitions inclusives, les résultats sont également publics. ■



**Thomas Egli** est Directeur du Forum de Genève. Il est fondateur de l'Organisation non gouvernementale *Objectif sciences international* et cofondateur de la *Geneva Foundation for the Future*.



Des Global Impact Projects, portés depuis Genève

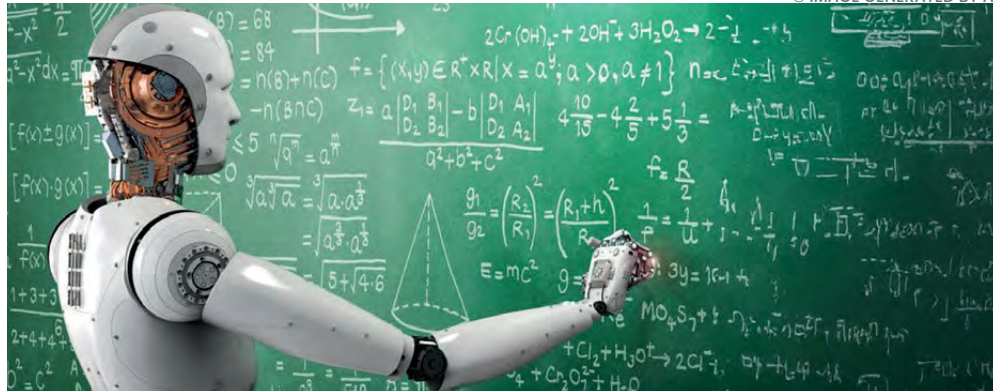


#### PLUS D'INFORMATIONS

Tous les ans le Forum de Genève accueille ses Conférences annuelles internationales sur 7 grands sujets clés pour le développement durable et la paix.

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> AI will play a growing role supporting both teachers and learners, but the risks must be acknowledged

# How AI is redefining teaching and learning

Artificial intelligence may make teaching easier, but at what cost to the experience of education?

SEBASTIAN ZIELINSKI \*

requires careful management to avoid misuse and inequality.

“ THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN TEACHING AND LEARNING MUST REMAIN CLEAR

**A**rtificial intelligence is often discussed as though its impact on education were a single, unified phenomenon, frequently framed in negative terms. In reality, AI affects education in very different ways depending on how it is used. To understand its true impact, it is essential to distinguish between AI as a tool for teachers and AI as a tool for learners, and to judge each according to the fundamental aims of education.

## The impact of AI on education and learning

AI is already reshaping education in significant ways. On a positive note, it is transforming education by making learning more personalized, accessible, and efficient. It allows students to receive instant feedback and tailored support, while helping teachers save time on tasks like grading and administration. It must be thought of not as a replacement for teachers, but a supplement. When used thoughtfully, it can make learning more personalized and accessible, but it also

## AI and teaching

When used thoughtfully, AI can be a useful, though far from perfect, tool for teachers. One of its most obvious applications is in the creation of teaching materials. Coursebooks and syllabuses almost always require supplementation, and teachers regularly need to design worksheets, quizzes, and assessments. AI tools such as ChatGPT can support this process by generating draft materials quickly, saving time in a profession where time is perpetually limited.

AI-generated materials almost always require careful human refinement, however. In my own experience using AI to create a test for primary school learners, the output was structurally coherent but pedagogically weak. Clear examples were missing, the tone was dry and poorly suited to young learners, and some questions encouraged unnatural or ambiguous responses.

Attempts to improve engagement through AI-generated activities were also limited, requiring me to search independently for

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specialist tools and integrate materials manually. I also had to design my own pronunciation assessment, as the suggested version would not have been effective.

This reinforces a key point: AI can assist teachers, but it cannot replace pedagogical judgement. AI does not reliably account for age-appropriateness, classroom dynamics, or the emotional and motivational needs of learners. Used well, it can speed up preparation; used uncritically, it risks producing content that is technically correct but educationally weak.

AI becomes genuinely beneficial for teachers only when it supports the core principles of good teaching: clarity, close observation of learners, emotional attentiveness, productive struggle, and strong communication with families. Teaching is not simply about delivering content efficiently; it is about creating the conditions in which learning can occur. While AI can help design differentiated activities or formative assessments, it should not replace teachers in marking. Assessment is not merely about assigning a grade but about understanding student thinking and providing feedback. Outsourcing this entirely to AI risks weakening one of the most important feedback loops in education.

**AI and learning**

AI used directly by learners presents a more complex picture. In some contexts, it can be genuinely supportive. For example, AI-based tutoring tools can help students who feel they do not receive enough individual support in class by offering explanations, examples, and opportunities to practice at their own pace. In subjects such as mathematics, where knowledge is clearly defined, this kind of support can be effective and empowering.

In other subjects, particularly those involving interpretation, argument, or contextual understanding, AI use requires far more caution. Without close teacher guidance, AI can introduce inappropriate content, undermine curricular coherence, or give students a false sense of mastery. More concerningly, when students rely

on AI to avoid thinking, struggling, or practicing, learning itself is hollowed out. Effort, confusion, persistence, and gradual improvement are essential educational processes. They are also motivating: progress generates confidence, which in turn encourages further learning.

**Assessment and authenticity**

AI creates serious challenges for assessment. Coursework becomes increasingly unreliable when teachers cannot determine how much work reflects a student’s own thinking. This problem is intensified by the ability of AI tools to mimic particular voices, ages, or levels of sophistication. As AI-generated work becomes more personalized and convincing, traditional indicators of authorship lose their diagnostic value.

In examination systems, another problem emerges. Students who rely heavily on AI may perform significantly worse under exam conditions, revealing a gap between apparent and actual competence. AI can therefore create an illusion of learning that collapses when independent performance is required.

AI is a double-edged sword. For teachers, it has the potential to support planning, differentiation, and more frequent in-class assessment. For learners, however, its overall impact may be more negative than positive if it is used to bypass the cognitive struggle that learning requires. The solution may not lie in better detection of AI use, but in rethinking teaching and assessment practices and placing greater emphasis on in-class tasks that prioritize thinking, discussion, and problem-solving.

If education is to benefit from AI rather than be diminished by it, the distinction between teaching and learning must remain clear and the struggle to learn must remain non-negotiable. ■



**Sebastian Zielinski** is an Editor, Writer, Teacher and Director of Zielinski Services Multimedia.

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AI CAN ASSIST  
TEACHERS, BUT  
IT CANNOT  
REPLACE  
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and transparent  
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## Digital doors: who gets in?

The shift to digital government is reshaping access to public services but not equally for all

PATRICIA NEMETH \*

**A**s public services move online, digital platforms have become the new front door to government. What once required a visit to a town hall or welfare office is increasingly managed through websites, portals, and mobile apps. And yet, for over 1.3 billion people, about one in six globally, who live with a disability, that door is often locked.

When a person cannot renew benefits, read an emergency alert, or submit a complaint because the interface was not designed with them in mind, this is not a technical oversight. It is a form of administrative

discrimination. On Global Accessibility Awareness Day (21 May), that is the uncomfortable truth digital government must confront.

### The promise and its condition

Over the past two decades, governments have invested heavily in digital public services. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) E-Government Survey 2024 documents steady progress: more countries than ever provide services online and integrate digital tools into core administrative functions, with digital government now a cross-cutting enabler of the Sustainable Development Goals. Residents can submit tax returns, apply for social protection, or renew licenses from home.

The promise is real: a state that is more reachable, more responsive, and more equitable. But it rests on one basic condition: that people can use the systems being built for them. If the digital front door is too narrow or effectively invisible to a large share of the population, the result is not inefficiency; it is exclusion.

#### The invisible barriers

Data confirm that this pattern is widespread, not exceptional. WebAIM's 2024 "Million" study found that almost 96% of high-traffic home pages had detectable failures against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). An unlabeled button, an uncaptioned video, or dense bureaucratic language, particularly for users with cognitive disabilities, can make public platforms impenetrable for users with visual or hearing impairments.

These barriers are not distributed evenly. They compound with poverty,

limited connectivity, age, and geography, and they will only grow. As the population ages, it means that more people will experience vision, hearing, mobility, and memory-related impairments. When digital services are built without accessibility in mind, they are built against a significant portion of the public they are meant to serve.

#### A governance obligation, not a design preference

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities makes the legal position clear. Articles 9 and 21 make digital accessibility a binding obligation, not an optional feature, by requiring equal access to information and communication technologies.

The technical knowledge to meet that obligation already exists. WCAG sets clear standards for making web content perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. Many countries have

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ACCESSIBILITY  
IS NOT CHARITY:  
IT IS GOOD  
ADMINISTRATION

**LA PRÉCARITÉ A UN VISAGE.  
LA SOLIDARITÉ AUSSI.**

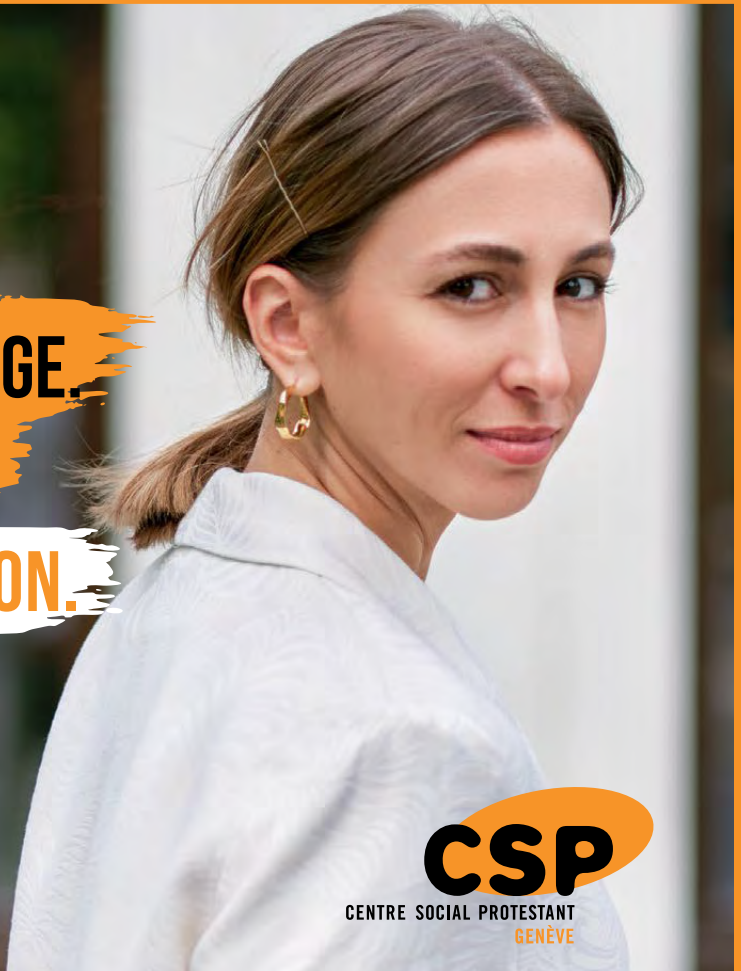
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Global Accessibility  
Awareness Day:  
Driving Digital  
Inclusion

incorporated these into national law, and DESA’s Online Services Index now factors accessibility into its assessments. The gap is not knowledge; it is implementation, enforcement, and accountability.

Addressing this requires assigning clear institutional responsibility, budgeting for accessible design from the outset, and integrating accessibility checks into procurement and development. Crucially, it means involving persons with disabilities in the design and testing of services, so that digital doors are built with, not merely for, the people who need them most.

**Why this benefits everyone**

Accessibility is not charity; it is good administration. High-contrast text helps many users reading on a phone in sunlight. Captions serve anyone watching a video in a noisy environment or in a second language. Clear language reduces errors and abandoned forms for all users. People are also more likely to use online services rather than queuing in person, as when they are confident, they can complete tasks independently. That means fewer errors and fewer complaints for administrations.

Many of us will experience disability over a lifetime, whether temporary or permanent. Designing for accessibility is, in a real sense, designing for our future selves.

**A concrete checkpoint**

Global Accessibility Awareness Day is not just an occasion for statements; it is a practical prompt. Administrations can ask: Are our portals compatible with assistive technologies? Are forms navigable by keyboard alone? Are official videos captioned and available in national sign languages? Are emergency alerts accessible to all?

DESA has stressed the importance of “digital inclusion by design.” The Disability Inclusion Strategy frames accessibility as a system-wide responsibility. The commitments exist. The question is whether everyday practice, portals, apps and content actually live up to them.

Digital transformation is ultimately about who gets to participate in public life. The real measure of a digital government is not how advanced its technology appears, but how inclusive it truly is. Are we using this moment to open public doors wider than ever before, or quietly closing them to those who have always had to push the hardest to enter? ■



**Patricia Nemeth** is a Human Resources Officer at UNFCCC.

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# From market to meaning

Rewriting trade law to protect meaning, not just markets. What if we reimagined it as a tool for cultural dignity?

AYESHA DAWOOD\*

**E**dward Said’s powerful words: “Humanism is the only, and I would go so far as to say, the final resistance we have against inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history,” speak the language of the UN Charter – “to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples...”

International trade is the bridge between cultures and economies

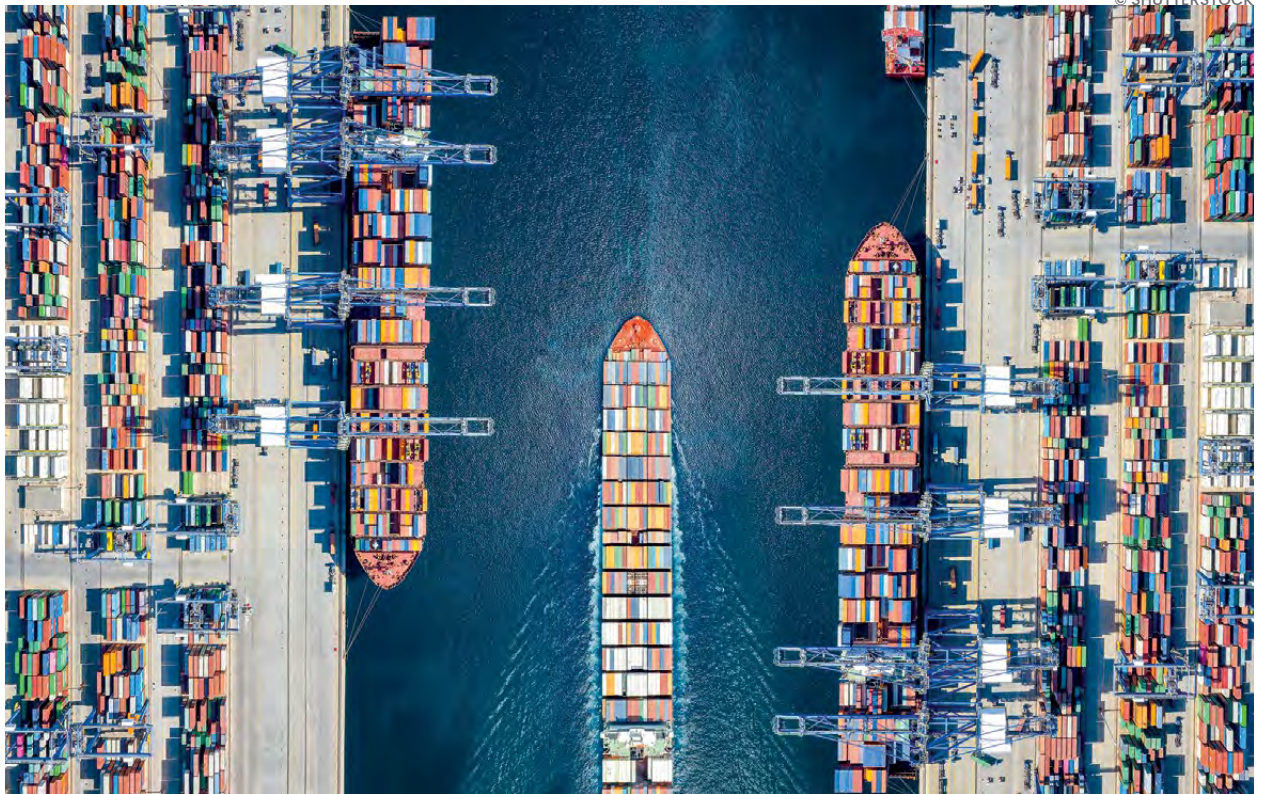
What would happen if we reimagined international trade, making dignity and understanding the measure of every deal, tariff and dispute?

We have moved beyond shipping containers to digital transmissions and a streaming culture. These data flows are a reality – music, film, music, design crossing borders instantaneously. Could cultural intellectual property (cultural IP) be a counter-hegemonic influence, transforming intellectual property from a creative cultural commodity to a tool enabling equitable trade and cooperation?

I introduce the term AnimEnomics (an expression I have coined– distinct from a website reporting on Japan’s anime market) to describe cultural, creative and economic interaction by media – driven cultural products within a humanist legal framework to show how commerce and creative cultural assets intertwines societal fabrics and may be aligned with human rights. This framework treats cultural IP as a public good, capable of advancing communication, inclusive development and trade justice and not leveraged merely as a commodity. It argues that cultural assets are important drivers of international trade and an important carrier of social meaning. It should be noted that AnimEnomics has not previously been recognized nor acknowledged in legal scholarship, economic literature nor media studies.

To situate this argument, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS, 1994), the WTO agreements and principles regulating trade and intellectual property (IP) are addressed in conjunction with international human rights law which provides normative substance through the protections for culture, development,





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health and to participation and protection of scientific, literary and artistic progress. These commitments are grounded in the moral and legal framework of dignity, justice and international cooperation articulated in the UN Charter (1945) and core human rights covenants.

Yet, trade rules are often interpreted through a hegemonic trade paradigm, privileging market access and capital expansion. A counter hegemonic perspective might enable us to see these instruments as international constitutive structures, capable of advancing equity among nations and people.

**Beyond import–export: completing the framework**

By focusing only on regulations and market access, the cultural and emotional dimensions of exchange, trade’s humanist dimension, and the interpretive constructs

“**WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE REIMAGINED INTERNATIONAL TRADE...**

that inform trade are often overlooked. In fact, the creative cultural IP addressed here is different from the cultural IP associated with traditional heritage knowledge and the cultural expressions of a country and Indigenous Peoples, who have a defined legal niche. Creative cultural expressions, from anime, memes, art, and media to storytelling, as well as the cultural narratives and emotional connections embedded in exchange itself, are often dismissed as incidental to “serious” trade policy.

These modern creative cultural assets are vital cultural infrastructure. They influence diplomacy, shape preferences, mobilise public awareness, and give meaning to what might otherwise remain abstract legal structures. They are not simply entertainment, but act as cultural equity agents. They are not just tools for profit, but make culture a medium of access and a significant channel for cultural and economic exchange, shaping how people build connections, understand one another, and relate across borders. This model enables cultural and social identities to be respected and exchanged as part of global justice.

▲ Connecting nations, fueling innovation, and creating opportunities beyond borders



▲ Containers at Tanjung Perak commercial port in Surabaya, Indonesia

These cultural forms function as instruments of “soft power,” which Joseph Nye recognised when he stated that “the soft power of a country is dependent on three sources: its culture, in places where it is attractive to others; its political values, when it lives up to them at home and abroad; and its foreign policies, when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.”

**Cultural intellectual property**

Cultural IP operates as a bridge between these regimes, generating economic value while carrying intrinsic human rights significance. This analysis reflects the cultural theory of intellectual property, in which Professor William Fisher of Harvard Law explains how the rule of law both protects and enables our appreciation of the arts and innovation.

“**WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE REIMAGINED INTERNATIONAL TRADE....**

Cultural IP advances the view that international trade must evolve beyond profit maximisation toward dignity, as enshrined in Article I of the UDHR: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Culture should be understood as an essential component of identity, diversity, human development, and global understanding, not reduced to a tradable commodity in global supply chains. Market rules should not erase

communicative access. The protection of cultural IP must be justified against broader objectives of social welfare, cultural participation, and parity in development. Article 8 of the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity states that cultural goods must not be treated merely as commodities, but recognised as transmitters of identity, values, and meaning.

**China Publications and Audiovisual Entertainment Products**

This omission is visible in the WTO dispute on cultural goods in *China Publications and Audiovisual Entertainment Products* (WT/DS363, 2009), particularly in relation to China’s restrictions on foreign distribution and trading rights for audiovisual products. The dispute was settled primarily through the lens of market access, ignoring context. Cultural products were treated as tradable commodities rather than as expressions of identity and meaning. China’s prohibition on foreign-invested entities distributing sound recordings, audiovisual home entertainment, theatrical films, and reading materials was found inconsistent with national treatment obligations. The settlement failed to address culture as a public good or to consider the public interest benefits of promoting social values, morals, and cultural identity.

**Global perspectives**

Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry aims to expand international

content and creative industry sales to ¥20 trillion by 2033 under its revised Cool Japan Strategy. Anime exports do more than generate revenue; they circulate narratives, artistic expression, and values that expand Japan's global influence. Anime, originally emerging from Japan as hand-drawn or digitally produced comic-style animation, has since become a global cultural force shaping visual language worldwide. In this discussion, the term "anime" is used both in its specific Japanese cultural context and in its broader international animation and media dimension.

South Korea's specialised body, the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), similarly reflects state investment in cultural IP as a strategic export sector. This has enabled the Hallyu wave, covering K-pop, television dramas, gaming, and film, to be integrated into trade and soft power. Both cases demonstrate that cultural creative assets, once deemed peripheral to trade, now sit at the centre of trade and diplomacy. International law has yet to fully acknowledge their normative and legal weight.

### The rights paradigm

When we disentangle cultural impact from market forces, it is like separating the art and words of a story from the medium in which they are presented, similar to separating the narrative and visuals from the screen or platform itself. Cultural interplay determines the meaning and value of the exchange. Hayao Miyazaki, the Japanese animator, creates films that are both protected by copyright and commercially mobilised. They illustrate cultural IP as a public good while addressing social issues. His works generate shared cultural value and ethical meaning across borders, engaging with themes of greed, capitalism, the environment, gender, and war. One may ask whether Spirited Away can be seen as a cultural force that aligns with Said's philosophy of humanism.

Legal frameworks require careful application across borders, and this does not require hypothetical scenarios. Socio-cultural issues relate to the social welfare function of intellectual property

under TRIPS Article 7 and the right to participate in cultural life under ICESCR Article 15, as clarified by CESCR General Comment No. 17.

Articles 7 and 8 of TRIPS frame intellectual property protection as instrumental to technological innovation, social and economic welfare, and a balance of rights and obligations, while promoting the public interest. This confirms that intellectual property rights are not ends in themselves, but regulatory frameworks serving broader public objectives.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in General Comment 17, provides insight into the relationship between intellectual property and human rights, distinguishing moral and material interests from corporate rights. This reflects an understanding of intellectual property rights as rights-bearing, not simply revenue-generating.

A normative shift situates cultural IP within a human rights and public goods framework. AnimEconomics builds on this jurisprudential rationale, framing cultural IP as a regulated public good whose value lies not only in commercial exchange but also in its socially regenerative function, contributing to social welfare and cultural exchange in line with TRIPS and related treaty regimes.

If international law is to serve people as well as states, the central question is whether AnimEconomics can guide trade governance toward global understanding and justice alongside formal treaty regimes. A counter-hegemonic approach may reframe international trade law, with dignity and global understanding as interpretive anchors of economic relations.

Culture speaks. Cultural IP may represent a humanist turn in international trade law. ■



**Ayesha Dawood** is an international law and international affairs professional.

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CULTURAL IP  
ADVANCES THAT  
INTERNATIONAL  
TRADE MUST  
EVOLVE  
BEYOND PROFIT  
MAXIMISATION...”

# From Piazza Grande to global dialogue: cinema of commonality

Every summer, a small town on Lake Maggiore turns its main square into one of the world's largest open-air cinemas, and a lab for quiet diplomacy

RAPHAËL BRUNSCHWIG \*

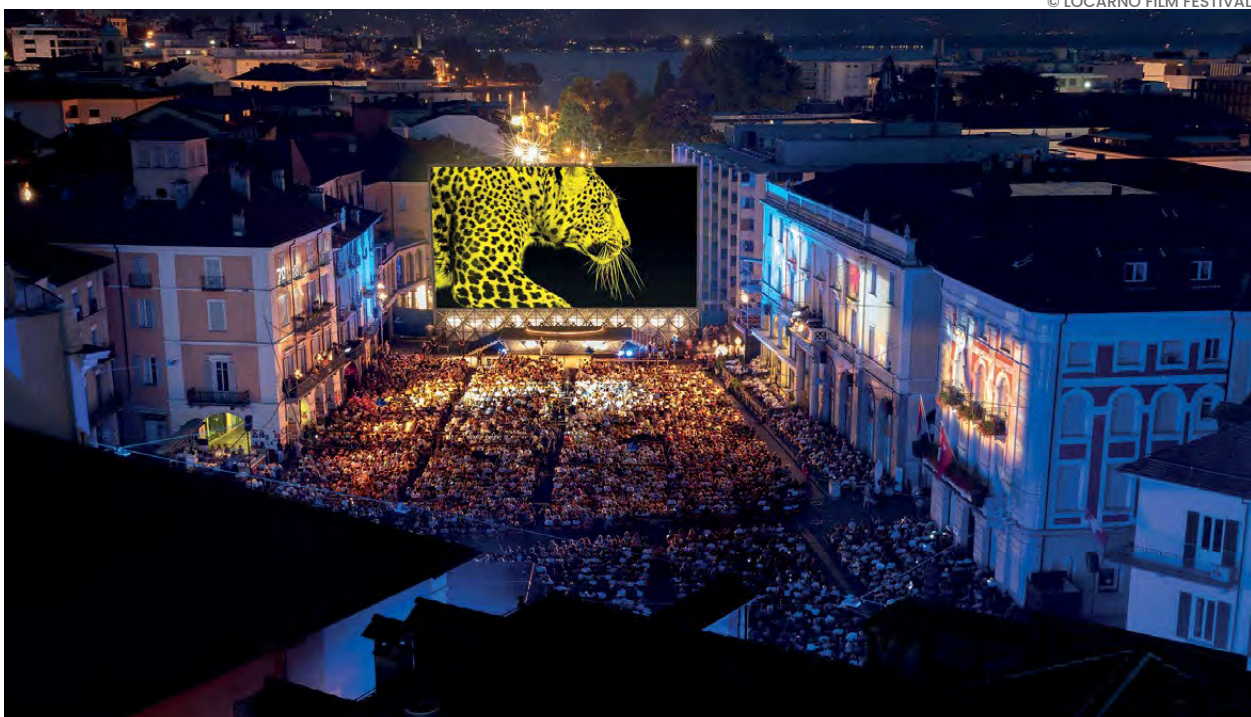
**I**n August each year, thousands of people gather in Locarno's Piazza Grande to watch films under the open sky, surrounded by the facades and arcades of the city's old town. The setting is local, rooted in Italian-speaking Ticino and its strong community ties to this event, yet the artistic program and the audience are highly international. For eleven nights, the square is transformed into a shared space where stories and ideas from

around the world are projected, experienced collectively, and then discussed and debated afterward.

Today, debates in public policy increasingly recognize that culture is not a luxury to be added once other priorities are funded, but a form of essential infrastructure that supports democratic societies. Cinema has the capacity to drive change in ways that purely economic measures cannot. Economists increasingly argue that arts and culture do not simply contribute to GDP; these sectors help shape the direction of economic and social development by influencing how

▼  
Piazza Grande,  
home to  
Locarno  
Film Festival

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communities imagine their shared future, how they define and confirm their values, and how political action can be mobilized in response to a changing global order.

Seen in this way, the Locarno Film Festival functions as an ecosystem rather than a single event: a place where diverse publics encounter different perspectives, where empathy develops through repeated exposure to a range of stories, and where key issues, from climate justice and gender equality to digital rights, emerge through cinema and discussion. The Piazza Grande becomes, during those days in August, a public arena in which thousands of people respond directly to what they see, laughing, listening, sometimes disagreeing, but always engaging with social questions through a shared experience.

From its beginnings in 1946, the Locarno Film Festival built a reputation for its strong defense of artistic freedom, placing discovery and the support of new cinematic voices at its core. In its early years, the Festival, sometimes controversially, welcomed filmmakers working under censorship in the Eastern Bloc. Those values remain central today. In 2025, Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof received the inaugural Locarno City of Peace Award during the Festival's Diplomacy Day. The prize, created to honor cultural figures who advance peace, diplomacy, and dialogue on the centenary of the Locarno Treaties, highlighted how the Festival's artistic mission is closely linked to a broader civic role.

Beyond the screen, the Festival hosts Diplomacy Day, an initiative that makes the connection between culture and politics a clear part of its mandate. Diplomacy Day brings together more than 200 delegates from business, politics, science, and culture for dialogue within one of the world's major film events. In 2025, the day included appearances by David Lammy, then British Foreign Secretary, Ignazio Cassis, Vice-President of the Swiss Federal Council, as well as Carlos Álvarez Pereira, Secretary General of the Club of Rome, and Pierre Krähenbühl, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

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In 2026, the program will focus on the theme “Reimagining Global Cooperation,” developed in collaboration with the Club Diplomatique de Genève, the Wyss Academy for Nature, and Foundation Botnar, bringing together diplomats, policymakers, representatives of international organizations, technology leaders, foundations, and filmmakers. The topic reflects current political changes, including declining trust in global partnerships, increasing fragmentation, the urgency of the climate crisis, and the growing risks linked to artificial intelligence across diplomatic, political, and cultural contexts. Building on the Festival's curatorial work, Diplomacy Day will open with discussions and interactive sessions, followed by a keynote that connects these ideas to cinema's role in supporting cooperation. The day will conclude with networking and an open-air screening in the Piazza Grande.

As discussions on the future of multilateralism continue in Geneva and New York, the example of Locarno raises a simple question: what might change if, alongside negotiations in conference rooms, more consistent investment were made in cultural spaces, whether physical or symbolic, where the perspective of art can inform and deepen policymaking? ■

▲  
Diplomacy Day 2025

“  
THE PIAZZA  
GRANDE  
BECOMES, FOR  
THAT MAGICAL  
PERIOD IN  
AUGUST, A  
DEMOCRATIC  
ARENA

*This article  
was written  
in collaboration  
with the Diplomatic  
Club of Geneva.*

\*

**Raphaël Brunschwig** is the  
CEO of the Locarno Film Festival.

## Chronicles of Everyday Diplomacy

ANTOINE TARDY \*

**B**

y the third day of talks at the Palais des Nations, endurance becomes its own diplomacy.

Delegates and staff find whatever comfort they can between sessions — barefoot, crouching, scrolling.

The negotiations continue. ■



PHOTO  
ANTOINE TARDY



\* **Antoine Tardy** is a freelance photographer based in Geneva. **Web:** [antoinetardy.com](http://antoinetardy.com) **Instagram:** @antoinetardyphoto

# From ocean depths to protecting the planet

As an explorer, diver, mountaineer and filmmaker, Paul Rose has devoted his life to discovering, exploring and protecting the ocean's last wild places

FRANCESCA LUALDI \*

**I**t is impossible not to be drawn to the magnetic energy of a modern-day hero. Speaking with Paul is a journey in itself: a conversation with an adventurer who has never lost the hope—or the determination—to speak about nature and the actions we can all take to improve our planet.

▼ Former Vice President of the Royal Geographical Society and Chair of its Expeditions and Fieldwork Division, Paul Rose is now Expedition Leader for the National Geographic Pristine Seas

Paul Rose observing from the Pristine Seas submarine deep in the Pacific

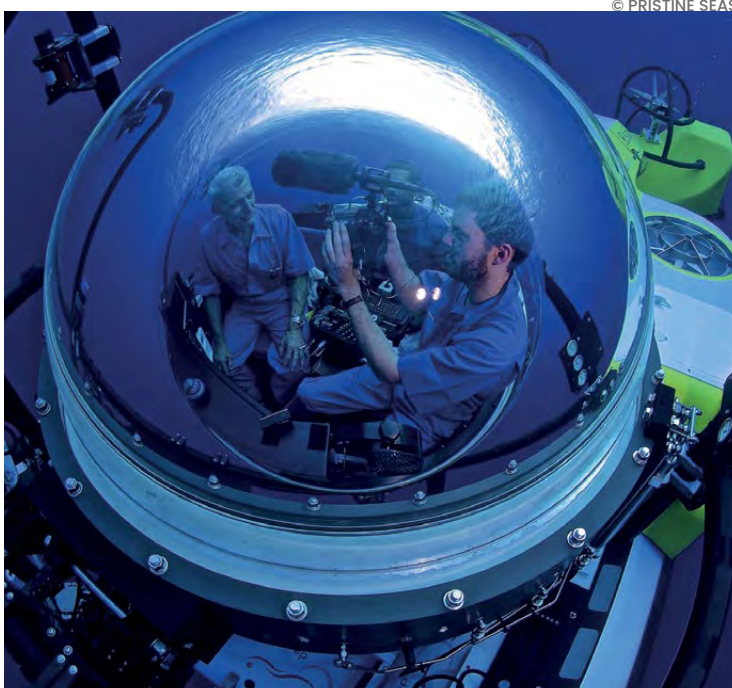
expeditions, bringing scientists and explorers to some of the ocean's most remote regions to help establish new marine protected areas.

He previously served for ten years as Base Commander of Rothera Research Station in Antarctica for the British Antarctic Survey, earning Her Majesty The Queen's Polar Medal. For his work with NASA on the Mars Lander project on Mount Erebus, Antarctica, he was also awarded the United States Polar Medal.

**1.** You have spent decades exploring some of the most remote regions on Earth. From your perspective, what are the most urgent environmental changes you have personally witnessed, and what should the international community prioritize to address them?

One of the most worrying things I have witnessed in recent years is that people are beginning to lose trust in scientific data—and I believe this is extremely dangerous. If we look at plastic pollution, overfishing, overextraction of natural resources, and the loss of habitats and biodiversity, these are issues whose numbers we see constantly in the news. Yet those figures often disappear quickly from people's minds, partly because some assume they are simply the product of artificial intelligence or algorithms rather than the result of real scientific work.

Behind every dataset is real field research: scientists and teams diving into freezing water, crossing deserts, sailing through storms and working for months in



© PRISTINE SEAS

remote polar stations to gather evidence. Scientific knowledge comes not only from machines, but from people working in some of the world's toughest environments.

There is also reason for hope.

More people are involved in research today than ever before, and science needs many professions, from scientists to divers, doctors, engineers, pilots, electricians and drivers who make expeditions possible.

The more people who become involved in science, the more powerful this connection becomes. When they return home from an expedition or a field mission, they do not just bring back data—they bring back stories and experience. They become ambassadors for science and for the planet. And when those same people later sit in a meeting room, make business decisions or stand in front of a board, they carry with them a deeper sense of responsibility.

That is how real change happens: when knowledge from the field reaches the places where decisions are made, and when more people feel personally connected to the future of our planet.

**2. How important is storytelling in translating complex scientific findings into action by governments, institutions and the public?**

Storytelling is fundamental today.

The secret weapon lies in sharing stories that inspire a spirit of adventure in others. This entails encouraging people to push their limits and embrace exploration as a mindset, just as we naturally do when we are children. Teachers, parents and society at large should nurture this curiosity. Even policymakers and ambassadors, when possible, should experience firsthand what melting ice in Antarctica or deforestation in the Amazon really

“  
THE MORE PEOPLE WHO BECOME INVOLVED IN SCIENCE, THE MORE POWERFUL THIS CONNECTION BECOMES

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➤  
Paul Rose  
with a Grouper  
in the Seychelles  
outer Islands

looks like. Seeing these realities on the ground makes it far easier to understand a field report—and allows them to become witnesses and storytellers of nature themselves.

Bringing scientific data, films and images to the public is essential, but the power of thoughtful storytelling should never be underestimated. Great leaders who have experienced something personally often carry a particular sparkle in their eyes, a sense of conviction that comes from direct experience. That authenticity resonates deeply with us as voters, consumers and decision-makers.

In the end, storytelling bridges the gap between science and society. It transforms complex research into narratives that people can understand, remember and act upon, helping to build a shared sense of responsibility for the future of our planet.

**3. What role do international organizations and multilateral cooperation (such as the UN) play in turning scientific discoveries into concrete conservation policies?**

During challenging field projects (such as in the harsh conditions of the polar regions) we remind teams that every observation, data point and report helps shape better global decisions. Work done in remote places ultimately feeds the knowledge policymakers rely on, but it only matters if leaders are willing to listen and act.

I saw this clearly during Ocean Week in Brussels, where I facilitated discussions among politicians, scientists and project leaders. Despite their different backgrounds, they shared an explorer's mindset: curiosity, adventure and deep respect for the ocean. That spirit helps connect science with real-world action.

International organizations play a crucial role in this process. Despite limited funding and political challenges, they bring countries, scientists and decision-makers together. Geneva, in particular, embodies this cooperation, a place where global dialogue, continuity and careful listening shape international action.

We should never underestimate this power. Institutions that unite the world around science and shared responsibility are essential to turning knowledge into action. My role is to bring people closer to the frontline, helping them understand the realities scientists face in the field and encouraging that same spirit of exploration and responsibility for our planet. ■

\*

**Francesca Lualdi** is a Partnerships and Communications Specialist with experience in the private sector and the UN system.

# A FLOURISHING SEASON AT THÉÂTRE DE CAROUGE

**At the Théâtre de Carouge, *Ivanov* and *Présentation de saison(s)*, the season's final two productions, stir the heart and the mind.**

May and June are particularly fruitful months at the Théâtre de Carouge, featuring two productions—*Ivanov* and *Présentation de saison(s)*—that offer distinct flavours yet share undeniable strengths.

Through May 10, author and actor Jean-François Sivadier shines as he directs Chekhov's \**Ivanov*\*. He heightens both the comedy and the despair of a society in decline in this play, which could be subtitled “Chronicle of the Foretold Death of an Anti-Hero.” *Ivanov*, a ruined landowner whose wife, Anna Petrovna, is dying of tuberculosis, falls in love with a young woman, Sacha... Featuring a dazzling cast, this biting adaptation of an iconic play from Chekhov's oeuvre was a resounding success when it premiered last January.

At the end of May, *Présentation de saison (s)*, an anthology of 18 season presentations, will bring to a close a year of performances that have thoroughly delighted audiences. For this grand finale, Jean Liermier will draw from a selection of highlights gathered over his eighteen years at the helm of “the most beautiful theatre of Carouge in the world.” A sparkling look back for a journey through words, images, and sounds, accompanied by a constellation of surprise guests.

Finally, on Saturday, June 13, summer begins on a joyful note with the announcement of the new season for 2026-2027, co-programmed by Jean Liermier, the current director, and Jean Bellorini, who will take over as director in January 2027.

[www.theatredecarouge.ch](http://www.theatredecarouge.ch)





Nimo Hassan  
delivering a  
keynote speech  
at the Country  
Humanitarian Forum  
in Jowhar, Somalia,  
November 2025

# The foundation of humanitarian action

Protecting communities from sexual exploitation and abuse requires trust, honest dialogue and the willingness to listen to those on the frontlines

CLARE FRANCIS\*

**N**o matter who you are or where you serve, we all have a role to play in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse. Read this interview with Nimo Hassan, Director of the Somali NGO Consortium, about her work to ensure that

local and national actors are at the heart – and the helm – of our collective response.

**What does a typical day look like for you?**

The work of coordinating NGOs across Somalia begins long before the first meeting of the day. Working with diverse organizations means

updates and requests arrive constantly; some are routine, while others require immediate attention or advocacy. As the Director of the Consortium, my role is to support and represent this network while managing my team, who are spread across the country.

Coordination, advocacy and representation are central to my role. Whether discussing access issues, policies or operational challenges, the Consortium brings organizations together and facilitates information-sharing with UN agencies, donors, the Government and other partners.

While no two days are the same and priorities can shift quickly, the core purpose of my role remains constant: strengthening the NGO community in Somalia and helping to ensure that humanitarian and development efforts reach those who need them most.

### What is your proudest achievement in this role?

One of my proudest accomplishments has been supporting our diverse NGO members in working collectively to ensure their voices are heard in key humanitarian discussions in Somalia. The Consortium provides a vital platform for national and international NGOs to share field perspectives and influence the decisions affecting our communities.

I am especially proud of our efforts to support members in elevating the protection of women and girls and, in particular, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (PSEAH). We have also advocated for stronger funding for protection services, which remain under-resourced despite significant needs.

It is rewarding to see our members come together with a stronger collective voice. This collaboration contributes to more accountable and effective humanitarian action – and most of all, it leads to better outcomes for the communities we serve.

Alongside your leadership of the Somali NGO Consortium, you also serve as Chair of the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) Board.

### What does ICVA do and what are your priorities as ICVA's PSEAH Champion for 2026?

ICVA is a global network of over 170 NGOs whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice. As its PSEAH Champion, I am committed to strengthening collective leadership and accountability on this issue across the humanitarian system.

Our work on the Championship focuses on three flagship priorities:

1. Conduct landscaping and amplify research to keep the system informed;
2. Promote locally led protection efforts by strengthening the Inter-Agency PSEA Community Outreach and Communications Fund;
3. Simplify, promote and support uptake of existing tools, guidance and mechanisms – so that frontline actors can embed PSEAH into their work without undue administrative burden.

Most importantly, underpinning all of this is a commitment to ensuring that the voices of local and national actors – particularly women-led organizations from the Global



#### USEFUL RESOURCES

HOW TO REPORT SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE:

[bit.ly/4tnJv2E](https://bit.ly/4tnJv2E)

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE UN RESPONSE:

[bit.ly/4kqlymc](https://bit.ly/4kqlymc)

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SOMALI NGO CONSORTIUM:

[bit.ly/4ttQW8I](https://bit.ly/4ttQW8I)

LEARN MORE ABOUT ICVA:

[bit.ly/4td7OzX](https://bit.ly/4td7OzX)



Creating safer futures in Somalia

© SHUTTERSTOCK



➤  
Nimo Hassan at a maternal health session highlighting community support for mothers and newborns, Baidoa, Somalia, 2024



South – shape global decisions. Drawing on my experience leading the Somali NGO Consortium and working across NGO, UN, government and donor partnerships, I believe real progress on PSEAH is built on trust, honest dialogue and the willingness to listen to those doing the hardest work in the most difficult places.

**What are the major challenges to protecting communities from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and how do you overcome them?**

The system faces a dangerous paradox: the conditions that increase risk and vulnerability are the same ones eroding our ability to respond. Overcoming this requires ruthless prioritization, smarter use of existing tools and resources, and an honest reckoning with where the system is falling short – which is what this Championship is designed to support. We need to better equip frontline actors, while also ensuring that humanitarian leadership sets the tone on our ethical standards.

**Why is it important for PSEA efforts to be shaped and led by local actors?**

Trust is local. Communities are far more likely to report exploitation and

abuse – and to believe that something will be done in response – when the people they turn to are part of their context, speak their language and understand their realities. Global frameworks matter, but they can only effectively protect people when they are owned and carried by those closest to them.

**What message would you like to share with fellow leaders?**

You do not need to be an expert on this issue to make a difference, you just need to mean it.

When leaders speak openly about their commitment to safe, respectful behaviour, it changes what teams believe is expected of them and what communities believe is possible. That tone, set from the top, is one of the most powerful tools we have. How we treat people is not a footnote to humanitarian action – it is its foundation. ■

\*

**Clare Francis** is an Associate PSEA Specialist and Speechwriter in the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to SEA.

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A silhouette of a woman's head in profile, facing right. The interior of the head is filled with a vibrant, multi-colored light trail that radiates from the center, transitioning through blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape with a horizon line.

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# AI's skills gap demands gender-responsive multilateral action

As with previous technological shifts, this moment is not only about innovation; it is about access, inclusion, and choice

MANON BALCAEN \*

**F**rom classrooms to boardrooms, from public services to global supply chains, artificial intelligence is reshaping how societies function and how people work. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Future of Jobs 2025 Report, 44% of workers' skills are expected to be disrupted within the next five years. By 2030, AI and automation will reshape nearly every sector of the global economy, creating new roles, redefining existing ones, and displacing many more. As with previous technological shifts, this moment is not only about innovation; it is about access, inclusion, and choice. Yet this transition is unfolding unevenly, and women, in particular, risk being left out of both the decisions and the

UNITAR's work is integral to the evolution of skills and training at the UN

benefits. This is particularly concerning as women's voices remain underrepresented in the very spaces where these decisions are made.

## The widening gender gap

Women systematically face a two-part problem: relatively fewer women are in jobs predicted to be augmented, while more are in roles projected to be disrupted, making their jobs obsolete. Numbers reveal that women are 1.5 times more likely to work in roles at high risk of automation. Women remain concentrated in administrative and routine roles, most vulnerable to automation, while facing unequal access to the digital skills training that could help them pivot to emerging opportunities. This creates a growing imbalance resulting in displacement.

Meanwhile, women remain underrepresented in STEM fields that are essential gateways to AI-augmented careers, a pattern that extends into AI design and leadership itself, where women's limited presence means the technology is being built without their perspectives, potentially embedding biases that further disadvantage them in the labor market.

This gap reflects systemic barriers, not individual choices. Among these barriers, women carry 2.5 times more unpaid care work on average than men globally, directly limiting the time available for reskilling. The numbers from the UN Women and LinkedIn report "Women and Future Jobs"



© UN WOMEN/RYAN BROWN

## ABOUT UNITAR

Established in 1965, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) is the dedicated training arm of the United Nations. Its mission is to strengthen knowledge and skills through high-quality training, research and innovative learning solutions.

Through strategic partnerships and a global learning platform, UNITAR builds skills of individuals, and enhances capacities of institutions and organizations, particularly those in vulnerable contexts, to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global commitments.

underscore the urgency; only 29.4% of AI engineering skill-listers on LinkedIn were women in 2025.

Women who gain access to AI-adjacent and transferable skills can move into emerging roles, but only if supported by gender-responsive policies and training systems. This needs to be addressed through targeted training and learning initiatives, equipping women, diplomats, public servants and other change agents with the competencies to engage meaningfully in the multilateral processes that are actively shaping AI governance and the future of work. Without such intervention, WEF projects that by 2030, 120 million workers will face medium-term redundancy. For women, the consequences extend beyond individual livelihoods, displacement without a pathway back ripple across entire households and communities, and economies lose the multiplier effect that women's economic participation is known to generate.

Yet no single government can solve this alone. AI technologies cross borders, professional qualifications need cross-border recognition, and the standards governing AI are set in international bodies where women's voices are already underrepresented, making multilateral action not just useful, but structurally necessary. Realizing this requires strengthening the institutional systems, legal, technical and administrative, that enable developing countries to translate international AI commitments into

national implementation strategies, monitoring frameworks and evidence-based policy. Without these institutional foundations, even the best-designed global agreements risk remaining aspirational.

### A path forward

Countries cannot bridge this divide alone. Joint investment in lifelong learning, shared digital infrastructure, and inclusive funding mechanisms are essential to ensure that women are not left behind.

The solution requires action across three fronts. First, national AI strategies must include mandatory gender-disaggregated skills targets and reporting mechanisms, moving beyond voluntary commitments to robust accountability mechanisms. Second, multilateral funding bodies have already demonstrated that gender conditionality works: the Green Climate Fund's model of tying disbursements to measurable inclusion targets has driven tangible results. The same approach should be applied to AI transition funds and strategic multistakeholder partnerships to ensure that women are not an afterthought in resource allocation. Third, cross-border recognition of non-formal and community-based digital credentials must be prioritized as women disproportionately gain skills outside traditional institutions. Without recognition frameworks, those skills remain invisible to labor markets. This matters especially for leadership and soft skills development: the human capabilities that community spaces cultivate, creative thinking, emotional

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ULTIMATELY, THIS  
WORK BEGINS  
WITH INDIVIDUAL  
COMMITMENT  
AND COLLECTIVE  
WILL



➤  
A panel featuring  
Phumzile  
Mlambo-NGCUKA,  
former United  
Nations Under-  
Secretary-General  
and Executive  
Director of UN  
Women from August  
2013 to August 2021

intelligence, strategic communication, are precisely what AI cannot replicate, and therefore increasingly what employers and institutions need.

This shift creates an opening to level the playing field if women have equal access to skill development. Organizations worldwide are already establishing innovative approaches, from coding bootcamps targeting underrepresented groups to AI literacy programs integrated into community development initiatives.

#### Why multilateral action matters

As Dr. Alessandra Sala, Global President of Women in AI and Co-Chair of UNESCO's Women for Ethical AI, has argued, "diversity and inclusion in AI is a global commitment and a collective leader's responsibility." This framing is instructive: the challenge is not technical but structural, and the response must match its scale.

As the UN's training and capacity-building arm, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) plays a catalytic role in this effort. Through its Gender and Diplomacy programmes, the Institute has reached government officials across regions, building the leadership and gender-responsive capacities needed to drive systemic change at the policy level, directly advancing the empowerment of individuals and strengthening the

national institutions that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands. Ultimately, this work begins with individual commitment and collective will.

Whether AI deepens inequality or expands opportunity will depend on who is enabled to shape it. As part of the effort to include all voices around the table, the forthcoming UNITAR Online Certificate on Women's Leadership – 'Make Your Voice Heard,' offers a concrete starting point. Designed as a space for women leaders and professionals to navigate and lead an increasingly AI-driven world, the program builds the confidence, capabilities, and networks needed to influence the policy discussions and regulatory conversations where the rules of our AI-driven future are being written.

The question is not whether women will be affected by AI's transformation of work, but whether the international community will act decisively now to ensure they have the tools to lead in the economy of tomorrow. Ready to hear your voice? Register now and join a global community of women leading the change. ■



**Manon Balcaen** is the Gender Focal Point of the Multilateral Diplomacy Division at UNITAR.

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# Forty years into eternity

Four decades after the death of Jorge Luis Borges in Geneva, the city is honoring the seminal writer with a series

MARCOS LIYO \*

**J**orge Luis Borges lived a long life. He sits in front of a large stone wall, alone, resting his hands on his cane. The statues around him appear imposing and distant. The square is quiet in the afternoon. He turns his head slightly to the right. Above him, four stone figures look straight ahead. They do not acknowledge one another. They are unresponsive, and Borges, now elderly, has been blind for many years. His vision failed, but his memory did not. In his mind, the image of Jean Calvin and the Reformers remains clear.

A tribute to his life's work beckons this month as we reflect on the legacy he left behind.

Jorge Luis Borges first arrived in Geneva in April 1914 at the age of 15. His family settled in an apartment on Rue de Malagnou, where they lived until 1918. He studied at Collège Calvin, where he learned French, Latin, and German. In Geneva, he formed friendships that lasted throughout his life and discovered literature as a shared activity, a way to connect with others.

During his teenage years, he was deeply interested in theology, which he later described as a form of fantasy literature. On July 7, 1917, at the inauguration of the International Monument to the Reformation, he saw the statues of Calvin, Farel, Beza, and Knox. That image stayed with him for the rest of his life and reappeared nearly seventy years later in his memories.

➤  
Jorge Luis Borges' gravestone at Cimetière des Rois, 2023



© MARCOS LIYO

## NUMEROUS TRIBUTES

**On Sunday, June 14 at 4 p.m.,** at the Cimetière des Rois in Plainpalais, Geneva, the Swiss association *Los conjurados* ([losconjurados.ch](http://losconjurados.ch)) will invite the public to visit Borges's grave. Poems will be read in Spanish and French. Visitors will be able to leave messages in a dedicated box, and 40 yellow roses will be placed there, one for each year since his death. Writers, diplomats, academics, and cultural figures are expected to attend. Alberto

Manguel, former director of the National Library of Argentina, has confirmed his participation. This event is part of a series organized by *Los conjurados* this year.

**On May 7 at 6 p.m.,** the Bibliothèque de Genève in Parc des Bastions will host Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater, who will speak about key metaphysical themes in Borges's work.

**On June 2, 13, and 14,** the Maison Rousseau et Littérature in Geneva's Old Town will host talks with Argentine writers on different aspects of his work.

**On November 28,** the Cité Bleue theater in Champel will hold a day of roundtable discussions, music, and film focused on Borges's life and writing.

Between these two moments, his early years in Geneva and his later recollection of them, Borges created the body of work that made him one of the most important writers in world literature. His writing is filled with libraries, tigers, labyrinths, knives, mirrors, books, and swords. It often revisits the same themes in different forms and invites multiple interpretations, shaped by each reader's perspective.

His work is usually divided into three periods. The first, from 1920 to 1935, is often called his criollista period. During this time, he experimented with literary modernism and tried to develop a poetic voice connected to Argentina. The second period, from 1935 to 1955, is considered his mature phase. It includes his best known short stories and essays, many of which explore philosophical and metaphysical ideas. The final period, from 1955 to 1986, came as his blindness worsened. In this stage, his writing became more conversational and reflective, focusing less on intellectual systems and more on personal thought.

Borges did not write novels or plays. He preferred short stories, although he also wrote essays and poetry. The boundaries between these forms in his work are often

unclear. His stories can be read like essays, his essays often contain poetic elements, and his poetry sometimes tells a narrative. He also wrote tango lyrics and film scripts, though these are less well known.

His writing is varied and often fragmented. With a few early exceptions, he rarely produced single, unified books. Most of his volumes are collections of texts that were originally published in newspapers and magazines.

Reading Borges can produce different responses, including aesthetic appreciation, interest in language, and intellectual curiosity. Over time, however, many readers are drawn to the personal quality of his work and the sense of intimacy it conveys.

### A stone in Plainpalais

Facing the wall, the man sits and thinks, more with certainty than nostalgia:

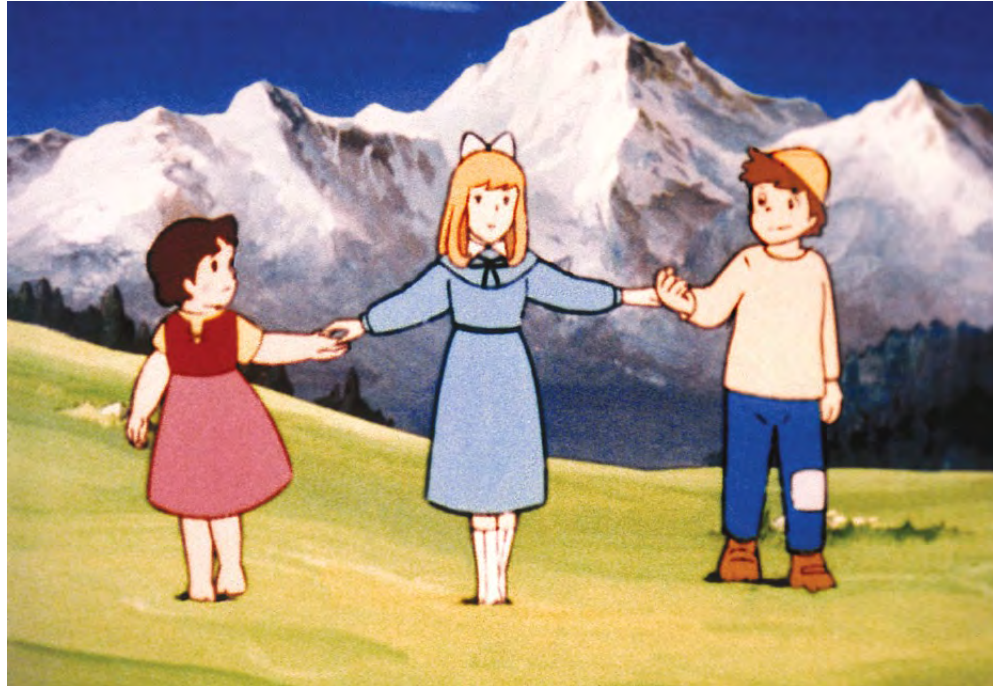
*"I know I will always return to Geneva, even after my death."* ■



**Marcos Liyo** is the General Coordinator of the Association "*Los Conjurados*."



IN 2026, *LOS CONJURADOS* WILL ORGANIZE NUMEROUS TRIBUTES TO HONOUR THE SEMINAL WRITER



➤  
United as friends – despite different perspectives and backgrounds: Heidi, Clara, and Peter from the animated series “*Heidi, Girl of the Alps*” (1974)

## Heidi: how one child can inspire peace

Heidi has the potential to contribute to world peace – if we take her seriously and understand her as an invitation to dialogue

PETER OTTO **BÜTTNER**  
AND PETER **POLZIN\***

**T**his is a story that connects generations, cultures, and nations.

Heidi, an orphaned girl, has captivated millions of people around the world to this day. For many, she is best known through the Japanese animated series that has shaped our image of Heidi since 1974 and remains closely tied to childhood memories. Yet the character and her story are far older than this modern popular icon and had already inspired generations of readers long before.

“Heidi” was created in 1879 by the Swiss author Johanna Spyri. With her work, she not only secured a place in world literature, but also articulated a profound vision of humanity – portraying the child as a source of strength and hope for adults.

The themes explored in the story are universal and timeless: love, trust, belonging, and the search for identity, all of which are fundamental human needs and experiences that connect people across nations, cultures, and religions.

In 2023, UNESCO inscribed the Heidi and Johanna Spyri Archives in Zurich into its “Memory of the World” Register, recognizing the global significance and

more than 145-year impact of the story. Yet even more important than its worldwide success are the values it conveys: through the eyes of a child, Heidi shows what a peaceful and meaningful coexistence can be built upon.

### Where Heidi is, there is peace

How such coexistence can emerge is exemplified in the relationship between Heidi and her grandfather. Through her kindness and childlike openness, she manages to heal the heart of a man who lives in conflict with himself, with God, and with the world – and who, through Heidi, finds his way back to life and to the community.

This transformation does not happen through moral instruction, but through lived humanity. While the villagers surround the “Alp-Uncle” with suspicion and accusations, Heidi approaches him with openness and affection. This is where the true strength of one of the most influential works of children’s literature lies: Heidi does not preach peace, she embodies it.

By seeing the good in others and offering trust, she achieves something that adults often fail to do: bringing people back into dialogue and making a new beginning possible. In this sense, “Heidi” takes on the quality of an allegory of peace – a story about how broken relationships can heal and how trust can grow where mistrust once prevailed.

### Heidi as a space for dialogue

The story of “Heidi” is shaped by conflict – and precisely in this lies its potential for reconciliation. Heidi’s world is not an idealized one, but a healing one. Its strength lies in allowing us to see the world through the eyes of a child, and to experience how healing can emerge.

This observation is not merely literary. Through our work with the Heidi Heritage Project, we have repeatedly witnessed how Heidi can open spaces for dialogue. When people are asked what memories they associate with Heidi, conversations begin almost immediately. They speak about their

childhood, personal experiences, and the emotions connected to the story. Heidi touches upon something fundamental: the inner child.

In this way, the story creates a shared cultural point of reference – a human encounter before political positions come into play. It enables people to meet first as human beings, not as representatives of different interests, countries, or worldviews, and thereby lays a foundation for meaningful dialogue.

### Shaping peace through culture and education

This experience forms the foundation of the Heidiseum’s work. Heidi is understood not only as literary heritage and a pop-cultural phenomenon, but as a living cultural asset with the capacity to connect people across the globe. Through cultural and educational initiatives, as well as international collaboration, spaces are created for discourse, mutual understanding, and lasting exchange. Heidi unites the world.

This vision is also reflected in the planned Heidi Heritage Center in Zurich. Conceived as both an exhibition space for the UNESCO collection and a place of encounter, it will include a dedicated dialogue space that brings the values of the story to life.

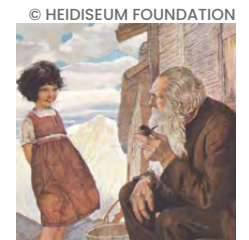
A particular focus lies on working with children and young people – for they are the ones who shape the world of tomorrow. Through interdisciplinary school programs and workshops, the values and messages of the story are brought into awareness. When asked whether Heidi could be considered a superhero, one student offered a simple yet insightful answer: “Yes, she uses soft power. She heals with kindness.” ■



**Peter Otto Büttner** is Founder and President, and **Peter Polzin** is Co-Founder and Chief Executive of the Heidiseum – The Heidi Heritage Project.



HEIDI’S WORLD IS NOT AN IDEALIZED ONE, BUT A HEALING ONE



Heidi meets her grandfather. Illustration by Gustaf Tenggren, whose artistic style later influenced Disney. USA, 1925



Racing in the icy waters is not for the faint-hearted

# Cold water swimming: method to the madness

Take the plunge and this new hobby could change your life

MOLLIE FRASER-ANDREWS \*

**A**nyone up for a swim? You might say yes if it was heated, with easy access to a warm shower or a sauna, but would you say yes, if asked in winter in 5°C water?

The chances are that the majority would refuse, but you might just surprise yourself, and subsequently revel in the wonders it can do to your physical and mental health.



THE MAIN BATTLE IS THE FIRST STEP INTO THE WATER

## One step at a time

The main battle is the first step into the water- that horrible moment of discomfort. The next few steps become easier and easier and once your shoulders are in, a feeling of euphoria takes over. For others, flight mode may kick in and before you know it, you'll find yourself retreating back to your warm towel. But you never know until you try!

The good news for fair-weather swimmers is that the warmer months are now here (in Europe!), which means the challenge to get into your swimming suits and brave the cold waters is less daunting. The hardy winter swimmers will be wishing for quieter pools and changing rooms, but the sun makes the whole experience better for everyone.

By starting now as the weather warms up our outdoor pools, seas and lakes, you can build cold water swimming into your routine. Whether you continue that once winter beckons is another story...

## Let's get physical

Cold water swimming benefits have been kicking around for a while (no pun intended), but what are the scientific facts behind this?

Firstly, it is worth noting that this is not for everyone. Cold water exposure can stress out the cardiovascular system, so if you

suffer from a heart condition or other medical problems, it is worth checking with your doctor before starting.

One of the main benefits it has to your physical health is improved circulation. This is because the body performs a “vascular workout” as the cold water causes blood vessels to constrict then dilate as you warm up. In addition, you might find that your body can regulate its own temperature more efficiently and over time, regular cold water swimming can lower blood pressure.

Studies have correlated a stronger immune system with cold water swimmers as white blood cells increase. This reduces the impact of habitual colds, likelihood of infection and ensures a generally more robust internal defence system.

Athletes often use ice baths to recover their muscles after sporting events, this is due to the defamatory effects of cold water on the muscles, reducing soreness and speeding up recovery periods. The first reported claims for this date back to 400 BC; Hippocrates was known to treat fatigue with water therapy.

On the other hand (and foot!) is the low-impact cardio exercise that comes with swimming. It does not put stress on bones and joints in the same way that other sports can. Is there really no downside?

### Impacts on the psyche

The positive effects of cold water therapy on the human brain has been widely reported, to the extent of anti-depressive. Improvements to mood and reduction in depressive thoughts link to the increase in the catecholamines (molecules that act as chemical messengers for dopamine, noradrenaline and adrenaline) as a result of the body’s response to cold water exposure.

All forms of exercise can evoke this response, but for some, the extreme reaction the body has to cold water surpasses the positive impacts of other physical activity.

Some other benefits include improved sleep quality and regulation as a result of the aforementioned chemicals activating the

sympathetic nervous system. Regular cold swims could be the answer to your sleep prayers!

In general, improved energy and alertness is a bonus, awakening the mind as well as the senses. Once the brain has been flooded with adrenaline and noradrenaline, a sense of mental clarity can last for hours as these chemicals sharpen focus and reaction times, increase attention span and reaction speed and reduce “brain fog.”

### The sport of ice swimming

Certainly more common in northern countries, winter or ice swimming is taken seriously by extreme athletes pushing their bodies to the extreme. Ice swimming can only be done where freezing temperatures remain no matter the time of year. The International Ice Swimming Association (IISA), founded in 2009, has conducted 42 official ice swimming competitions around the world since it was founded by South African swimmer Ram Barkai, who kickstarted the ice-miles movement. This is where swimmers can compete in a 1608m race in maximum 5°C water in only a swimming costume, hat and goggles.

The Ice Mile was rejected by the International Olympic Committee for inclusion in the Winter Olympics in both 2018 and 2022, but the community remain hopeful as the sport gains traction in the wellness and competitive spheres.

### Leisure and pleasure

Unlike many trends and fads, this one is here to stay. Whether it is in the many lakes, pools, rivers and seas, the undeniable benefits of cold water speak for themselves.

And if that wasn’t enough to inspire you, perhaps the words of Wim Hof, founder of the Wim Hof Method will: “Use the cold well, and you bring the immune system, the energy system and your cardiovascular system to an optimum [state].” ■



“  
REGULAR COLD  
SWIMS COULD  
BE THE ANSWER  
TO YOUR SLEEP  
PRAYERS!

\*

Mollie Fraser-Andrews is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.

# La Société de Lecture : entre héritage et modernité

Lieu de vie autant que de savoir, la Société de Lecture mêle débats, rencontres et initiatives pour les jeunes pour faire du livre une expérience joyeuse et partagée

MURIEL SCIBILIA \*

**R** enouant avec l'esprit de l'ancienne tradition du « salon » où l'on discutait littérature, histoire ou d'actualité autour d'un déjeuner-débat, la Société de Lecture (SdL) concilie exigence et ouverture à travers une programmation aussi dense qu'ambitieuse : conférences, rencontres avec des écrivains, ateliers d'écriture et activités pour les jeunes.

“  
RASSEMBLER  
LIVRES  
ET SAVOIRS,  
FAIRE CIRCULER  
LA PENSÉE

Les formats sont variés et conçus de sorte à favoriser l'échange plutôt qu'un face-à-face magistral. Ici, une discussion se prolonge autour d'un verre ; là, un auteur répond aux questions du public. « Nos programmes mêlent la littérature et les humanités », précise Emmanuel Tagnard, Directeur culturel et communication. « En plus des rencontres avec des auteurs, nous organisons un cycle annuel d'une dizaine de conférences thématiques en lien avec l'actualité ou qui permet d'appréhender un continent, un pays ou une culture. Le cycle de cette année, qui portait sur l'intelligence artificielle, a été très apprécié. En littérature, nos choix reposent sur un équilibre subtil entre des auteurs renommés et de nouvelles voix, entre des romanciers étrangers et suisses. Tout en respectant les goûts de notre public, nous n'hésitons pas à le bousculer. Ce qui importe c'est de contribuer à mieux comprendre et décrypter le monde. » En cela, la SdL reste fidèle à son ADN : faire dialoguer les idées.

Fondée en 1818 par une poignée de savants en réaction aux secousses napoléoniennes, la SdL, qui occupe un hôtel particulier au cœur de la vieille ville, est née du désir de rassembler livres et savoirs et de faire circuler la pensée. Un objectif qui, deux siècles plus tard, reste au centre de sa vocation.

Et quoi de mieux pour cela que l'étonnante bibliothèque constituée depuis le début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et qui compte plus de 200 000 ouvrages répartis sur plusieurs étages : textes de référence, littérature classique et contemporaine, essais, revues, collections étrangères. Des volumes reliés de cuir au titre doré, des livres légèrement déformés par les années qui exhalent l'odeur familière du papier vieilli, cohabitent avec des ouvrages récents acquis par la SdL à raison d'une cinquantaine par mois. « La nature des ouvrages a évolué au fil du temps, précise la directrice de la SdL Ann Huber-Sigwart. A l'origine, les fondateurs considéraient que la littérature était trop frivole. Seuls les récits de voyages complétaient les collections encyclopédiques.»

Les rayonnages ne sont pas pensés comme un musée, mais comme une réserve à explorer. Les livres ne sont pas figés. Qu'il s'agisse d'éditions anciennes ou de nouveautés, ils sont empruntés, feuilletés, discutés. Les bibliothécaires ne se contentent pas de gérer un catalogue : ils orientent, suggèrent, transmettent. Le conservateur des collections, Maxime Canals, est intarissable sur les personnalités de



La Société de lecture est installée dans un hôtel particulier du XVII<sup>ème</sup> à Genève

### ➔ PLUS D'INFORMATIONS

Association à but non lucratif, la SdL est en grande partie financée par les cotisations de ses quelque 1500 membres, par diverses activités et par la location des salons pour des événements privés ou professionnels :

[societe-de-lecture.ch](http://societe-de-lecture.ch)

premier plan qui ont fréquenté la SdL parmi lesquelles Franz Liszt, Albert Cohen ou Nicolas Bouvier. Et de se réjouir d'abriter l'Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert, les éditions de Jean Calvin annotées par lui-même ou encore d'extirper avec gourmandise la fiche des livres consultés par Lénine qui aimait ce lieu où il pouvait lire et écrire sans être dérangé par d'autres migrants russes.

Pas question pour autant de se transformer en temple de la nostalgie. Si les salons feutrés, les boiseries, les escaliers patinés conservent le charme d'un ancien salon littéraire, la SdL offre des espaces de travail modernes. On peut y consulter la presse internationale, travailler ou découvrir les nouveautés. On peut réserver en ligne les ouvrages listés dans son catalogue et ses membres ont accès aux conférences sous forme audio, vidéo ou en replay. Ce mariage entre respect des traditions et adaptation technologique explique en

partie la longévité de l'institution et sa capacité à rester un lieu vivant de curiosité intellectuelle.

Décloisonner, ne pas se complaire dans « l'entre soi » qui avait prévalu au siècle précédent, tel est le fil rouge qui relie toutes ses activités. Cela passe par la programmation d'auteurs anglophones, par des partenariats avec différentes institutions comme le théâtre de Carouge, le Grütli ou le Festival du film et forum international sur les droits humains (FIFDH) ; ainsi que par l'attention portée au jeune public à travers notamment l'organisation du « Croque-livres », un festival littéraire convivial et créatif, conçu pour faire aimer les livres aux enfants tout en les amusant. Un rendez-vous attendu au cours duquel les salons historiques de la SdL se transforment en terrain de jeu. « Nous intervenons aussi en milieu scolaire, ajoute Ann Huber-Sigwart. Nous offrons une vingtaine de bourses à des collégiens pour qu'ils découvrent et s'approprient ce lieu. Et nous avons lancé le programme « Next Gen » afin d'assurer la relève culturelle. » Toucher un livre ancien, comprendre comment une collection s'organise, rencontrer un auteur : autant de moments concrets qui donnent chair à la lecture et l'inscrivent dans le réel. ■



**Muriel Scibilia** est une journaliste, auteure et ancienne responsable du service de presse et de communication de la CNUCED.



**Ann Huber-Sigwart**,  
Directrice de la SdL ; **Emmanuel Tagnard**,  
Directeur culturel et communication



Educating young minds to inspire the next generation

# Eduki: 15 years of connecting youth with International Geneva

Building bridges between schools and global cooperation

ANNIKA HARTMANN DE MEURON \*

**F**or 15 years, the Eduki Foundation has been working to bring students from across Switzerland closer to the

world of international cooperation. By building bridges between schools and international organizations based in Geneva, Eduki enables young people to better understand global challenges and their impact on everyday life.

Through multilingual educational activities tailored to different age groups, the Foundation opens the doors of international and non-governmental organizations. Students gain a unique opportunity to meet experts and engage in discussions on key issues such as human rights, children's rights, humanitarian action and

many more. These exchanges make the role of International Geneva concrete and accessible, while highlighting its relevance at both global and individual levels.

## Innovative learning through direct experience

In 2025, Eduki organized 170 activities in collaboration with 25 international organizations, reaching 2,373 students from across Switzerland. To ensure inclusiveness, remote formats are also offered, allowing classes from more distant regions to engage directly with United Nations experts through interactive videoconferences.

Among its initiatives, "Young Reporters at the UN" invites students aged 15 and above to step into the role of journalists during press conferences organized especially for them. This immersive

“  
EDUKI'S  
FLAGSHIP  
PROJECT  
REMAINS ITS  
NATIONAL  
COMPETITION

experience fosters critical thinking, media literacy and communication skills.

In addition, Eduki offers guided educational tours of the Nations district and interactive workshops on the Sustainable Development Goals. It also further facilitates language exchange activities that encourage dialogue on international cooperation between students from different linguistic regions of Switzerland.

In parallel, the Foundation provides teachers with multilingual educational resources on key themes related to international cooperation.

#### **A national competition focused on responsible digital futures**

Eduki's flagship project remains its national competition, held every two years under the high patronage of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. The 2025/2026 edition, "Interconnected: human – digital – sustainable," invites students across Switzerland to reflect, create and act on the challenges and opportunities of digitalization in relation to sustainability and citizenship.

The symbol of this 10th edition, a compass, reflects young people's need to navigate a rapidly changing world and to define their own path towards a digital future that is both human-centered and environmentally responsible.

Participants can submit artistic works, media productions or concrete actions. In this last category, upper secondary students may also apply for the Françoise Demole Award, which supports innovative projects with funding of up to CHF 10,000.

#### **A lucid, critical and engaged generation**

This year, the competition saw remarkable participation: 2,108 students from 48 schools across 14 cantons submitted more than 228 projects, demonstrating both creativity and strong engagement. Through their work, students highlight a constant tension between the opportunities offered by digital technologies and their associated risks.

The most frequently explored themes include digital footprint and e-waste, well-being and screen addiction, online identity and social pressure, fake news, and the growing impact of artificial intelligence on individuals and society.

Beyond identifying challenges, students develop thoughtful ethical reflections on how digital tools should be used. Their projects reveal not only awareness, but also a clear willingness to act and contribute to a more sustainable and balanced future.

#### **Showcasing youth voices and ideas**

The award ceremony will take place on 6 May 2026 at the United Nations Office at Geneva, offering a meaningful and rewarding moment for participants. Beyond the awards themselves, the day will feature a dedicated programme of activities, enabling students to discover the diverse facets of the UN's work as well as related international organizations in Geneva.

In addition, a selection of student works will be exhibited from 4 to 11 May, in Hall 14 of the Palais des Nations. All submitted projects will also be presented in an online catalogue available from 6 May 2026, providing concrete visibility to the ideas and commitments of young people.

#### **A shared commitment to the future**

Over the past 15 years, the Eduki Foundation has established itself as a key player in education for international cooperation in Switzerland, and its work would not be possible without the support, expertise and commitment of its partners. By giving young people a voice and connecting them with international institutions, Eduki offers a meaningful educational experience at the heart of International Geneva and helps shape a generation that is informed, critical and ready to engage in building a more sustainable future. ■



**Annika Hartmann de Meuron** is the Director of the Eduki Foundation.



**EDUKI OFFERS A MEANINGFUL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AT THE HEART OF INTERNATIONAL GENEVA**



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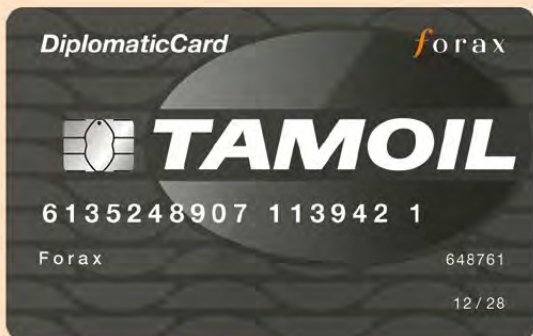
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