Group 1: Youth, peace and security

Guiding questions

- **Do you have examples of successful/innovative projects aiming to empower youth and strengthen their participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding?**
- **What elements should the European Commission take into consideration when it supports projects in this area? (What pitfalls should it avoid?)**

Participants' comments and recommendations

- The EU should actively consult and involve young people in its policy processes, including in its engagement on issues which are not youth-specific
- The EU should adapt the way it consults young people in order to enable them to express themselves as openly as possible
- The youth, peace and security (YPS) agenda should be mainstreamed throughout all EU actions
- Since YPS issues are multidimensional, it would be useful for the EU to adopt an integrated approach to the YPS agenda and to coordinate across policy sectors and levels
- It can be helpful for programmes which are focused on the social and political integration of young people to be implemented in parallel with programmes which are focused on improving their livelihoods and education opportunities
- In addition to political/governance reforms, police and judicial reforms can play an important role in increasing state legitimacy in the eyes of young people
- It is important to carry out gender-sensitive conflict analysis and to be conflict-sensitive when engaging with communities on YPS issues as they are closely tied to the power relations which exist in many contexts
- The EU should avoid actions which risk damaging existing power relations and it should positively engage those actors who hold power within local communities (e.g. elders, religious leaders, etc., including female actors) in order to encourage them to promote the involvement of young people in decision-making processes
- It is important for the EU to understand how diverse young people perceive and experience violence, and to adapt its engagements accordingly
- It is particularly important for the EU to be sensitive to gender dynamics in its engagements on YPS and it should promote positive masculinities whenever possible
- The EU should endeavour to engage with, address the needs of and support all young people, including those who are not part of privileged groups, living in urban centres, etc.
- Given the difficulties of defining "youth" and identifying who qualifies as a young person, it is important for the EU and civil society organisations (CSOs) to adapt their actions to local realities and to local understandings of terms (e.g. the EU should not impose a definition with a restrictive age span)
- Given that young people are diverse and have correspondingly diverse needs, it is important for the EU and CSOs to take an intersectional approach to them and to avoid treating them as a homogeneous block (e.g. engage with them differently based on their gender, their ethnicity, their level of education, etc.)
- It is important to support and engage with children as well as adolescents and young adults
- It is important to broaden engagement with young people beyond those who are involved in formal organisations
- Young people who are in armed groups should not only be seen as perpetrators but also as victims

- Projects which are focused on engaging with youth associations in universities can be helpful but they must be part of a broader engagement which can also benefit less-privileged young people
- It is vital to allow young people to express and define their needs on their own terms and for the EU to adapt its support accordingly
- It is important for the EU to pay attention to social movements which involve young people, and to the various types of actions in societies which can shed light on what young people identify as their needs and challenges
- The EU should promote the local ownership of projects and it should adapt its funding to the capacity of youth organisations:
  - funding requirements should be flexible in order to make it easier for youth organisations to qualify
  - small amounts of money can be channelled (e.g. through larger CSOs) to youth organisations which are not able to absorb larger sums
  - the EU should find ways to reduce the pressure which CSOs which are lead- or co-applicants in projects involving small, informal youth organisations can face due to the associated risks of failure
- CSOs should not be penalised for working with armed groups (e.g. to encourage young people to demobilise)
- The United Nations (UN) progress study on YPS entitled 'The Missing Peace' provides useful recommendations on how to ensure that funding mechanisms can be more effective in supporting young people
- Young people should not only be seen as the beneficiaries of projects but also as the actors to implement them
- It can be helpful to encourage children to participate in child peace clubs so that they can learn peacebuilding skills and start leading their own projects when they are adolescents
- It is useful to help young people to acquire or develop the tools which will allow them to access information, to develop their media literacy, to understand political developments, and to share information among themselves, including through mobile phones and new technologies (although it should be noted that online platforms can also be spaces of conflict)
- It is often helpful to support existing projects and initiatives, and to build on what is already working
- Intergenerational dialogue can be useful for helping other groups to develop their understanding of the needs and perceptions of young people
- It is important to understand the impact of conflict on young people's agency and to identify the positive dynamics which can be supported, including in the post-conflict period
- The creation of linkages between formal and non-formal programming, the inclusion of peace education competences across curricula, and the inclusion of peace education in teacher training can all contribute to increasing the effectiveness of peace education projects

For more information about any of the issues which were raised in this small group discussion, please contact Ben Moore.