



HANDBOOK FOR FACILITATING ONLINE YOUTH POLICY DIALOGUES



The content of this handbook is a collection of materials and resources created and collected to carry out the online training course for Facilitators on Online Policy Dialogue in the Youth Field. The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe

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FOREWORD

In a general context of shrinking space for civil society, compounded by the challenges posed by COVID-19, a meaningful youth participation in democratic processes is at stake.

However, the quality of the youth engagement in policy-making processes does not depend only on the socio-political contexts and on the policy design's mechanisms in place.

Among the factors affecting the results of a youth dialogue initiative where young people and policy makers interact and cooperate, also other elements must be considered: the methodology used to run the event, the practical setting of the space, the capacity of the facilitator to tackle a sensitive topic and the level of attendees' engagement at the preparatory phases.

If those elements are important in traditional settings, they become essential when the political discussion takes place online: in the digital space the intercultural dialogue dimension might be underestimated and an extra series of factors (digital fatigue, technical problems, limited non-verbal communication, etc...) can undermine the effectiveness of the conversation.

Hence, the facilitators play a vital role in shaping and encouraging an effective and inclusive online dialogue towards concrete shared results.

For these reasons, The North-South Centre promoted an online course to improve the quality of the interaction between youth organisations and institutional representatives, increasing awareness about each other's roles for the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

With this handbook the North-South Centre intends to share with a wider audience of practitioners some of the resources and insights gathered while running the "training course for facilitators of online policy dialogue in the youth field".

It contains tools and tips to facilitate virtual moments of dialogue, consultation and sharing, ensuring a high level of engagement among all youth stakeholders following the Council of Europe's human-rights approach.

Graziano Tullio

Youth Cooperation Programme
North-South Centre of the Council of Europe

TRAINING FOR FACILITATORS OF ONLINE POLICY DIALOGUE IN THE YOUTH FIELD



This handbook is the output of an online course promoted by the North-South Center with the intention to strengthen the skills of professionals facilitating virtual dialogues and consultations among youth stakeholders.

The course articulated around three pillars: 1) facilitation competences, 2) policy making and policy dialogue knowledge, and 3) technical expertise to set up quality on-line spaces for dialogue.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the elements that ensure safe and engaging digital environments for youth policy dialogue and youth policy-making.
2. To learn strategies that guarantee equal contribution opportunities to all the actors involved taking into consideration the intercultural dimension and the gender mainstreaming perspective.
3. To enhance facilitation competences such as empathy, neutrality, conflict management, active listening, active techniques of questioning, report building and consensus building among others.
4. To understand the role of the facilitator and the different phases of the facilitation process (from the preparation of the event to the final evaluation of the effectiveness of their performance).
5. To enhance the capacity of leading the conversation with consideration of the impact public policies have on different publics and sectors of the society, being aware of the Council of Europe's human rights approach.
6. To be acquainted with the main international youth policy instruments and policy dialogue mechanisms in order to facilitate a youth dialogue around and within them.
7. To be able to work at interregional level and for interregional cooperation within the different international platforms of dialogue promoted by the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the African Union and other international organisations.
8. To understand issues related to global democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural dialogue, to address challenges regarding the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and of the UNSCR 2250 "Youth, Peace and Security".

Human Rights Education For Legal Professionals

HELP Online Courses

The course took place between August and October 2021 on the Council of Europe's HELP online platform, alternating synchronous group sessions and asynchronous self-guided learning moments.

In total, 44 training hours articulated in five modules enabled participants to engage in group discussions with policy makers, follow interactive presentations and analyses case studies through a variety of resources (video, blog, surveys...).

A final practical exercise mentored by trainers enabled to put in practice the skills acquired.

The course was developed following a learner-centred approach based on the principles of non-formal education.

Participants had different profiles (youth workers, civil servants, political representatives and members of international agencies) coming from different geographical contexts. This variety created a fertile ground for the course and provided an opportunity for networking and intercultural dialogue.

Dates	Asynchronous learning	Synchronous sessions	Module	Content
23 Aug. - 5 Sept.	8 hours	2 Sept. 16:00-18:00 CEST	1- Introduction, personal experiences and landscape of youth policy developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technicalities and sharing expectations and participants' experiences • Quality online environments for youth policy dialogue • Youth policy processes around the world
6-19 Sept.	10 hours	9 and 16 Sept. 16:00-18:00 CEST	2 - Facilitating a policy dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning a participatory activity following the CoE human rights approach • Ensuring engagement and intercultural dialogue in online policy discussions • Key competences of the facilitator • Non-formal education in online contexts
20-26 Sept.	6 hours	23 Sept. 16:00-18:00 CEST	3 - Digital skills and tools for online facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical development of skills for online facilitation • Library of online tools and resources
27 Sept - 24 Oct.	Self-organised (max. 8h)		4 - Practicing online facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice the online facilitation and online youth dialogue in small groups • Peer-review among participants • Feedback and mentoring by trainers
25-31 Oct.	2 hours	28 Oct. 16:00-18:00 CEST	5 - Conclusion and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the competences developed • Identify skills to be further strengthened • Evaluation of the learning points • Exploring other opportunities for personal development and other spaces to interact and cooperate with other professionals

THE OPENING SESSION TO SET THE GROUND

During the first synchronous session of the course, a panel discussion provided an overview on the state-of-art of the youth policy sector and helped in identifying the current challenges that need to be addresses in order to have an inclusive and meaningful policy dialogue.

Participants from 22 countries across Africa, Europe and the Mediterranean interacted with the following guest speakers:

- **Ms Mai Hosny**, Policy Analyst on Youth at the OECD Development Centre.
- **Mr Thomas Andersson**, Spokesperson on Youth at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.
- **Ms Nafula Wafula**, outgoing Vice Chairperson for Policy, Advocacy at the Commonwealth Youth Council.

“36% of ministries of youth affairs in OECD countries report that they are facing challenges in collecting age disaggregated data.”

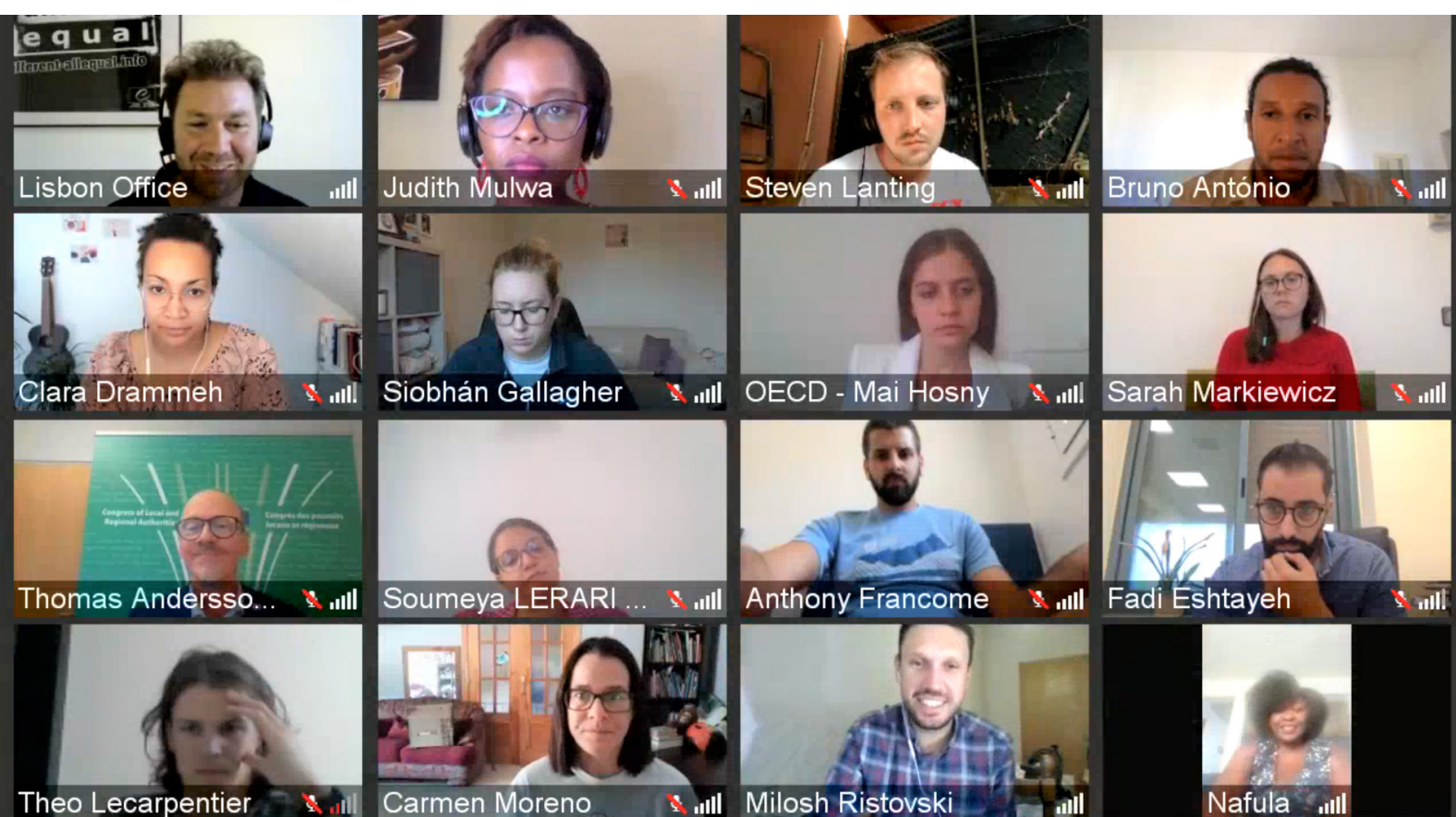
Ms Mai Hosny

“From an African perspective, governments cannot ignore anymore the role of National Youth Councils and National Youth Organizations in policy development.”

Ms Nafula Wafula

“The COVID-19 crisis showed how existing differences in legislation and digitalisation level across regions and countries crucially hinder online youth policy dialogues.”

Mr Thomas Andersson



KEY QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

The conversation among guest speakers, trainers and participants addressed some of the main issues that should be considered to ensure an inclusive and effective policy development process.



A digital board helped gather the answers provided by the group to the three main questions below:

Which risks are connected to the digitalisation of youth policy dialogue?

- **Language difficulties** undermine online engagement. In traditional settings, other forms of communication and group dynamic mitigate language barriers.
- **Digital infrastructure**, limited access to the internet and digital tools might reduce the capacity of young people to get involved in some countries.
- **A safe online space** is fundamental to enable people to express themselves freely. Gaps in online privacy and security protocols can dissuade from sharing delicate information and might put at risk young activists' engagement in political processes.

What are the main factors that contribute to a meaningful youth policy debate?

- **Age disaggregated data:** Lack of disaggregated data is a challenge in policy design.
- **Institutions with the capacity to protect the rights of participation** of children and young people, enabling their meaningful participation.
- **A rights-based approach** in the development of policies. This approach will inevitably require the engagement of youth workers and youth work.

Which groups of interests (stakeholders) strive to be heard within policy development processes?

- **The LGBTQI community** is not considered as a demographic group in policy design processes.
- **Youth living in rural areas:** policy outcomes usually favor young people from urban areas
- **Women, especially young mothers** (in many African countries childcare facilities are not usually provided during consultations): women in vulnerable situation do not feel valued and supported enough to continue engaging in consultation processes.

CHAPTER 1

THE ROLE AND SKILLS OF THE FACILITATOR

“Facilitation is the art of leading people through processes towards agreed-upon objectives in a manner that encourages participation, ownership and creativity by all those involved.”



A facilitator plays a pivotal role in the planning and implementation of an online youth policy dialogue. Dialogue is both an art and a science that requires practice, innovation and mindfulness.

The facilitation of an online youth policy dialogue is a process, which requires a skilled facilitator. As a result, a facilitator not only determines the trajectory of the conversation but also ensures that important elements of a policy dialogue such as human rights and gender principles are effectively integrated into the facilitation process. Indeed, a facilitator should ensure an online policy dialogue is as accessible as possible. The role of a facilitator also adapts to the given dialogue, which may vary in terms of geographical region, policy objectives or developmental challenges.

The facilitator has three distinct roles to play in a policy dialogue process:

1. Preparation

Staging the policy dialogue, designing the group process preparing participants and stakeholders.

2. Implementation

Facilitation of the policy dialogue and adjusting the dialogue process as needed.

3. Reporting

Preparation of final outputs.



OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES OF A YOUTH POLICY DIALOGUE

Equal access and non-discrimination

Whilst being a challenging principle to achieve, accessibility encourages meaningful and constructive participation of all stakeholders in a dialogue. Moreover, when all sides are previously prepared, the dialogue can best achieve its goals whilst creating an encouraging environment for all participants.

Participation

A dialogue must create a space that encourages the active participation of all parties. This space should equally be adapted to all so each participant feels empowered to contribute to the dialogue.

Interactivity

This principle is at the heart of making dialogue lively and encouraging all parties to share their points of view on different sides to participate it must be interactive.

Outcome-oriented

One of the biggest priorities for facilitators in non-formal education is that the dialogue should be result-oriented. This does not mean that principles should be sacrificed, but the facilitator should ensure that an output is produced from the dialogue process.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Using the Human Rights-Based Approach helps facilitators incorporate human rights standards and principles into their work. The main goal is to further advance human rights for all and achieve better and more sustainable results in projects.

The Human Rights-Based Approach has a focus on rights-holders and duty-bearers.

It recognises beneficiaries as active subjects or rightsholders, rather than passive recipients. It also establishes duty-bearers as those who have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil rights and before whom claims may be brought.

Who is a rights-holder?

Rights-holders are individuals or social groups that have entitlements in relation to specific duty-bearers. In general terms, all human beings are rights-holders under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Who is a duty-bearer?

These are actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realise human rights and to abstain from human rights violations. They can be state and non-state actors.

The European Youth Forum mirrors the rights-based approach to youth policy by integrating the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the development, implementation and evaluation of youth policy. In this regard, the rights-based approach to youth policy can be achieved by:

- **Preventing discrimination against young people** on the grounds of age or any other factor.
- **Promoting youth policy** in such a way that encourages the cross-sectoral participation and autonomy of young people and ensures that youth-specific concerns are considered in all sectoral policies.
- **Ensuring the recognition**, access and monitoring of youth rights by continuing to strive for the adoption of legal tools targeted to the specific needs of young people.

RESOURCES

Videos

- [Rights based approach in practice](#)
- [Essential Guide to Gender Mainstreaming](#)
- [Gender Mainstreaming Plan](#)

Reports

- [Council of Europe: Human Rights Approach, Practical Guide for Co-operation Projects](#)

A GUIDE TO INTEGRATING HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES IN THE FACILITATION OF ONLINE YOUTH POLICY DIALOGUES

The integration of human rights principles in the facilitation of online youth policy dialogues should be included in the planning, implementation and reporting stages.

OBJECTIVE	HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?
Adequate representation in policy discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mapping rights-holders and duty-bearers and lines of accountability.• Considering different stakeholders' perspectives when planning an online policy dialogue.
Ensure that no one is left behind	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consulting with participants in preparation of the online youth policy dialogue to understand their context.• Ensuring equality and non-discrimination with regards to access to online platforms. a participant's age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, ethnicity or disability should not be an obstacle to access.• Recognising the diverse backgrounds of participants and the challenges they may face. this may include existing policies that hinder online dialogues.• Using gender-sensitive and inclusive language that promotes equality.
Feedback and follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing virtual mechanisms to receive, track and follow-up feedback, suggestions or complaints on the process and dialogue. this may include online surveys.

SKILLS FOR FACILITATING ONLINE POLICY DIALOGUES

A facilitator is an integral part of an online policy dialogue process. Their knowledge about the context of the dialogue, facilitation tools and how to create an enabling environment provides a seamless and enjoyable process for participants. Good online facilitators must have the following skills and attributes:

Create an inclusive environment

Participation from all group members is essential for a successful online youth policy dialogue. To create an atmosphere that encourages participation, a facilitator can:

- Incorporate an ice-breaker and get-to-know games to help people open up and start speaking.
- Use online platforms that support active contributions from participants, such as Jam Board, Miro Board, etc.



Clear explanations of guidelines and instructions

It is important to clarify from the beginning what you are asking from participants. Effective facilitation depends on clearly explaining:

- Usefulness and objectives of activities
- Steps of the dialogue
- Time constraints
- Sharing examples and instructions can be an effective way to convey information

Group dynamics

Paying attention to group dynamics and how individuals participate is important to any group facilitation scenario, especially in interregional and intercultural groups.

To create a participative atmosphere where everyone is involved, a facilitator must understand the dynamics of the dialogue, measure emotions and help the group achieve its potential.

Empathy

Conflict-ridden topics can stir up emotions in participants and arguments or misunderstandings are a natural part of a discussion. While guiding the group toward solutions, it is important to pay attention to how individuals within the group may be feeling about the direction of the session.



Flexibility

As a facilitator, being able to swiftly adapt is an essential skill. It is also necessary to communicate and confirm the potential changes to the agenda with the group.

The facilitator's role is to help a group achieve a set of common objectives. Any changes in the desired outcomes should be pre-agreed with the group.

Active listening and verbal tools

Basic verbal tools, such as paraphrasing, referring and summarising can help participants understand that their thoughts are being listened.

- **Probing** is used to determine the mood or opinion of a group about a topic or point in the discussion. Asking for a thumbs up or thumbs down can be enough to get an impression of the general opinion of the group.
- **Paraphrasing** means expressing a participants' idea in your own words to ensure the group has a shared understanding.

- **Redirecting questions and comments** to the group helps get participants more involved in the discussion and can also encourage group reflection.
- **Bridging and recalling** can help the group follow the discussion and connect ideas by recalling earlier discussions or ideas.
- **Shifting perspective** by looking at a problem from a different angle can help the group move forward when the discussion is stuck.
- **Summarising** a discussion promotes understanding and can help the group build a conclusion.



Conflict management

It is important to identify underlying conflicts beneath disagreements taking place in the dialogue. Given the time and scope of the session, not every interpersonal difference can or should be resolved. However, it is important to know the right techniques and group processes to diffuse tension.

More information about: [Handling Difficult Situations](#)

Consensus building

Different points of view emerge naturally in a discussion. It is the job of the facilitator to help the group find common ground among different opinions and help the group arrive at a decision that is accepted by all participants.

Consensus, in this context, means allowing participants to express their opinion and making all participants aware of the reasons behind a particular decision.

Neutrality

This is the guiding principle for a facilitator. Facilitating is about supporting the whole group in achieving their objective.

Time management

Effective facilitation is about efficient time-keeping. The facilitator must guide the group in timely conversations and decisions. The facilitator must be aware of time during a meeting and let participants know when time is running out.

If an activity takes more time than planned, it usually comes at the expense of some other item on the agenda.

Generating outcomes

Takeaways of an online youth policy dialogue are essential to keep track of group progress and avoid circling back to the same topics. A facilitator should capture and highlight the key messages to provide a useful baseline for action-setting and follow-up.



CONCLUDING TIPS FROM EXPERT FACILITATORS

- **A facilitator needs to identify all stakeholders** ranging from government representatives, civil society, opinion leaders and most importantly the youth themselves.
- **Youth dialogues should not be seen as a stand-alone activity** but an ongoing process that fits into a policy programme and project development process.
- **Online facilitation is a very important engagement tool** that provides an alternative to engage with young people in the absence of physical spaces. However, this presents new challenges such as access to virtual infrastructure and the related costs of access.
- **A good facilitator must understand the context** in which the online youth policy dialogue is held. For example, online youth policy dialogues in a peace and security context will vary from the other development contexts. As a facilitator, it is important to consider the relevant global, national and municipal frameworks in an online youth policy dialogue.

CHAPTER 2

PLANNING AN ONLINE DIALOGUE

An online youth policy dialogue needs to have a clear goal and set of objectives. To do so, it is key to understand the underlying motivations behind the policy dialogue and develop a consensus with the organising institution on their goals and needs.

To plan a successful youth policy dialogue a facilitator can follow the following steps:



Step 1. Process Design

When you have set the desired outcomes, it is time to find the right process to help the group think. Finding the right process is about finding the structure that will help the group think effectively. This may translate as an open discussion or a structured one. The objective is to use different techniques to help the group exchange viewpoints, analyse issues, generate new ideas and make decisions.

A common structure for facilitation of an online group facilitation discussion is to:

- **Apply divergent and convergent thinking:** First, you help the group broaden their horizons and generate new ideas or solutions. Then you help them narrow down a set of options they have created to make a final decision.
- **Finding the right process:** To ensure that the policy dialogue can support the group in moving towards a conclusion, the facilitator has to design a process with the desired outcomes in mind. When multiple desired outcomes must be achieved, it is key to prioritise and set realistic expectations for the group. This is critical to avoid being overwhelmed during the online policy dialogue.

Step 2. Agenda Planning

Agenda planning is key to ensure that the process works with time constraints, logistics, group dynamics and the number of participants. It can help you stay on track during the dialogue.

- **Timing:** Participants expect the session to start and end on time. If the session lasts longer than 90-120 minutes, it is important to include breaks, for instance, stretch or lunch breaks.
- **Number of participants:** Online group discussions have a natural limit, above a certain group size, it is difficult to have a discussion where everyone is involved. Depending on the type of exercise or discussion, you may need to split your participants into groups or breakout sessions. The larger the group, the more time the facilitator will need to manage the session.
- **Breaking the ice:** Effective facilitation allows participants to present themselves and be more familiar with each other so that they can be more productive in the online session.
- **Agenda mix:** There are different types of interaction, ranging from presentations to individual work, small group and large group discussions. A healthy balance of different interaction types throughout the online session will help participants stay engaged.

Don't forget to plan...

- How will one topic of the online session flow into another one?
- How should the online sessions be properly concluded?

Step 3. Communication

Good communication is integral for a facilitator and anyone involved in the online group facilitation.

- Facilitators should be in contact with stakeholders throughout the online youth dialogue process and may even be in contact with some participants.
- It is important to keep your stakeholders updated throughout the design process. Most stakeholders will be interested in knowing in advance the process and agenda for the online youth policy dialogue.
- This type of communication offers a chance to get further insights about the goals and the group, helping you to come up with the right session design.

Step 4. Organising skills

- Make sure to have everything you need for online sessions. Missing a vital piece of equipment can be stressful and make online group facilitation more difficult. Online environments call for a good computer, lighting, headsets and a reliable network connection.
- Access to a reliable network might not be available to all. When facilitating online interregional or intercultural dialogues, be aware of this challenge. Sometimes this means being open to non-participation.



NON-FORMAL EDUCATION STRANDS IN ONLINE YOUTH POLICY DIALOGUES

- Coherent objectives, programme, methodology and number of participants.
- Selection of participants based on age, nationality, sex, disability, socio-economic criteria.
- The programme adapts to participants' needs and supports vulnerable communities and people with disabilities.
- Activities are inclusive and take into account participants' training needs and learning preferences and abilities. Online trainers must negotiate these with participants using a participatory approach.
- The programme should provide a fair balance of development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and an awareness of the key values underlying the activity by highlighting the value of the activity for transformative learning and education.
- The programme and methods should take into account and value participants' experiences and competencies.
- Participants must be actively engaged in the learning process.
- Participants should not be subject to formal systems of individualised evaluations. Group assignments, which provide intercultural responses, should be encouraged.
- Participants should be able to get a certificate of their attendance and a summary of teaching modules in the activity.

Learn more: [Non- formal Education Strands and its Translation to Online Contexts](#)

CHAPTER 3

IMPLEMENTATION

A. GENDER-SENSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

It is important to use gender-sensitive and inclusive language and be mindful of the words that easily slip out in online policy dialogue, such as ‘Good morning, guys’.

Integrating a Rights-Based Approach in a policy dialogue can enable the facilitator to mainstream gender-sensitive and inclusive language. Although the specific questions and approach will differ with the subject and the mandate of the institution, a facilitator can:

Ask questions about the **responsibilities, activities, interests and priorities** of women and men and how their experience may differ.

.....

Ask questions about the **assumptions about “families”, “households” or “people”** that may be implicit in the way a problem is posed or a policy is formulated.

.....

Obtain **data and information** to allow the experiences and situations of both women and men to be analysed.

.....

Seek the **inputs and views of women**, as well as men, on decisions that will affect the way they live.

.....

Ensure that activities where women are numerically dominant, including unpaid work, receive attention.

.....

Avoid saying if all women and men share the same needs and perspectives.

.....

Analyse an issue and propose policy options for **implications from a gender perspective**. Seek to identify means of formulating directions that support an equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities.

B. DIGITAL TOOLS

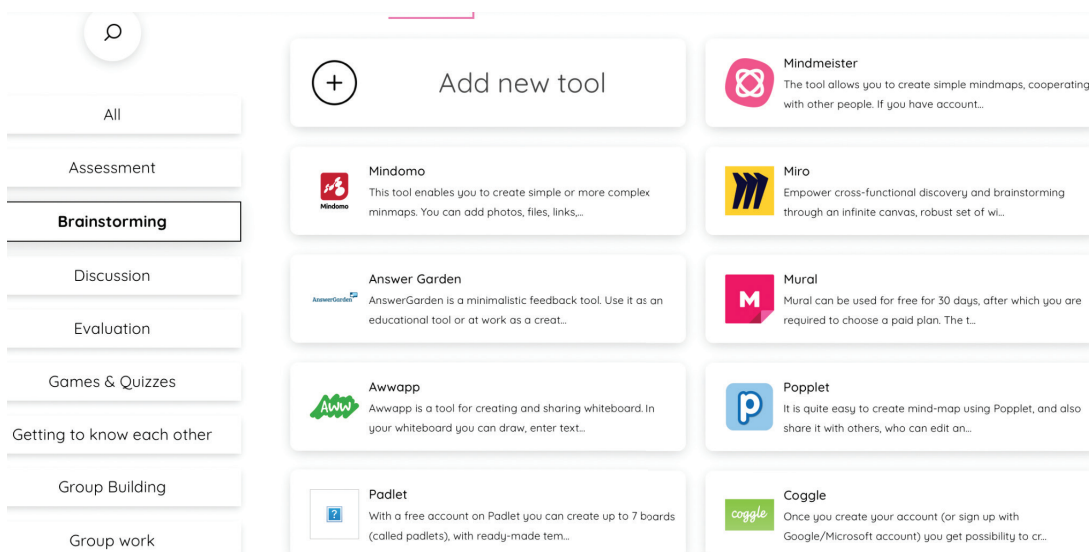
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital environment offered a space for interaction between users and allowed them to fill in the void created by the pandemic.

Technology impacts how dialogue and co-creation processes are driven, but also offers an opportunity to foster youth participation in a tech-driven world. In this context, digital tools and platforms act as effective enablers for non-formal education. Using digital platforms, an online facilitator can communicate with participants, before, during and after the session sharing videos, documents and surveys. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that not all groups have access to or the ability to use these tools.

Digital platforms and tools are integral in ensuring interactive and seamless sessions. These tools allow course participants to contribute to the dialogue, give ideas and receive feedback from the online facilitator.

Digital tools can be classified according to their use:

- Assessment
- Brainstorming
- Discussion
- Evaluation
- Games and quizzes
- Getting to know each other
- Group building
- Group work
- Mentoring
- Online learning
- Presentation
- Project management
- Promotion
- Reflection
- Simulation
- Team management
- Theoretical input



Learn more about [Digital tools and platforms](#)

WELCOME TO DIGI YOUTH PORTAL

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT
ONLINE LEARNING AND DIGITAL TOOLS IN YOUTH WORK

Choosing the right digital tools

- **Objective:** The first step is to define the desired outcomes and aims of the on-line policy dialogue to better guide the group.
- **Methodology:** It is important to define the level of participation and level of depth needed in a discussion to attain the goal of the policy dialogue.
- **Target group:** Digital tools help engage with the participants seamlessly and serve as an enabler to ensure that all groups are well represented and can contribute to the dialogue process.
- **Test:** An online facilitator must prepare in advance by testing whether digital tools are user-friendly and accessible to participants with a limited broadband connection.

The following questions can help online facilitators choose a digital tool:

- What do you need the tools to do?
- What are the desired outcomes?

- How many participants will be part of the dialogue?
- Are there any associated costs with the tools selected? Can the tool be used for various purposes?

The South-East European Youth Network (SEEYN) has created the [DIGI YOUTH PORTAL](#). This webpage gathers best practices for on-line facilitation and categorises digital tools by the need, use and purpose. Moreover, the portal provides the best ways of using a particular online tool in the youth policy co-creation field and includes user experiences. It serves as an interactive website focused on lifelong learning by allowing stakeholders to contribute with new tools, articles and good practices.

[The Library Saas Worthy](#), specifically aimed at educators and practitioners in non-formal education, includes more than 40 000 tools in different categories.

TIPS

- Try not to get overwhelmed. Digital tools serve as an addition to existing knowledge on facilitation.
- Read and test digital tools before using them in a dialogue.
- Digital tools are not an activity, they are a method to organise and develop a specific activity.
- Digital tools are not free and require investment.
- Inform yourself about privacy concerns and inform participants when using a specific tool.
- Learn, practice and invest in trying out new tools to diversify your methods.

C. COMMON MISSTEPS WHEN FACILITATING AN ONLINE DIALOGUE

Framing and contextualising

Before hosting an online dialogue, it is important to frame and present the topic of discussion to participants. When framing an online dialogue activity, explicitly state the rules and expectations for involvement and present issues as opportunities rather than problems. This helps create boundaries around the online dialogue and positions participants at the centre of a topic. This is an essential first step in setting a positive tone and expectations for involvement.

Process management

Effective process management includes clearly explaining the consultation process, expectations, workload, dialogue principles as well as moderation guidelines. A simple way to do this is to incorporate a short video introducing participants to the online dialogue space.

Understanding behavioural modes

Understanding behavioural modes in your online dialogue can help better manage and facilitate discussions. There are three main behavioural modes to look out for in online youth policy dialogues: monologue, debate and dialogue.

- **A debate** occurs when participants read and react to each other's posts but are competing to win the debate by presenting their best argument.
 - **Dialogue** is what happens when participants read and respond to each other's comments, ask questions and build on their ideas and understandings of the topics.
- **A monologue** is what happens when participants visit a forum once, leave their comments and never return. In this case, the framing may need to be reconsidered to reinvigorate the discussion.

Mapping youth policy dialogues

A mapping exercise can help the facilitator understand participants' capability to apply the tools, skills and competencies shared throughout the course. Moreover, allocating time for feedback at an individual level or in small groups is key to ensuring a satisfactory implementation.





D. COURSE PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Study the target audience of the session. Be aware of participants' profiles and backgrounds and adapt the facilitation accordingly.
2. Keep in mind the freedoms and limitations that an online learning space offers. Consider technical issues that might arise and make sure to have a back-up plan.
3. Set realistic objectives based on the budget and human resources allocated.
4. Listen as much as you talk: apply active listening.
5. Ensure that your group is balanced and that the policy dialogue last an appropriate amount of time.
6. Do not underestimate the logistical preparation and the impact that the practical setting has on the outcomes of a session.
7. Diversify your tools and methods to maintain high levels of attention from participants.
8. Balance your knowledge on the topic with good practical tools.
9. Assess whether you are the right facilitator for the group (check your own biases toward specific groups).
10. Feel the room: the success of a policy dialogue depends on keeping all people well informed and engaged during the process.

*The NSC performed an evaluation two months after the end of the course to assess the competence and knowledge acquired by participants. Among other questions, participants were asked to give recommendations to facilitators for setting up an online policy dialogue.

CHAPTER 4

CHECKLIST FOR ONLINE FACILITATORS

PLATFORMS AND MATERIALS TO SUPPORT PARTICIPANTS

- Consider the right platforms for communication between facilitators and participants.
- Online platforms should serve as a knowledge hub for participants.
- Digital tools that should be able to withstand poor internet connection.
- Prepare an introductory panel discussion to demystify the requirements of the course and its application in youth development.
- Diversify the profiles of panellists.
- Use short videos, PowerPoint presentations and blogs. They serve as a reference point for participants.

CONTENT DELIVERY

- Schedule regular meetings with online participants. This can help remove communication barriers.
- Post in advance content on the online platform.
- Adjust the time of the sessions to meet participants availability.
- Allocate more time to practical sessions.
- To give continuity to the course, transform the modules offered to self-paced e-learning.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE COURSE

- Ensure that selected participants come from different professional backgrounds in the youth development sphere.
 - Ensure regional representation to enrich discussions.
 - Ensure that participants are comfortable contributing to the discussion.
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There can be various factors that affect dialogues between policy-makers and young people. These include the design and setting of a youth consultation, the ability of the facilitator to tackle sensitive topics and the level of participants' engagement.

Therefore, facilitators play a vital role in shaping and encouraging effective dialogues that produce shared results. As more dialogues are increasingly taking place online, the skills of facilitators must adapt to a distinct set of factors, from digital fatigue to technical problems and limited non-verbal communication. If not addressed with the right skill set, these issues risk undermining the effectiveness of online dialogues. With this handbook, the North-South Centre intends to share with a wider audience of practitioners some of the resources and insights gathered while running the training course for facilitators of online policy dialogue in the youth field.

Tools and tips have been curated to facilitate virtual dialogues, consultations and experience-sharing. These insights will support facilitators to ensure a high level of engagement among all youth stakeholders while following the Council of Europe's human-rights approach.

ENG

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