NETWORK ON YOUTH AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Summer Universities 2022
"Building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions"
withing the three-year cycle under the umbrella theme
"SDG 16: peace, justice and strong institutions".

Concept Note

The Network on Youth and Global Citizenship is a partnership facilitated by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe that gathers youth-led organisations, international youth platforms and governmental institutions from Europe, the Southern Mediterranean and beyond. The Network was set up in 2011 as an informal platform of dialogue and multilateral cooperation at interregional level in the youth field.

Every year, **the Network promotes international youth events called "Universities".** In each "University" a number of youth-led and youth-oriented organisations have the possibility to run their own activities (trainings, seminars, board meetings...) within a dynamic and participatory context which encourages networking, cooperation and peer-to-peer education.

Every year the Network on Youth and Global Citizenship proposes a theme representing the thread that connects all the activities taking place in the framework of the Universities that same year. The plenary sessions and all the other common moments of the University (the "Joint Programme") explore the annual theme, connecting all partners' activities and engaging all the participants involved in them.

For the period 2018-2020* the Network agreed on a three-year cycle under the umbrella theme of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: "Peace, justice and strong institutions". The umbrella theme, representing the overarching priority of a three-year cycle, is broken down every year into specific annual themes according to the three pillars of the SDG16: peace, justice and strong institutions.

*Due to the pause imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic in the year 2020 and 2021, the cycle will be concluded in 2022.

> **2018-2022 umbrella theme:**
> **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

Peace, justice and effective and inclusive institutions are on the top of the global youth agenda and they are largely recognised as core elements for sustainable development. However, progress in these areas remains uneven across and within regions.

A fundamental shift in the way those global challenges are faced needs to be grounded in a new rights-based approach. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents the major contribution for such a shift, being a transformative agenda and a universal call for action to ensure democracy, security, and prosperity.

The Agenda 2030 acknowledges the centrality of youth: over a third of the 169 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets highlight the role of young people and the importance of their empowerment and participation. Albeit the official recognition of their role and of their main concerns and challenges remain open when it comes to the effective space young people and youth organisations actually have with regards to the implementation, the monitoring and the review of the global goals.

Within this context, **the SDG 16 is particularly relevant: accountable and transparent institutions, fair and accessible juridical systems, and a society free from violence and discrimination are among the main elements that could guarantee a greater contribution from youth in translating policies into action towards the achievement of the UN SDGs.**

The strategic importance of the UN SDG 16 also comes from the fact that it is closely related to two other UN SDGs particularly relevant for young people: SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth. On the one hand, education develops critical thinking, helps to reduce inequalities, to enhance gender equality, and fosters tolerance between people thus contributing to more peaceful societies. On the other hand, youth unemployment can lead to marginalisation and peace disruption if it is left unaddressed. Therefore, productive employment and "decent work" for the young generations are key elements to achieving fair globalisation and poverty reduction.

To that end, it is important that governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities work together with youth organisations and with other sectors of civil society, ensuring more efficient mechanisms of youth participation and more inclusive decision-making processes, following a bottom-up approach. Those demands are in line with the Council of Europe Recommendation on youth work, the renewed EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the UN Resolution on "Youth, Peace and Security".

Considering this rationale, peace, justice and strong institutions represent the core elements of the Network for the years 2018-2020, in line with the priorities of the North-South Centre and of the youth sector of the Council of Europe.

The Universities, within this cycle, will be spaces to empower young people, build synergies among policy makers, nurture civic engagement, and promote respect for Human Rights - in Europe and beyond – in efforts towards building more peaceful societies where everyone could benefit from freedom and protection and "no one is left behind".

Focus 2022: Building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.

In May 2020 the UN Development Programme warned that the levels of deprivation in the conditions of health, education, and living standards in some parts of the world are equivalent to those last seen in the late-1980s[1]. The COVID-19 pandemic turned out to be a magnifying glass for inequalities worldwide. The growing socio-economic inequalities not only remain at the root of todays' global threats, but they will continue to harm social cohesion and worsen the lack of trust in democracies and institutions.
The need for collective responses to address global challenges (climate change, extreme poverty, sustainable development, migration…) collides with the state of crisis of many institutions and multilateral entities.

Restoring trust in institutions would require balancing the space given to groups having major influence in the global economy with the space demanded by fragile and marginalised communities.
A potential action in this sense could be the **transition to more inclusive, dynamic, and connected-to-the-ground institutional mechanisms, where organised youth civil society plays a key role.** Civil Society Actors (CSAs), including Youth Civil Society Actors (YCSAs) are key stakeholders to connect "duty bearers" and "rights holders" and to render authorities accountable, guaranteeing good governance.

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[1] COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery. Accessed online here on 17 March 2021.

However, the youth sector also faces problems. Insufficient technical, financial, and organisational capacities limit the possibilities young people possess to participate in policy processes and to carry out long-term strategies. Moreover, besides being very fragmented, the sector is affected by issues connected to accountability gaps, high staff turnover, and disconnection between youth representatives and young people of the communities they represent. All those aspects might instil doubts in institutions at the moment in which they intend to engage more with youth organisations.

Moreover, there exists a widespread issue of disenchantment and disengagement. A recent EU survey showed that despite the majority of respondents believing it is important to help people in developing countries to level up inequalities, just over half of them agree that individuals can play a role in tackling poverty[2.]
Looking at the Southern Mediterranean region, despite some positive developments[3], civic engagement levels among youth in this region are the lowest in the world, with only nine per cent of youth in region volunteering with a civic organisation[4]. And for those who are engaged, there are persistent challenges, such as the capacity to express their voice autonomously given that most youth CSAs depend solely on the State's funding through which local governments infiltrate and influence the sector's agenda[5].

The limitations to civil engagement, the deterioration of socio-economic situation, the lack of institutional accountability and persistent structural violence and disenfranchisement in the society are increasing the disillusionment towards institutions. Those trends worsened as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic as there were situations where the crisis was used as a pretext to curtail civil liberties, including freedom of expression and association.

According to the 2021 Global Risks Report, "youth disillusionment" will become a critical threat to the world in the short term. Since 2019 the world has observed an intensification of youth protests that represent increased sentiment of betrayal by the generation in power over insufficient action on social and climate justice, political change, and corruption. Failing to address the fears and concerns of young people could intensify inter-generational tensions, widen societal fragmentation, and further challenge national institutions.

In light of this scenario, it is fundamental to foster confidence-building initiatives between youth organisations and policy makers in order to better understand each other's role and to explore their complementarity: **as young people need strong institutions ensuring the protection of their rights, institutions need a strong civil society to feed and sustain their work for building more fair and peaceful societies.**

To ignite this virtuous circle, the following questions - linked to specific SDG16 targets - need to be addressed:
- What contribution can young people give to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions (target 16.6)?
- What mechanisms can be enhanced to ensure responsive and inclusive decision-making (target 16.7)?
- Could the youth sector play a role in the fight against corruption and bribery (target 16.5)?
- How can the interregional youth cooperation contribute to broadening and strengthening those institutions ensuring global governance (target 16.8)?
- What synergies can be developed between youth organisations and national institutions to prevent violence and enforce non-discriminatory policies (16A&B)?

For the achievement of the SDG16, the answering to those questions is a fundamental exercise that should jointly engage young people, youth workers, institutional representatives, and policy maker makers.

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[2] Special Eurobarometer 476 on EU citizens and development cooperation. September 2018. Accessible here
[3] Such as the Morocco Integrated National Youth Strategy 2015-2030; Tunisia's National Youth Council since 2016; Lebanon's National Youth Development since 2012; Egypt's National Youth Strategy for Egypt, 2021-2026; and Jordan's National Youth Strategy for Jordan renewed since 2005.
[4]United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Division of Data, Research and Policy (April 2019). MENA Generation 2030: Investing in children and youth today to secure a prosperous region tomorrow. Consulted on 4 March 2022. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/mena-generation-2030.
[5]Abdeslam Badre. Youth Civil Society Actors in Euro-Med Space for dialogues within and across the Mediterranean Institutions. September 2021. Accessible here: https://meddialogue.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/MAJALAT-Research_Youth_EN-1.pdf