Digital resilience: Youth strategies against racist and xenophobic acts through computer systems

North-South Centre's Intercultural Conférence

Kotor, Montenegro
24-25 October 2024

RATIONALE

The world is observing a surge in racist and xenophobic crimes through computer systems due notably to a proliferation of conflicts and crises. These specific forms of cybercrime not only exacerbate existing tensions and polarisation within and between regions, but also contribute to strain relations between the global North and the global South.

Amidst this surge, particular concern arises regarding the involvement of young people. Statistics[1] reveal that the young generations of today experience higher rates of victimization. Adding to this concern, a recent study conducted in Europe[2] uncovered a worrying trend of a significant portion of young people admitting engaging in various forms of cybercrime and online harm, including hate, racist and xenophobic crimes online.

This concern is not confined to Europe alone but resonates across the Middle East and Africa. Africa is experiencing a significant growth in cybercrime activities, driven by the rapid expansion of internet penetration among its youth population - the largest in world. This growth occurs against the backdrop of historical challenges and a proliferation of conflicts on the continent[3]. Consequently, regional organisations like ALECSO or the African Union seek to address this concern by emphasizing the imperative to prevent the spread of hateful ideologies, genocide, and hate crimes in its various forms, including online[4].

The normalization of risky online behaviour among young people, coupled with a notable gap in cybercrime education tailored to their online experiences, highlights the urgent need for comprehensive cybercrime education and awareness initiatives. These initiatives should complement existing legal frameworks or step in to fill the void in cases where such frameworks are absent.

The Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention)[5] and its additional protocols, specifically its first Additional Protocol concerning the criminalisation of acts of racist and xenophobic

---

[1] Debb, S., Schaffer, D., & Colson, D. (2020). A reverse digital divide: Comparing information security behaviours of generation Y and generation Z adults. International Journal of Cybersecurity Intelligence and Cybercrime, 3(1), 42-55. Available at: https://www.doi.org/10.52306/03010420GXUV5876. Accessed on 25 March 2024.

[2] Julia Davidson, Mary AikenMary Aiken, Kirsty Phillips, Ruby FarrFarr (2022) CC -DRIVER 2021 European Youth Survey. University of East London, Institute for Institute for Connected Communities. Available at: https://www.ccdriver-h2020.com/publications. Accessed 25 March 2024.

[3] The World Report 2023 of Human Rights Watch provides, among other, an overview of the proliferation conflicts around the world, including 23 countries in the African continent. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023. Accessed on 17 April 2024.

[4] Since 2017 the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union convenes annually in April, a PSC open meeting on hate crimes and fighting genocide ideology in Africa.

[5] The Budapest Convention is the first international treaty specifically focused on cybercrime and electronic evidence, and most relevant legally binding treaty today. More information here.

nature committed through computer systems[6], play a crucial role in combating cybercrime across borders, including hate speech and crimes. The number of ratifications of the Budapest Convention, 70 countries to the date, and of its first Protocol, currently 35, illustrate the global scope and relevance of these pioneering instruments.

Within the Council of Europe, the North-South Centre is a key instrument of the external dimension of the Council of Europe, that serves as a vector for transmitting its values, standards, and tools beyond the European continent through political dialogue, networking, and the implementation of cooperation projects, notably among young people. As an Enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe, it brings together several European and African countries to exchange ideas and act on shared concerns, such as the fight against cybercrime.

THE NORTH-SOUTH INTERCULTURAL CONFERENCE

The North-South Centre's Intercultural Conference is part of its "North-South Dialogues": a new initiative of the NSC's medium-term strategy, launched in alignment with the outcomes of the Reykjavik Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe. The initiative is designed to bridge the growing divide between the North and the South and serve as a platform for discussion on the state of North-South relations and opportunities for mutual development, around key Council of Europe standards. By fostering dialogue, the "North-South Dialogues" seek to engage the widest possible number of countries from the South and the North to identify points of contention and build bridges around standards such as in the field of cybercrime.

With the Budapest Convention as a reference, and building on the conclusions of the study presented on the occasion of its 20th anniversary of the First Protocol[7], the North-South Intercultural Conference will gather experts from the North and the South, to exchange knowledge and practice on how to best combine legal frameworks and social initiatives engaging young people, to provide sustainable solutions to counter racist and xenophobic crimes committed through computer systems.

This specialized conference is organized in partnership with the authorities of Montenegro and benefits from financial contributions by the governments of Malta, Portugal, and Spain within the framework of NSC projects. It also receives support from CyberSouth+, a joint initiative of the European Union and the Council of Europe that aims to strengthen legislation and institutional capacities on cybercrime and electronic evidence in the region of the Southern Neighbourhood in line with human rights and rule of law requirements.

---

[6] ETS 189, hereinafter referred to as the "First Protocol".
[7] Implementing the First Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on Xenophobia and Racism: Good practice study. 1 December 2023.

OBJECTIVES

1. Delve deeper into the extent of involvement of young people as perpetrators of racist and xenophobic acts committed through computer systems, both based on recent academia work and experiences of key actors in this area.
2. With the First Additional Protocol of the Budapest Convention as a reference, promote a better understanding of existing standards to address this problem, the benefits of applying them, and implementation challenges.
3. Devise criteria to design youth-friendly initiatives aiming to increase the awareness of the youth about cybercrime in general, and concretely, of racist and xenophobic acts through computer systems and their ability to prevent and combat them.

FORMAT

The one-and-a-half-day specialized conference is designed as a dialogue among experts seated around a U-shaped table. It will be structured into three key sessions:

- An overview of current trends and threats across different regions, including a youth perspective.
- A presentation of key standards addressing the issue, and how these can be, or are being, utilized by young people.
- Recommendations for creating youth-friendly initiatives to combat racist and xenophobic acts committed via computer systems.

After the initial presentations in each session, all participants will be encouraged to share insights from their national, regional, or international experiences.

OUTCOME

At the end of the Conference the key findings and recommendations will be included in the Conference's Declaration, and they be applied in future youth projects and initiatives by the North-South Centre.