



Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting

**The EU's Implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda:
Gathering Young Experts' Recommendations**

13 – 14 January 2022

MEETING REPORT

The overall objective of the meeting was to gather concrete recommendations from young civil society experts on how the EU should enhance its implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected areas.

The meeting took place online over two days and brought together 19 participants, including 14 young civil society experts and 5 officials from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission (EC).

The discussions were held under the Chatham House Rule. This report is a summary of the key recommendations that were put forward by the civil society participants.

The Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The fourth phase of the CSDN will last from 2020 to 2023. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).

Recommendations

1. The EU should ensure that it engages with, and supports, diverse young people.

- The EU should develop further its tools to identify and to engage with diverse young people, as young people are not a homogeneous group and efforts to engage with them should be sensitive to their diversity. This includes ensuring robust gender analysis and gender-responsive programming, and taking into account the different identities, experiences, needs and aspirations of diverse young people, including those engaged in violent conflict and on the frontlines of violence; from small towns or villages, less accessible areas and non-recognised entities (e.g. non-recognised states); in borderlands communities; of different faiths, ethnicities, castes, classes, and other relevant identity factors; speaking minority languages; from gender and sexual minorities; young refugees and displaced persons; young people with disabilities; and other less-represented and marginalised young people.

2. The EU should approach Youth, Peace and Security as a fundamental cause and a wide-ranging agenda (relating in particular to peacebuilding, governance, development and human rights); it should avoid adopting a 'securitised' approach to the agenda that would over-emphasise state-centric security and state-led counter-terrorism / countering violent extremism efforts.

- Youth participation in, and support for, violent conflict can result from breakdowns in a country's fair and inclusive development and governance (or the absence thereof). The EU should understand and help address the grievances and inequalities that can drive some young people to embrace political violence and violent extremism, including by supporting inclusive governance structures and the adequate, youth-sensitive provision of public services.
- The EU should avoid focusing on state-led counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, as this can increase risks to young people, reduce trust, exacerbate grievances and undermine long-term work to prevent conflict.
- The EU should ensure that its approach to security sector reform (SSR) is youth-sensitive, including with respect to addressing diverse young people's experiences with security forces and to protecting their human rights.
- The EU should ensure that its external action and its policies, including in relation to migration issues, do not reduce, and instead facilitate, the ability of young people to move, particularly in order to engage and exchange with other young people (including across borders).
- The EU should stop arms exports to areas at risk of violent conflict.
- The EU should monitor and regularly evaluate its progress on the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

3. The EU should strengthen the way its delegations consult and engage with diverse young people, including by having a dedicated youth focal point in the delegation and youth sounding boards to advise delegations.

- Youth focal points should be adequately trained, selected and supported with resources, and being the youth focal point should be the sole or main focus of their job description and activity.
- Youth focal points should engage in youth activities to make themselves known to youth groups, and their contact information should be displayed on the website of the delegation.
- Youth focal points should make sure they do not inadvertently reinforce existing structures and social norms (e.g. traditional structures and norms) that contribute to the exclusion of young people, particularly the most marginalised.
- Youth engagement at the level of delegations should be a systematic effort supported by adequate resources and staff; it should not be left to the youth focal point only.

4. The EU should consult and engage with diverse young people as part of (conflict) analysis processes to inform its programming and engagements, and it should ensure that young people are able to participate meaningfully in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its programming and engagements.

- The EU should ensure that it engages with young people in a conflict-sensitive manner. In particular, the EU should develop further its tools to protect the safety of the young people that it engages with and consults, and it should ensure that they are able to express themselves in safe spaces.
- The EU should ensure that its conflict analyses are age-sensitive and gender-sensitive, paying particular attention to stereotypes about youth, to gender stereotypes and to age-based dynamics.
- The EU should develop and strengthen its use of inclusive youth sounding boards, including at the national and global levels. It should ensure that there is a rotation of diverse young people on these boards, ensuring in particular that less-engaged and marginalised young people are represented adequately.
- The EU should ensure that young people contribute meaningfully to its work not only through consultations on programmes and actions, but also by involving them in high-level processes, in the organisation of the consultations themselves, and in other formal processes.
- The EU should ensure that it engages with marginalised young people in particular as part of conflict analysis processes. This should include consulting local young people where the EU is looking to engage, but also consulting young refugees and migrants who are located in Europe, to inform the EU's actions in their home countries.
- The EU should try to consult young people in the contexts where they live, including by working with local partners to organise in-person consultations. When relevant the EU should also facilitate young people's access to Europe, and address the obstacles they may face to travel, particularly with respect to restrictions on visas.
- The EU should be ready to engage with young people in youth-centred spaces (and not only to bring young people to the EU's own spaces for consultation and engagement).
- The EU should ensure that it does not only consult and engage young people digitally, as many young people do not have access to social media and digital platforms.
- The EU should ensure that it uses data disaggregated by age and gender whenever possible, including with respect to understanding the impacts of conflict and climate change on young people.
- The EU should help young people prepare for consultations and exchanges, including in terms of self-confidence building, skills building, etc.
- The EU should recognise that young people often work as volunteers in peacebuilding organisations, and that it may be difficult for them to participate in meetings and consultations on their own time. The EU should support their ability to do so and ensure that consultations and exchanges are not solely extractive.

5. The EU should support and strengthen inclusive youth networks, coalitions and institutions, to promote intercommunal and intraregional dialogue between youth and the cross-fertilisation of ideas. It should help young people build such structures in countries or regions where they are absent or minimal.

- The EU should support youth networks with adequate resources, and it should establish channels for cooperation with them to actively involve them in relevant EU decision-making processes.
- The EU should promote the fact that such networks and coalitions should be truly inclusive and trusted by the wider youth population, and not dominated by men and/or instrumentalised by authorities.
- The EU should support inclusive Youth Parliaments and similar initiatives driven by young people, but it should avoid promoting the creation of such bodies where they would be at significant risk of tokenisation and instrumentalisation/control by authorities.

6. The EU should support the creation of, and protect, safe spaces for young people to express themselves in different ways and to exchange with each other freely, including on political and conflict issues (at the community and national levels in particular).

- These safe spaces should be spaces where young people are able to engage in different activities together, including artistic performances, photography, media courses, psychosocial programmes, sports, feminist oral stories, the sharing of experiences of violence, etc. This is helpful to create bridges between people within and across communities.
- These spaces should also be spaces where young people are able to share experiences, lessons learned, good practices, etc., on participating in political processes, on preventing conflict, on fostering dialogue, etc.
- The EU should help protect young people working on peace and conflict issues and defending human rights from shrinking civic spaces, and from violence and (physical and online) threats.

7. In its political dialogue with its partner governments and regional bodies, the EU should strongly promote the direct participation of young people in political processes (including peace processes) and in governance institutions at different levels. The EU should also support EU Member States, partner governments and regional bodies in developing and implementing national/regional strategies and actions plans on Youth, Peace and Security (including through technical and financial support).

- The EU should dedicate specific funding and resources to support the participation of young people in political processes. It should support programmes to help young people become more engaged in political spaces, including by building their capacities (to develop analytical tools, their debating skills, etc.) and by raising awareness and disseminating information to them about their rights and about the opportunities at their disposal to engage in political activities.
- The EU should ensure that its protocols for engagement with partner governments include explicit and mandatory provisions for youth engagement and protection, in line with existing UN human rights standards (ensuring that these standards are youth-sensitive).
- The EU should help bridge the gaps that may exist between (a) youth-led initiatives and organisations and (b) local and national authorities and regional bodies, including by:
 - Helping to address obstacles to the participation of young people in political processes and governance institutions. These may include traditional structures, hierarchies and social norms that lead older men to be overrepresented in leadership roles (recognising that marginalisation can also operate along class and tribal lines), a lack of accountability of people in power, patterns of exclusion such as corruption and nepotism, etc.;
 - Working with national and local governments to build their capacities to engage with young people meaningfully, as 'how' they listen to young people and 'what' they do as a result is as important as listening in the first place;
 - Supporting engaging with young people through formal and informal spaces, and in existing youth-centred spaces.
- The EU should ensure that young people are more aware of, and able to participate in, peace processes, particularly as involving young people, women and non-combatants in peace processes tends to result in more acceptable, successful and sustainable solutions. The EU should do so by:
 - Promoting the importance of making peace processes and negotiations more transparent, and of ensuring that more information is circulated to young people about ongoing, and upcoming, processes;
 - Putting pressure on partner governments and conflict parties to ensure that young people are nominated to their delegations participating in peace processes, for example by reserving certain seats around the table solely for young people;
 - Supporting the direct and meaningful participation of diverse young people from civil society in peace processes. Civil society actors, including women and young people, are still too often consulted through parallel tracks instead of directly involved in the negotiations themselves (men

are invited to take part in these processes because they engage in violence, block a pipeline, or have weapons, whereas peaceful young people, particularly young women and young people from marginalised groups, are excluded);

- Ensuring that young people are able to participate in peace processes in ways that protect their safety and their ability to express themselves freely.
- The EU should strongly promote legal reforms on civic and political rights, to protect and promote the access and participation of young people in electoral processes, including by addressing age restrictions. The EU should be ready to use sanctions against leaders who prevent young people that should be eligible from participating in elections.
- The EU should support the contributions of young people to accountability mechanisms for national governments, regional bodies and international actors.

8. The EU should ensure that its strategies and engagements on peace and security issues are systematically youth-sensitive and gender-sensitive, and it should support young people's own initiatives to build peace.

- The EU should ensure that any programming and engagement relating to Youth, Peace and Security is conflict-sensitive.
- The EU should support efforts to improve the digital literacy of both young people and older people, including their ability to develop strategies to disseminate positive information and to counter dis/misinformation and hate speech, particularly on social media. Intergenerational capacity exchange can be a useful tool to not only strengthen skills, but also improve intergenerational respect and collaboration.
- The EU should make explicit the importance of youth-sensitive and youth-led transitional justice processes, and of the active participation of young people at all stages in transitional justice mechanisms, allowing for intergenerational ownership.
- The EU should ensure that its strategy on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), and the strategy's implementation, are youth-sensitive.
- The EU should ensure that it addresses climate change and its links to peace and conflict by supporting youth-led activities at the community, national and regional levels, and by helping build the resilience of young people (particularly those from marginalised groups) to the effects of climate change.
- The EU should strengthen the language on youth inclusivity and on the roles of young people in future versions of its Concept on EU Peace Mediation.
- The EU should support the development and replication of innovation hubs to promote government and regional programmes that will support the efforts of young people relating to sustainable job creation.
- The EU should support mechanisms for enhancing the trade of products manufactured by young people in a sustainable manner, in order to support their empowerment and help them generate revenue.

9. The EU should support the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda through adequate funding, and it should ensure that its funding is accessible, flexible and adapted to the needs, priorities and capacities of youth groups.

- The EU should ensure that youth-led organisations are engaged with as implementation partners and not simply as beneficiaries of funding. It should pursue framework partnership agreements directly with youth groups whenever possible (involving intermediary NGOs can also work, but the amount of funding appropriated to them should be minimal and they should not be setting the priorities and the agenda of projects).
- The EU should provide youth groups with long-term setup funding that is reliable and predictable.
- The EU should recognise that youth groups are often organised informally, lack bank accounts and/or the administrative capacities and track records required for existing funding streams and

reporting requirements. It should adapt its funding streams and requirements accordingly, and help youth groups to build their capacities to prepare project proposals and to apply for EU grants.

- The EU should ensure that it provides long-term financial support to young people's initiatives, so that young people may develop fully their capacities to engage in peacebuilding and so that their efforts may be sustainable.

10. The EU should engage with young people in their social contexts, through intergenerational initiatives.

- The EU should engage young people, community leaders and stakeholders, teachers and families through an intergenerational approach to ensure that young people are positively influenced and supported by the people and communities around them, including by promoting youth-inclusive social norms (as this notably involves changing how societies and older people consider and engage with young people). This can be pursued by supporting the grassroots development of community action hubs, by supporting intergenerational peace education programs, etc.
- The EU should engage young people through areas of interest to them, including through the arts and entertainment, pop culture, sports, etc. In these areas, the EU should work with influencers that are popular and trusted, to promote the inclusion and participation of young people and the role of young people in building peace, and to push back against hate speech, violence and exclusion.
- The EU should help bridge the gap between previous youth leadership and the leadership of new generations by supporting networks, hubs and spaces where older and new generations can come together and exchange/learn from each other.
- The EU should help offer and promote youth-sensitive psychosocial / mental health support that is provided on the long term (i.e. not only short-term mental health interventions after a conflict), including for victims of violence, for former combatants / child soldiers, for young people engaging in peacebuilding work and defending human rights, and for these young people's communities. In doing so, it can be helpful to embrace an intergenerational approach in order to have a positive impact at both the individual and collective levels.
- The EU should promote spaces for intergenerational dialogue around climate justice and responses to climate change (as young people and the next generations will be disproportionately impacted by the decisions taken on the issue by those who are in power now).