

Board of Services to the University and the Community Prize 2021

Laureates:

Intercultural student associations AYO and Mahara

Nominator:

Prof. Noel Clycq (Chairman, Steering Committee on Diversity) & Team Diversity

Among the many student clubs at our university, there are two that have particularly distinguished themselves in terms of service provision. Firstly, I am talking about Mahara, an Islamic-inspired student group that has been working for the students of Antwerp since 2015. And secondly, about AYO, the African Youth Organization, which is the first student group in Antwerp to focus on students with African roots. With their many committed activities, these associations contribute 'from below' to two specific strategic policy themes of UAntwerp, namely 'Diversity and Participation' and 'Active Pluralism'.

They organise workshops on academic Dutch, they serve as a contact point for additional guidance needs of disadvantaged groups, and they also developed the sustainable 'StuDream' project to promote the recruitment and study progress of students with a migration background at UAntwerp. Another asset that they use to put our university on the map is the annual *iftar* organised by Mahara during Ramadan.

Mahara and AYO have clearly made exceptional commitments over the past years, helping to strengthen the internal and external service provision at UAntwerp and the societal role our knowledge institution plays.

Their sustainable and inclusive cooperation with faculties, central services and the other student associations, makes a significant contribution to some of the core themes of our university: diversity, participation, social inclusion, and active pluralism. Thanks to their focus on socially vulnerable target groups, they also help to build a bridge between disadvantaged groups and the facilities already available at UAntwerp.

It is also important to remember that Mahara and AYO can only work with the help of voluntary commitments made by students who often have other social tasks and/or student jobs in addition to their studies. Committing oneself in such a way is not easy and takes a lot of time and energy. Therefore, we consider it essential to recognise and highlight these efforts.

For the above reasons, We ask Rector Herman Van Goethem and Vice-Rector Filip Lardon to honour the intercultural student associations Mahara and AYO with the Board of Services to the University and the Community Prize 2021 of the University of Antwerp.