Religious Literacy for Youth Workers

Introduction

This material is designed to support youth workers in developing religious literacy and fostering interreligious dialogue among young people from diverse backgrounds. In today's multicultural and multireligious European society, religious literacy is as essential for youth work as media literacy is in our technology-driven world.

What is Religious Literacy?

Religious literacy is the knowledge of, and ability to understand, different religions, their beliefs, practices, and cultural contexts. It involves:



basic understanding of various religious traditions,



awareness of religious diversity within communities,



recognition of the role of religion in people's lives and societies.

Key points regarding religious literacy:

- It's not about memorising facts or doctrines, but developing critical awareness of how religion shapes identities, experiences, and interactions.
- It involves recognizing the diversity and complexity of religious traditions, as well as their commonalities and differences.
- It requires acknowledging the role of power and privilege in shaping religious narratives and representations.
- It challenges stereotypes and prejudices that can lead to discrimination and violence.
- It can be enhanced through learning from authentic sources, engaging in dialogue with people of different faiths and worldviews, and reflecting on one's own assumptions and biases.
- Using simple language helps in explaining and understanding religious concepts.

Importance of Religious Literacy in Youth Work

- Helps in understanding youth perspectives, values, and needs
- Fosters respectful dialogue and inclusion in the community
- Facilitates reaching youth from minority communities
- Improves intercultural communication
- Contributes to citizenship competence by raising awareness of diversity and cultural identities.

What is Interreligious Dialogue?

Interreligious dialogue is a respectful exchange between individuals or groups of different religious backgrounds, aimed at fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. It entails learning about the religious Other with an aim to positively change relationships with the Other.

Important note: interreligious dialogue always happens between people, not between religions. Be aware that personal views, including your own, may not represent a particular religion or belief completely accurately.

Key Principles of Interreligious Dialogue

1. Respect for diverse beliefs and practices
2. Active listening and open-mindedness
3. Focus on shared values and common ground, but acknowledge differences as well
4. Willingness to learn from others
5. Commitment to peaceful coexistence.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right, enshrined in:

- Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and
- Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The European Union (in Council Conclusions on Freedom of religion or belief; 16 November 2009) recognized that this freedom:

- Applies equally to all persons
- Includes all religions or beliefs, including non-traditional ones
- Covers beliefs of religious minorities, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs
- Includes the right to adopt, change, or abandon one's religion or belief of one's own free will.

Best Practices for Youth Workers

1. Create safe and inclusive spaces for all religious backgrounds
2. Encourage curiosity and respectful questioning
3. Address misconceptions and stereotypes about religions
4. Promote critical thinking about media representations of religion
5. Facilitate interfaith cooperation and friendship-building activities
6. Stay informed about current religious issues and debates
7. Use simple language to explain religious concepts
8. Reflect on your own assumptions and biases.

Three non-formal workshops

Workshop 1: THE HUMAN BAROMETER ON RELIGION & HUMAN RIGHTS

- **Topic**: Managing "rights in tension," Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and freedom of expression.
- **Methodology**: Kinesthetic positioning / Values clarification exercise.
- **Target Audience & Group Size:** 12–30 participants.
- **Duration:** 45 Minutes.
- **Space & Materials Required:** A long, unobstructed hallway or room. Signs marked "AGREE" and "DISAGREE" placed on opposite ends of the room.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Positioning Rule:** Explain that the room represents a continuum. Standing right under "AGREE" means 100% agreement, "DISAGREE" means 100% disagreement, and the middle represents uncertainty or nuanced views.
2. **Read Dilemma Statements:** Read one statement at a time. Participants must physically walk to the position on the line that reflects their stance.

   A — Statement 1: "Public schools should ban all visible religious symbols for teachers and students to maintain complete secular equality."

   B — Statement 2: "Freedom of expression includes the absolute right to criticize, mock, or satirize religious beliefs and holy figures."

   C — Statement 3: "When freedom of speech clashes with protection against religious hate speech, protection from harm must always take priority."

3. **Facilitate Dialogue**: After each statement, ask 2–3 participants at different points along the line to explain their reasoning. Allow participants to physically change their position if an argument raised by a peer changes their mind.

4. **Debriefing:** Bridge the activity directly to **Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)** and **Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**, highlighting that human rights are universal and interdependent, requiring careful balancing when rights come into tension.

Workshop 2: GUESS WHO'S COMING TO THE COMMUNITY EVENT

- **Topic:** Implicit bias, spatial exclusion, and stereotypes surrounding religious and worldview identities.
- **Methodology:** Non-verbal simulation, peer labeling, active debriefing.
- **Target Audience & Group Size:** 12–30 participants (youth workers, student leaders, young people aged 15+).
- **Duration**: 75 Minutes.
- **Space & Materials Required:** A large room cleared of furniture to allow free movement. Printable role cards (available **here**), blank sticky notes, painter's tape, background music.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Setup & Environmental Framing (15 Mins):**
    - Clear the room's center to allow unobstructed movement and play soft instrumental background music.
    - Instruct participants to line up with their backs to you. Tape one Role Card to each participant's back (or forehead) so everyone can see the identity label **except** the person wearing it.
    - **Rules of Engagement:**
        1. Silence: The simulation is strictly non-verbal (no talking or gesturing).

2. Interaction: Walk around, read others' role cards, and write a one- or two-word social reaction on their attached sticky note based on immediate social assumptions (e.g., "Welcoming", "Suspicious", "Keep distance", "Curious").

3. Clustering: Try to non-verbally form small conversation circles with people you feel comfortable with, while noticing who gets excluded.

2. **Non-Verbal Simulation (20 Mins):**

   - Observe group dynamics silently. Note who forms exclusive circles, who is isolated on the periphery, which identity labels receive immediate warmth vs. hesitation, and whether any "bridge-builders" emerge.

3. **Guessing & Mandatory De-roling Protocol (15 Mins — MANDATORY SAFEGUARDING):**

   - Stop the music and freeze the group in their final positions.
   - Ask participants to read the notes on their back **without looking at their role card** and guess their assigned identity based on peer reactions.
   - **De-roling Ritual:** Have every participant remove their card, physically **rip it up** or throw it into a central recycling bin, shake out their limbs, pair up with a peer, and state aloud: "I am [Real Name]. I am a youth worker. That was only a role, and it does not define me or you."

4. **Debriefing:**
Seat the group in a single circle. Facilitate discussion across four levels:

   - Stage 1 (Emotional): How did it feel to be treated according to a label you couldn't see?
   - Stage 2 (Critical Analysis): Which identities experienced structural privilege (instant acceptance) vs. social distance?
   - Stage 3 (Media/Digital Literacy): Where do these instant reactions come from (media framing, algorithmic rage-bait, echo chambers)?

- Stage 4 (Youth Work Practice): What structural barriers exist in our youth spaces (dietary, spatial, calendar scheduling...), and how do we uphold EU **Youth Goal #3 (Inclusive Societies)**?

Workshop 3: TAKE A STEP FORWARD

- **Topic**: Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), structural inequality.
- **Methodology**: Embodied simulation, spatial mapping, human rights reflection.
- **Target Audience & Group Size**: 15–24 participants (youth workers, student leaders, young people aged 15+).
- **Duration**: 75 Minutes.
- **Space & Materials Required**: A large room, hallway, or outdoor space where all participants can stand side-by-side in a single straight horizontal line. Printed role cards and situations script (available **here**).

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Setup & Internalization (15 Mins):**
   - Hand out one **Role Card** per participant at random (swap immediately if someone gets an identity identical to their real life).
   - Give participants 5 minutes to sit quietly, read their card, and imagine their persona's daily routine, fears, and family background using guided prompts.
2. **The Simulation Walk (20 Mins):**
   - Have all participants stand side-by-side in a straight horizontal starting line in complete silence.
   - Explain the rule: "I will read out a series of statements. Every time you can answer 'YES' based on your assigned role, take ONE step forward. If your answer is 'NO' or 'UNSURE', stay where you are." Read the situations slowly, pausing 10–15 seconds between statements for participants to step and observe their positions relative to others.

- **Final Freeze:** After the final statement, instruct everyone to remain frozen in place and visually observe the spatial distance across the room.

3. **Mandatory De-roling Protocol (10 Mins):**

   - Instruct participants to drop their role cards onto the floor.
   - Have everyone physically shake out their arms and legs, step away from the simulation line into a circle, take a deep breath, and state aloud their **real name** and one personal, unrelated fact (e.g., "My name is Anton, and my favorite hobby is cycling").

4. **Debriefing: Facilitate a seated circle discussion across four levels:**

   - Stage 1 (Experiential): Ask those at the front when they realized societal structures propelled them forward, and ask those at the back how it felt to stay behind on basic daily rights.
   - Stage 2 (Systemic defaults vs. neutrality): Analyze how societal "defaults" (calendars, canteens, secularism laws) impact visible vs. non-visible worldviews unequally.
   - Stage 3 (Intersectionality): Compare roles to examine how gender, ethnicity, and legal status intersect with religious identity to create unique barriers
   - Stage 4 (Human rights anchor): Connect outcomes to **Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)** and **Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.**

Conclusion

Religious literacy and interreligious dialogue are essential skills for youth workers in today's diverse European society. By fostering understanding, respect, and cooperation among youth from different religious backgrounds, we can build more inclusive and harmonious communities. Remember that religious literacy contributes to improved intercultural communication and is a crucial element of citizenship competence.

This material has been made by Udruga Prizma in the scope of Erasmus+ funded training course **ReLit 2026: Religious Literacy for Youth Workers**. The author owns no copyright over the material.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Co-funded by the European Union

Udruga Prizma

ReLit 2026
Religious literacy for youth workers

