

## Transcription – CHARM-EU Podcast, Episode 22: discussing Youth Skills Day with CHARM-EU DEI Office

### **Elliott Cholet**

Hi everyone and welcome back to another episode of The CHARM-EU podcast. My name is Elliot from the University of Montpellier. I'm your host today and as always very happy to be with you to discuss something that is embedded very deeply, into CHARM-EU DNA and I'm talking about inclusion.

In particular, today we will discuss about international days that CHARM-EU committed to celebrate with a specific focus on international Youth Skills Day, which is actually on the day when this podcast is recorded, which is July 15th.

As a former member of the CHARM-EU Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office, or DEI, I am delighted to be joined today by two current members of the DEI office, Tamar Aprahamian educational policy advisor at Utrecht University and Florian Bergonhe, project manager at the Handicap and Diversity Unit from the University of Montpellier.

Tamar, Florian, welcome, and thank you so much for joining me today.

### **Tamar Aprahamian**

Thank you so much. Happy to be here.

### **Florian Bergonhe**

Yes. Thank you for having us.

### **Elliott Cholet**

Thank you. Thanks again for joining me. So first of all, and to give a bit of perspective to our conversation as I just mentioned, CHARM-EU through the voices of its the DEI office and communication team committed to celebrate and highlight a number of international days throughout the year. And I would like to ask the both of you the reason of that commitment and why celebrating these days is so important?

### **Tamar Aprahamian**

I think celebrating International Days like the Youth Skills Day is very important for several reasons. I think it brings global attention to critical issues and it also fosters a sense of shared responsibility and and also collective action and for CHARM-EU this this commitment aligns with our core values of inclusion and diversity and we make use of these days to raise awareness about diversity and inclusion topics that are at the core of what CHARM-EU stands for and finds important. And also we ask our CHARM-EU members to participate in activities regarding these topics.

**Florian Bergonhe**

Yes, Tamar is absolutely right. For example, on the 5th of March 2024, upon the approach of International Women's Day, a panel discussion on gender inequalities in food system featuring leaders in academia and industry was hosted by CHARM-EU which not only highlighted gender equality issues, but also provided a platform for students from CHARM-EU to engage and learn, and in fact our dear team lead Agnes Sarolta Fazekas participated in this incredible panel discussion and in general the goal is to promote human rights perspectives across the program by celebrating these days, we can amplify our message, engage with a wider audience and encourage collaboration across different sectors to address this global challenges.

**Elliott Cholet**

Thank you to both of you for highlighting this which I think is very important and now let's jump right into the topic of our conversation today which is Youth Skills Day which was officially declared by the UN General Assembly in 2014 to celebrate the importance of equipping young people with skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship, as well as for addressing global challenges and advancing sustainable development. And when I say that, to me, it sounds exactly like what CHARM-EU is trying to do on a daily basis. And I'm curious, can you tell us a little more about that and in particular, what is your role as DEI office in that process?

**Tamar Aprahamian**

I think like I said before, Youth Skills Day resonates deeply with CHARM-EU's mission. We face global issues that can only be solved if we collaborate. I think we have to join forces across countries and cultures and different points of views. But it is not always easy to do things in another way that you're used to. So I think it's very important that our students feel supported and comfortable and that they strengthen their intercultural skills and their skills to collaborate, and I think our role in the DEI office is to support to support activities within the master so that every person, regardless of their background, can develop these essential skills that will help them in their in their career.

**Florian Bergonhe**

Yes, and for emphasising what you have just said, Tamar, for instance, in CHARM-EU a collaboration with local startups took place in April this year during the Montpellier Cross thematic mobility. It allows students to work on real world projects, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation. We work closely with faculty, industry partners and within the university community to design initiatives that bridge the gap between education and the job market. This ensures that our students are well prepared to contribute to sustainable development and in the DEI, I would say that we make sure that every student is supported and feels included by writing needs report for example, for the ones with specific needs and it is our deepest wish actually to adjust and adapt the environment, so that every regardless of their disability or individual situation can have the possibility to reveal themselves and to

develop skills which can help them to face global challenges in a sustainable way and prepare them for employment.

**Elliott Cholet**

Brillant! Thank you. And I think one of my takeaways here is that collaboration is really the key, with all the stakeholders you mentioned and also between ourselves as CHARM-EU partners and I really think that the DEI office is a great example and best practice in that regard, in joining forces for the benefits of everyone.

Now, I would like to note that this year's theme of this International Day is Youth skills for peace and development and the UNESCO states that the choice of the theme highlights the crucial role that young people play in peace building and conflict resolution. And unfortunately it is an understatement to say that we currently live in a world facing a lot of challenges in that regard, and that conflicts are truly affecting both youth and education. And I think higher education institutions have a very important role to play here in terms of reducing economic inequalities, fostering a culture of peace and also create responsible citizens. Can you elaborate on that and on how CHARM-EU tackles this and tries to make young people sort of “agents of peace”?

**Florian Bergonhe**

Yes, it's actually an interesting question and I think that higher education institutions like CHARM-EU are uniquely positioned to promote peace and development through education. For example, our dear DEI colleague Cati Jerez from the University of Barcelona created a support program for refugees and people from conflict zones to promote accessibility and to support vulnerable situations with a comprehensive approach. And if we want to make our students agents of peace, we must embody this objective as a higher education institution in the first place. That is why it is important to have a support program like this one, I think.

**Tamar Aprahamian**

I also think it's very important. And in addition to what Florian has said, within the master program, we also have human rights, inclusion and diversity sessions. These are taught by the DEI team lead Agnès. And yeah, by fostering critical thinking, empathy, conflict resolving skills for our students, I think that's very important because we do want to empower our students to become like you say, agents of peace and yeah, indeed, that is what the world is in need of now. And I think it's our way to contribute to the world with CHARM-EU, by creating hopefully the University of the future. And also in the hope that we will make the world a better place with the students, that that are within CHARM-EU. So here's hoping.

**Elliott Cholet**

Thank you for sharing this. And I think it's really a great connection with my next question actually, because there is a few numbers that I would like to share with you and to discuss with you. The first one being that UNESCO, within the framework on this International Day, stated from the 13th edition of its Youth forum that 70% of young people feel they lack sufficient space to express themselves in public debates and voice their concerns and ideas, and I think it really relates to what you just mentioned and giving them a voice.

So how can higher education institutions, and, in particular European universities like CHARM-EU, contribute to address this issue?

**Tamar Aprahamian**

Well, these are important numbers, and I think we need to listen to them. Because there is a lot of things going on in the world and yeah, they should be heard because they are the next generation, they have to deal with the world after we're all gone. So I think they have a right to join in the public discussion and higher education institutions are the place for discussions, a place where we can listen to each other perspectives with respect, even though we may have different opinions and we should know how young people feel and think about certain topics and yeah, higher education institutions have an obligation to provide a safe space to discuss about their concerns their ideas, because if not at universities, then where should these discussions take place? I think we should offer them a room to be heard.

**Florian Bergonhe**

I totally agree with Tamar and actually addressing the need for young people to have a voice in public debate is essential for me too, and at CHARM-EU we actively create platforms for students engagement and expression, and this includes the necessity to organize forums, debates and workshops where students can share their perspectives on important issues. I would say that integrating students' representation in our governance structures ensures their influence in decision-making processes. Additionally, we leverage digital tools and social media to reach a broader audience, encouraging students to participate in public discourse and advocacy initiatives. Yes, that's what I wanted to add.

**Elliott Cholet**

Thank you to both of you for this message of hope as well, and it's also great to see that institutions like CHARM-EU recognize and acknowledge their responsibilities and the role they have to play in that process. So thank you very much again for that.

One more number now that I would like to discuss with you is that 60 out of 169 SDGs, sustainable development goals, Current targets explicitly or implicitly mention young people, which I think it's great. It's more than 1/3, but could also be higher. I don't know. What do you think about that, about what it says about the role of young people that they have to play in our current society and how do you, as CHARM-EU DEI office, work towards SDGs targeting youth in particular?

**Tamar Aprahamian**

Yeah, great question, and again, the numbers speak for themselves, right? Like I said before, it's evident that that, that young people have a very important role and they should be involved. And they need to be educated. Within CHARM-EU, we educate young people so that they can find the sustainable solution that societies are waiting for. Whether they follow the modules that we have on water, food, life and health. These are all important issues and and we try to prepare them and also equip them with all the right skills so that they

contribute to the sustainable problems that the world is facing. But apart from that I also hope that we can teach them about compassion, understanding, respect.

Like I said before, we need sustainable solutions for the future. With everything that's going on in the world, less individualism, more collaboration, more feeling that we're in this together. And I think we can achieve so much more if we work together. That's really important.

### **Florian Bergonhe**

Yes, and I would like to add that the significant mention of young people in SDGs underscores their critical role in achieving these goals and making a determined change in our society on how we treat each other and the planet. It highlights for me, the recognition that youth are not only beneficiaries but also key drivers of sustainable development, and at CHARM-EU the DEI office aligns with the SDGs, by reducing inequalities in the master's program regarding gender, disability or social economic background, for example. And our goal is to promote diversity and to create a climate of tolerance and kindness, so students can realize their full potential in a safe environment. That's the most important and as higher education institutions, we have this for this responsibility to the responsibility actually to give them the the resources to act on sustainable issues in an inclusive way. Yes, I think that's how I want to end that question.

### **Elliott Cholet**

Thank you. And I couldn't agree more, actually. And I think we've already seen from our students that graduated or that are still within our master's program that they are already committed and engaging into great initiatives and already having an impact and trying to make a change. And I cannot wait for the future and see what it holds from them.

Now to wrap things up, I would like to, as well always like to do, to give you the final words. So this is your time. I would like to ask the both of you, maybe one word or one statement you would like to share with us to conclude this episode of the podcast.

### **Tamar Aprahamian**

I think I would say a kindness. We need each other to move forwards. I've said it before. I have great difficulty with all the individualism, all the things that I see, the harshness, the disrespect in the world around us and I long for people to step forward and show some more compassion and just pure and simple kindness. We're all human. We should not exclude people for the way they look, who they love, for what God they believe in. I think we're all human, and we all want the best for our children. And I'm sorry, I think I sound like a hippie, but I believe in love and kindness.

### **Florian Bergonhe**

Yes, preach, preach. But I was trying to think, but spontaneously, I think that my word is empowerment to complete what you what you said because it means that by investing in the skills, voices and potential of young people, we can build a more inclusive, sustainable and peaceful world. For instance, seeing students take initiatives in their communities and become changemakers is a statement to the impacts of empowerment through education. And as

higher education institutions, we must make sure that it continues in that way and that it evolves in an even better way to give them a word they can be proud of and full of love and kindness, as Tama beautifully said.

**Elliott Cholet**

Brilliant ! What a great way to conclude this podcast, and thank you for tuning in and thank you so much, Tamar and Florian for joining me today for this fascinating and enlightening conversation, it was really great chatting with you, and also I believe very inspirational for people who will listen and really a great message of hope and positivity and what we all need.

**Tamar Aprahamian**

I hope so.

**Florian Bergonhe**

Yes we hope so and thank you Elliott, and thank you Tamar. It's was a a great moment.

**Tamar Aprahamian**

Yeah. Thank you. It was a pleasure to be here and hope we can make the world a better place. There's still hope for the future.

**Elliott Cholet**

Sure. Thanks again and as always, check out our website for more information about CHARM-EU and make sure you subscribe to our YouTube channel so you don't miss out on our new podcast episode and also interesting content on other platforms, especially on our social media such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The links are in the description, so join the CHARM-EU community. The podcast will now go on summer holidays, but we cannot wait to share with you our next episode in September. It's going to be a great one. Thanks again for listening goodbye and have a great summer everyone.