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RECLAIMING THE NARRATIVES: EMPOWERING MARGINALIZED YOUTH THROUGH DIGITAL ADVOCACY

Report on the Study Session held by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization Youth

in co-operation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe

European Youth Centre in Strasbourg

16-20 February 2026



This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

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1 Executive Summary

The UNPO Youth Network (UNPOy) successfully completed its 2026 study session, *"Reclaiming the Narratives: Empowering Marginalised Youth through Digital Advocacy"*, held from 16 to 20 February at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. Through expert-led sessions, hands-on workshops, and a visit to the Palais de l'Europe, participants built skills and confidence in digital advocacy and narrative-building to reclaim their communities' stories in digital spaces.

Organised in co-operation with the Council of Europe's Youth Department, the event brought together 21 young advocates from stateless, unrepresented, indigenous, and minority communities across the globe—including Ogaden, Catalunya, Friulia, Aceh, Guam, Iranian Kurdistan, Nagaland, Yazidi, Assyria, Balochistan, Sicily, Scotland, Brittany, Crimea, Tibet, the Roma people, and Somaliland—to strengthen their capacity as digital advocates.

Building on the momentum of UNPOy's growing network of grassroots advocates, this year's session placed digital tools and narrative power at the centre of the conversation, equipping participants with the skills needed to reclaim their communities' stories, challenge harmful narratives, and assert their voices in democratic and human rights processes.

A defining feature of this year's session was its emphasis on translating learning into tangible, community-rooted action. Working in teams across the latter half of the week, participants designed digital advocacy projects around themes they identified as most pressing for their communities: resource management, language rights, state violence, and misinformation. The resulting outputs, which included websites, interactive maps, reels, flyers, and hashtag campaigns, were not merely exercises, but practical tools that can be built to reach real audiences, foster community engagement, and amplify stories that too often go unheard.

By bringing together expert knowledge, institutional engagement, and peer solidarity, this study session reinforced UNPOy's core conviction: that young people from unrepresented communities are not passive subjects, they are agents of change.

2 Introduction

About the organisation and the network

The **Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)**, as an international organisation, provides a platform for unrepresented and marginalized peoples worldwide to advocate for their rights. The main aim is to promote self-determination, human rights, democracy, non-violence, and sustainable development.

The **mission** of UNPO is to provide a platform of solidarity and knowledge exchange for unrepresented peoples worldwide while fostering dialogues with the international community to collaboratively advance a peaceful, democratic, equitable, and sustainable world.

The **vision** of the organisation is a future where people and nations thrive under systems of governance that honour fundamental human rights.

The **values and principles** of UNPO are enshrined in the UNPO Covenant and upheld by all UNPO members:

- The equal rights of all people to self-determination and representation;
- Adherence to the principles of democratic pluralism and rejection of intolerance;
- Protection of the natural environment;
- Promotion of non-violence and the rejection of terrorism and violence as instruments of policy;
- Adherence to internationally accepted human rights standards

UNPO Youth (UNPOy) is a network of young people from stateless, unrepresented, and indigenous communities and minorities working together to strengthen youth participation, promote human rights, and advance democratic representation for peoples whose voices are often excluded from decision-making processes. Via study sessions organised in co-operation with the Council of Europe (CoE), the network contributes to these goals by supporting youth advocacy, developing leadership capacities, raising awareness about the situation of unrepresented communities, as well as fostering co-operation and solidarity among young activists and community representatives. UNPOy has grown as a network through a series of study sessions organised in co-operation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe since 2021.

Background

The 5-days study session 2026 was organised in response to the ongoing need within the UNPO Youth (UNPOy) Network and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) to equip young community representatives with the confidence, knowledge, and networks required to reclaim their stories, counter destructive narratives, and translate online activism into meaningful policy engagement. These communities frequently face structural barriers to political participation, limited access to decision-making processes, and persistent misrepresentation or silencing of their narratives in both traditional and digital public spaces.

In recent years, digital environments have become central arenas for political engagement, human rights advocacy, and identity representation. However, these spaces also expose marginalized communities to disinformation, hate speech, and exclusionary narratives that undermine democratic participation and social cohesion. For UNPO and UNPOy, supporting young activists to navigate and influence these contested digital spaces has therefore become an organisational priority.

Building on previous activities, the 2026 study session was designed as a step to further empower youth leaders with practical skills in digital advocacy and narrative-building. Additionally, the session responded to the organisations' broader mission of promoting human rights, democratic participation, intercultural dialogue, and peaceful societies. By using expertise of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and co-creating a dedicated learning space in Strasbourg, the study session aimed to strengthen solidarity among diverse communities while reinforcing a sustainable international youth network capable of advocating collectively for justice, recognition, and inclusion.

Aim and objectives

The **aim** of the study session was to strengthen the capacity of young activists from stateless, unrepresented, indigenous communities and minorities by equipping them with digital advocacy, narrative-building, and critical media skills to reclaim their stories, counter harmful narratives, and effectively participate in democratic and human rights processes at various levels.

Objectives:

- To enhance participants' understanding of how digital spaces influence democracy, human rights advocacy, and the representation of marginalised communities in diverse political and cultural contexts.

- To develop participants' skills in digital advocacy, strategic communication, and narrative-building, enabling them to amplify their communities' voices and advance their right to self-determination in online and offline spaces.
- To explore the impacts of disinformation, hate speech, and shrinking civic space on marginalised peoples, and to equip participants with practical tools to counter these challenges through inclusive and rights-based approaches.
- To foster intercultural dialogue, solidarity, and mutual understanding among participants from diverse unrepresented and indigenous communities, strengthening collective responses to shared challenges.
- To reinforce capacity-building and collaboration within the UNPOy network by encouraging peer learning, joint initiatives, and sustained engagement between young activists and UNPOy.
- To support participants in designing and implementing follow-up initiatives within their communities after the study session, ensuring projects are collaboratively developed, digitally informed, and aligned with UNPO's mission and values.

According to the feedback from the participants, the study session mostly reached its objectives. It demonstrates that the methods, interaction formats that were used and the topic itself were quite relevant for the youth from the marginalised communities.

Participants profile

As in previous activities, the participants of this study session were a diverse group of young people, mostly aged between 19 and 35, with an average age in the mid-twenties. They came from a range of geographical backgrounds and brought varying levels of experience. They included youth workers, students, and activists engaged in advocacy for their community purposes and youth-related initiatives. Altogether, the group reflected a balanced mix of gender, perspectives, and competences. It all contributed to a rich intercultural learning environment and enabled meaningful peer exchange throughout the study session.

For this study session, the UNPOy team decided to prioritise new applications (youth that had never participated in a UNPOy study session before) to ensure new perspectives, greater impact, and new members for the UNPO Youth Network. This approach also resulted in a more dynamic engagement of participants than in previous study sessions, more engaged discussions, and

exchanges. Throughout the selection process, we also prioritised securing at least one representative from communities that applied, to ensure a greater diversity of participants. As a result, we had **17 indigenous communities** and minorities represented by **21 participants**. The inclusion of participants from beyond the CoE member states was, as always, essential to the relevance and depth of sessions. In light of the personal circumstances of some participants, the team, the Council of Europe and the participants themselves strictly observed all appropriate security measures.

The preparatory team used various channels to reach out to the participants, including WhatsApp groups, social media (UNPO's Instagram, etc), personal communication with former participants, emailing to the NGO's-members of the UNPO network.

Link with the Council of Europe

The study session contributed directly to the priorities of the Council of Europe's Youth Department by promoting human rights, democratic participation, and intercultural dialogue. The session fostered critical reflection on current challenges like the rise of radicalism and democratic backsliding and encouraged participants to take an active role in addressing them, both locally and internationally. By creating a diverse and inclusive learning space, it supported mutual understanding and co-operation among young people from different backgrounds.

3 Programme – Inputs and Discussions

The session was designed and coordinated by a team of young advocates and longstanding members of the UNPO Youth Network, from the Crimean Tatar, Baluchi, Welsh, Sicilian, and Ahwaz communities.



Mavilie Demirdzhaieva as the Course Director together with Nieves Cancela, Dania Silawi Ahwazi, Elena Sofia Pia Gumina, Aaron Jones and Deedagh Jamalzhi as team members united to contribute their knowledge and experience to the activity. They were all former participants of the study sessions and were engaged in preparation of previous events. The preparatory

meeting of the team was held in November 2025 in Strasbourg under the guidance of the Educational Advisor Sulkhan Chargeishvili (online), Programme Assistant Patrick Norlain and Youth Department Intern Bente Aretz (in person). At the meeting, we first went through the aims and objectives of the study session and started to shape the proposed daily programme and background content information.



The study session on Monday, February 16, opened with welcome remarks by Sophie Kwasny, Head of the Education, Training, and Co-operation Division at the Council of Europe's Youth Department, followed by an address of Mercè Monje Cano, UNPO Secretary General, who set a powerful tone for the week ahead. Grounding her remarks in the realities facing unrepresented and indigenous communities today, the UNPO SG framed the study session as a direct response to an increasingly urgent global context—one marked by shrinking civic spaces and the growing need for communities on the margins of international politics to make their voices heard.



These introductory presentations were followed by a get to know each other session ("Poncho" Activity), where participants got an overview of the communities and minorities that were present in the room. Afterwards, the team facilitated a session on digital advocacy and supported the material with examples of digital advocacy campaigns ("Timeline of Success").

Participants continued their engagement in team-building exercises ("Networking World Café", "World Cinema") that they began on Sunday evening to foster a collaborative environment.

From there, participants dove into a rich programme of external expert-led sessions and collaborative workshops.



Tuesday morning, February 17, started with Bruce Mutsvairo, Dean of Amsterdam University College and Professor in the Department of Media and Culture at Utrecht University, who led a session on amplifying narratives in digital spaces, exploring the role of citizen journalism and digital activism in giving voice to underrepresented communities. Leanne Mohamad, British-Palestinian human rights activist, later spoke on the power of purposeful digital platforms for community building and engagement.

The second half of the day was dedicated to the topic of messaging. Participants learned how to develop a message, identify their target audience and choose effective communication channels. They then formed groups and began developing digital advocacy campaigns.

The CoE's lecturers during Wednesday sessions, February 18, contributed to the topic of digital security in the work of the CoE, giving participants a better understanding of what the CoE does in the aspect of digital development and data protection. In addition, they covered the issue of mis- and disinformation, highlighted the specifics of CoE's work, as well as shared valuable recommendations that might be applicable for our participants.



The programme also featured a compelling session on digital advocacy in a shifting geopolitical landscape, delivered on Thursday, February 19, by Zumretay Arkin, Vice President of the World Uyghur Congress, who drew on her own community's experience to address the practical challenges of digital advocacy, including digital security threats, and the concrete steps advocates can take to protect and amplify their work. Throughout the remaining sessions, participants continued working on their group projects while gaining new insights. They presented their projects on Friday, 20 February.

The **methodology** that was used by the team reflected the Council of Europe's youth sector priorities by combining human rights, non-formal education, intercultural learning, training of

trainers (ToT), and participatory approaches. Through collaborative workshops and peer learning, participants explored how narratives and identities are shaped in digital spaces and developed strategies to counter discrimination and harmful narratives. The study session fostered dialogue and solidarity among diverse communities, contributing to stronger cross-cultural co-operation and sustainable youth networks. Overall, the activity advanced the Council of Europe's objective of building inclusive, democratic, and pluralistic societies grounded in equality, participation, and respect for diversity.

The discussions led to the following **conclusions**:

- Activism and participation are not easy, activists from UNPO need to have means which sometimes is hard to guarantee in rapidly changing geopolitical world;
- Participating communities face the issue of internal fragmentation (within their communities), which is a big obstacle when strategizing and this translates into many discussions on this during the study session, as participants oftentimes don't feel completely engaged or connected with their broader movements.
- Participants were also sharing sensitive information regarding the issues and realities of life in their communities. For us, as the team, it is important to do everything possible so that they feel secure and free to speak without being discriminated against by others.
- Participants broadly agreed that they oftentimes feel they are not being taken seriously within their communities' movements because of their age, and that there is often not enough guidance from the leadership to engage.

4 Results and conclusions

The team's personal conversations with the participants and the feedback form allow us to state that the study session led to important **outcomes** at both individual and group levels. The group significantly increased their knowledge and understanding of the core concepts, gained new perspectives through intercultural exchange and peer learning. A key outcome was the creation of a strong learning environment that encouraged active participation, reflection, and mutual support. Participants were able to make connections between the topics discussed and their own local realities, as well as to identify concrete ways to apply their learning in their communities and organisations.

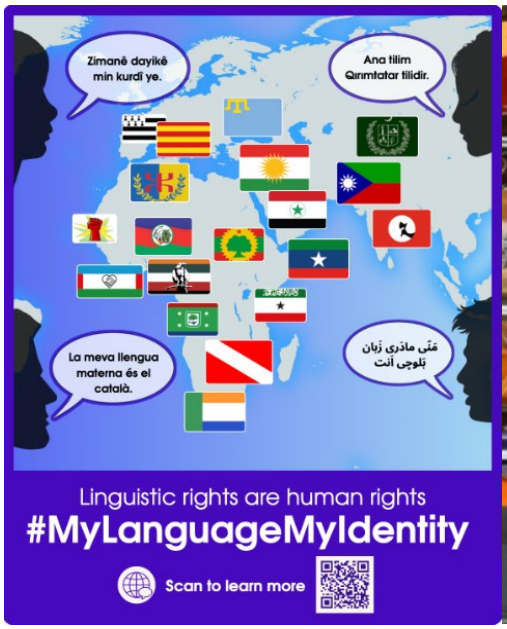
The session also strengthened networks among participants, fostering potential future collaborations and partnerships. The group demonstrated increased motivation and confidence to engage in youth work and advocacy including within the UNPO(y). Additionally, and most importantly, the study session successfully combined theoretical material with practical application (project group work), which contributed to the equipment of participants with tools and ideas for follow-up actions at local and international levels. Participants successfully designed five different digital advocacy campaigns and put the different tools and theoretical knowledge discussed throughout the study session into practice.

This study session resulted in several **outputs**. Participants collaboratively worked on the group work analysing stakeholders, defining their target audience and tailoring their messages. As a result, they developed digital campaigns and projects that can be applied in their respective contexts. Educational materials (presentations, guides, toolkits, etc) used during the activity were compiled and shared among participants for future use:

- Digital advocacy campaign 1 “States of Violence” website: https://statesofviolence.my.canva.site/
- Digital advocacy campaign 1 “States of violence” interactive map: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/27707891/
- Digital advocacy campaign 2 “#ResOURces” (link to presentation cannot be provided):



- Digital advocacy campaign 2 “#ResOURces collaborative map”: https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/en/map/resources_1363477#3/38.902637/23.092968
- Digital advocacy campaign 3 “#MyLanguageMyIdentity” flyer and reel (link cannot be provided):





- Digital advocacy campaign 4 “#FFF Media Kit” reel (link cannot be provided):



- Digital advocacy campaign 5 on Misinformation → link and material not available

There is no one formal resolution document that was adopted, however the collective learning and shared practices generated during the study session provide a strong foundation for follow-up activities and continued dissemination within participants' organisations and networks.

Throughout the study session, there was a board where participants could paste "feedback" post-its. At the end of each day, we had a reflection session where participants would provide feedback and insights from the day. On the last day of the study session, we had a session particularly for participants to complete the feedback form.

Insights from reflection sessions during the study session include:

- *"The project sessions could be spread all along the week so we think more about it"*
- *"The project is a very good idea and helps get engaged"*
- *"More engagement and informal talk with guest speakers"*
- *"Would be good to have some outgoing activities" (if weather was better)*
- *"More time on the workshops"*

Main **insights** from the feedback form:

➢ Participants' overall experience was positive, and most objectives were thought to be fulfilled, with the exception of one (learning about misinformation, hate speech and digital security), which was addressed in the form's section 1.

➢ All participants feel more prepared to combat discrimination as a result of the study session. There is a significant variation in the extent of how participants better understood the role of the Council of Europe and its work.

Based on the feedback form results, we can state that participants increased their competences in the topics of the study session. This is reflected in their active engagement, the quality of group discussions, and their ability to apply newly acquired knowledge and skills during the group work. Participants demonstrated improved understanding of the topics of digital advocacy and narrative-building and countering. While the level of learning varied depending on prior experience, the overall progression was observable, and the activity objectives were largely achieved.

Participants' responses highlight several key **learning points**. The most prominent outcome was the importance of networking and building meaningful connections. Many valued the chance to meet diverse people and exchange experiences. Intercultural understanding, solidarity, and respect for diversity were also central. The group recognised shared challenges to be addressed. A strong focus was on digital advocacy, and as the participants mentioned, they gained

knowledge, confidence, and creativity in using it as a tool for change. Participants also highlighted practical insights from experienced speakers and peer learning. While most feedback was positive, a few participants noted gaps in specific content areas, such as misinformation, suggesting the need for more in-depth learning.

Speaking about the guest speakers and lecturers: they gave the participants both theoretical and practical information that they can use in their current and future (digital) advocacy work. In general, their sessions received mainly positive feedback from the group.

The team consistently observed participant fatigue in the last part of each day. Informal feedback from participants suggested that shorter days would lead to more productive sessions. Based on this and the team's observations, the team recommends exploring a condensed schedule for future study sessions—such as 9:00 to 17:00—as the final hour tended to be unproductive. Alternatively, preparatory teams could benefit from being given a total hour allocation for the week, allowing for greater flexibility in scheduling rather than adherence to a fixed daily timetable.

In addition, according to the participants' evaluation results, the study session demonstrated a high level of quality, coherence, and organisation. The minor gaps identified do not significantly impact on the overall effectiveness of the session but rather highlight opportunities for future improvement and strengthening of already established practices.

5 Follow-up activities

We, as UNPOy team, plan several follow-up actions to build on the outcomes of the study session. These include supporting (information distribution) participants in implementing local initiatives, workshops, or awareness-raising activities based on the topics explored. Continued communication from our side will be maintained through online channels to facilitate exchange, peer support, and collaboration among participants. Where possible, we will explore the opportunities for further co-operation, including future projects or other educational activities. Our biggest follow-up aim is to ensure that the learning outcomes are translated into concrete actions beyond the study session.

We expect that each study session group of participants, including this one, will act as multipliers, namely they will be sharing the knowledge, skills, and approaches gained during the study session within their networks. This may include organising workshops, initiating advocacy campaigns, or other integrative activities. Our team, and UNPO more broadly, is ready to provide

continued support through mentoring, resource sharing, and maintaining communication channels for guidance and exchange. Participants will also have access to useful materials and methods developed during the session. This will enable them to replicate or adapt activities. This combination of individual initiative and organisational support is intended to strengthen the long-term impact of the study session.

The preparatory team has compiled all resources, materials, and presentations used by all guest speakers and facilitators and shared these with all the study session participants. UNPOy plans to work with the UNPO Secretariat to showcase the outputs of the study session on UNPO's youth website and potentially publish a compiled "digital advocacy toolkit" drawing from insights of the study session.

Such study sessions for the young people from the unrepresented indigenous communities and minorities, who face constant oppression, multiple discrimination, human rights violation is highly important, and this practice should be continued. The outcomes of our study session could be further integrated into the work of the CoE. The methodologies and learning outcomes from the study session could inform future activities or be shared as examples of good practice.

Appendix

Final Programme

Sunday, 15 February	
Arrival of Participants	
19:00	Dinner
21:00	Welcoming evening with ice breaking games and drinks

Day 1	**Monday, 16 February**
09:30-11:00	Official opening of the study session, introduction of UNPO and Youth Network, Code of Conduct Introduction of participants' communities, learning about each other and team building *(Poncho activity)* Welcome words by ***Sophie Kwasny**, Head of Education, Training and Co-operation Division, Youth Department, Council of Europe*
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-13:00	Youth and UNPO: Expectations, Opportunities, and Impact *by **Mercè Monje Cano***, UNPO Secretary General
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	What is digital advocacy?
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break

16:30-18:00	Timeline of successes *(presentation of (digital) advocacy campaigns)*
18:00-18:30	Reflection time
19:00	Dinner and free time

Day 2	**Tuesday, 17 February**
09:30-11:00	Amplifying Marginalized Narratives in Digital Spaces: Youth Voices, Citizen Journalism, and Digital Activism *Bruce Mutsvairo,* Professor, Department of Media and Culture at Utrecht University
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-13:00	Purposeful Platforms in a Digital Age *Leanne Mohamad,* Palestinian human rights activist, public speaker, community organizer
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	Messaging: designing a message and choosing your audience
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break
16:30-18:00	Messaging: effective channels of communication
18:00-18:30	Reflection time
19:00	Dinner and free time Networking world cafe

Day 3	**Wednesday, 18 February** **(Palais de l'Europe, room 10)**
09:30-11:00	Digital security in the work of the Council of Europe

	with **Ana TOKHADZE,** Digital Development Unit, Council of Europe and **Moiritz TAYLOR**, Data Protection Unit, Council of Europe
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-12:30	Addressing Misinformation and Disinformation and the work of the Council of Europe in the field with **Elena BRODEALA**, Freedom of Expression and CDMSI Division, Council of Europe and **Menno ETTEMA,** Hate Speech, Hate Crime and Artificial Intelligence Unit, Council of Europe Reflection time
13:00-14:30	Lunch
	Free afternoon in the city

Day 4	**Thursday, 19 February**
09:30-11:00	Project group work
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-13:00	Digital advocacy in a Shifting World *Zumretay Arkin,* Vice President, World Uyghur Congress
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	Project group work
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break
16:30-18:00	Project group work
18:00-18:30	Reflection time
19:00	Dinner and free time World Cinema

Day 5	Friday, 20 February
09:30-11:00	How to create a network
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-13:00	Presentation of projects
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	Presentation of projects
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break
16:30-18:00	Appreciation time and Closing ceremony
18:00-18:30	Reflection time
19:00	Dinner

Saturday, 21 February
Safe departure home!

References

1. Center for Civilians in Conflict (2022). Protecting Together: Preventing, Mitigating, and Addressing Civilian Harm. Advocacy Guide. 25 p.
2. Council of Europe (2023). "COMPASS: Manual for human rights education with young people". 2nd edition. 493 p.
3. European Commission. Non-Formal Education Methods. A YOUTH WORKER' S HANDBOOK. 63 p.
4. Pollicy (2020). Digital Advocacy Toolkit. 26 p.

Visibility

UNPO published a press release and posted 2 reels on their social media:

- Press release on UNPO's main website: https://unpo.org/unpo-youth-build-digital-advocacy-skills-at-strasbourg-study-session-with-the-council-of-europe/
- Press release on UNPO Academy website: https://academy.unpo.org/unpo-youth-build-digital-advocacy-skills-at-strasbourg-study-session-with-the-council-of-europe/
- Reel on the study session: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DVyKQu9jWRv/?igsh=MWowOWI1YTZhamc1aA==
- Reel celebrating International Mother Language Day with the UNPOy: https://www.instagram.com/reel/DVBwP4ajYv1/?igsh=MXgyNG05azhpamNyNw==