

# On-line meeting of International Stakeholders active in the field of Youth

3 June 2020

# REPORT





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#### **CONCEPT NOTE AND AGENDA**

Considering the current pandemic crisis, which is challenging traditional spaces for dialogue, the meeting ensured a space for interaction and mutual understanding among players of the youth sector at inter-regional level: international entities, inter-governmental institutions and youth-led umbrella organisations.

The on-line event was designed to be a safe and dynamic space for dialogue, peer-learning and partnership building, where inputs and initiatives are shared, commented and combined in an informal, yet technical manner. The meeting's starting point was the sharing of the different ways in which major players in the youth sector are adjusting their agendas, programmes and initiatives according to the current unexpected circumstances, assessing together the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on entities working with young people.

The online meeting also explored perspectives, insights and concerns in order to find a common ground in terms of priorities, challenges and messages worth being mainstreamed at inter-regional level to preserve the centrality of youth policies and of the role of young people also during these challenging times.

The main aims were to create/maintain connection among like-minded organisations, to draw a picture of the state of art of the current situation at interregional level and to share the challenges of the youth sector amidst the pandemic. In some parts of the globe, in fact, the COVID-19 pandemic brought additional concerns related to the shrinking space for civil society.

The meeting was organized in the framework of the "Global youth" project promoted by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe to foster youth participation and global citizenship through inter-regional cooperation. The project seeks a greater interaction and coordination among international players of the youth sector, who usually have scarce opportunities to discuss, share, learn and cooperate if not within specific project/programme frameworks or at the margins of institutional public fora. More frequent and structured, yet informal, moments of dialogue among international entities, inter-governmental institutions and youth-led umbrella organisations could contribute to the creation of a new momentum for the youth sector.

A second more pragmatic and practical meeting is foreseen in October 2020 with the view of encouraging synergies to avoid overlapping of initiatives during 2021 (which will probably be very dense in events) and increase the impact assessing the need of youth beneficiaries.

With these two meetings in 2020 (and a next one in 2021), the North-South Centre and its partners intend to create a path for dialogue, peer-learning and partnership to build a stronger multilevel global governance.

AGENDA			
Торіс	Methodology		
Getting acquainted with the participants and with the impacts of COVID-19 on participating organisations	Expo area of video contributions previously produced by participants, accessible from 2 <sup>nd</sup> June onwards		
Welcoming and introduction	Presentation by the facilitator		
Speed networking	Speed meetings in pairs		
I. Covid-19 and its impact on agendas, methodologies and initiatives.			
II. On-line dimension and outreach of youth multipliers	Three moderated sessions (video and chat)		
III: State-of-art of inter-regional cooperation in the context of Covid-19 pandemic	with instant surveys (Polls)		
Conclusions	Wrapping up and gathering of elements for evaluation and next meeting's agenda (instant <i>Poll</i> and contributions on chat)		
Extra space for networking	Session rooms available for meetings self-organised by participants (Optional)		

# PARTICIPANTS



Organisation	Participant name	Position
North-South Centre of the Council of Europe	Ms Rocío CERVERA	Deputy Director
	Mr Graziano TULLIO	Project Officer - Youth Cooperation
	Mr Miguel RUA	Support Assistant
African Union - Office of the Special Envoy on Youth	Mr Serigne NDIAYE	Member of the Youth Advisory Council
African, Caribbean and Pacific Young Professionals Network (ACP YPN)	Ms Adelaide HIRWE	Programme Manager
Anna Lindh Foundation	Ms Eleonora INSALACO	Head of Operations and Intercultural Research - Programme and Networks Unit
Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)	Ms Leonie NAGARAJAN	Director - Education Department
	Ms Freya CHOW-PAUL	Project Officer - Education Department
Assembly of European Regions - Youth Regional Network (AER-YRN)	Mr Vahram VARDAYAN	President of the Committee on Economy
Council of Europe - Youth Department	Mr Lazslo MILUTINOVITS	Educational Advisor - Youth Department
	Ms Andrea UGRINOSKA	Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth
	Mr Mihai DRAGOS	Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth
European Commission	Ms Agata SOBIECH	Head of Sector – Youth - DG DEVCO/DEAR
	Mr David FLYNN	Programme Assistant - DG DEVCO/DEAR
European Youth Forum (YFJ)	Ms Tina HOCEVAR	Vice-President
	Ms Assia OULKADI	Policy officer - Interregional & Global Cooperation

International Coordination Meeting of Youth	Mr Tarek EZZINE	Task-force member as Vice-President for External Affairs of International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)
Organisations (ICMYO)	Mr Roy IBRAHIM	Task-force member as Programme Coordinator of International Young Catholic Students (IYCS)
League of Arab States	Ms Chouaa DASSOUKI	Director of Population Policies - Technical Secretariat of Arab Council of Population and Development
	Ms Shaymaa ABDEL MONEIM	Coordinator of the Population Policies Department
Network of International Youth Organisations in Africa (NIYOA)	Mr Timothy ONYANGO	Member of the Board
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and	Ms Gamze IGRIOĞLU	Policy Analyst - Public Governance Directorate
Development (OECD)	Ms Charlotte DENISE-ADAM	Policy Analyst - Public Governance Directorate
Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)	Ms Erida DOBRUSHI	Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to the OSCE - representing Chairmanship-in- Office of the OSCE
Pan-African Youth Union	Dr Monzir ALMOSIREF	Deputy Secretary-General
	Mr Layne ROBINSON	Head of Social Policy Development
The Commonwealth	Ms Pegah MOULANA	Youth Human Rights Democracy Network
	Ms Esanju MASEKA	Youth Human Rights Democracy Network
UNESCO	Ms Maria KYPRIOTOU	Youth development specialist - Social and Human Sciences Sector - Youth Programme
Union for the Mediterranean	Mr Abdelkader EL KHISSASSI	Responsible for Youth Affairs - Social & Civil Affairs
United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC)	Mr Alessandro GIROLA	Programming Coordinator - Youth and Education Programme
	Mr Bram VAN HAVER	Project Management Specialist - Youth and Education Programme
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - Arab States Regional Office	Mr Osama ALJABER	Advocacy and Youth Coordinator
	Ms Razan MASAD	Regional Electoral Analyst
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) - Arab States Regional Office (ASRO)	Mr Samir ANOUTY	Regional Adviser, Youth and HIV\AIDS
UN Major Group for Children and Youth (UNMGCY)	Mr Mohamed EDABBAR	Regional Focal Point Middle East & North Africa
	Mr Khaled EMAM	Global Focal Point
UNOY Peacebuilders	Mr Mridul UPADHYAY	Regional representative for Asia
	Mr Tobias SARATIEL	Regional representative for East & Southern Africa
Youth Forum of the Portuguese Speaking Countries Community (FJCPLP)	Mr João VIDEIRA	Board member of the Portuguese national youth council (CNJ) holding the general secretariat of FJCPLP

#### REPORT

## Covid-19 and its impact on agendas, methodologies and initiatives.

#### Instant poll n.1:





#### Instant poll n.2 :

#### Which are the major challenges you faced?



#### Adaptation to digital resource mainly focused on remaining connected

Major events have been canceled and were replaced with their on-line version with webinars and other small-scale activities being organised with the primary objective of keeping in touch with partners, member organisations and beneficiaries.

The main concern was to remain connected with the network and this concern pushed organisations to look for new digital means.

#### "Especially in these times of social distancing, it is important to keep the community alive" Eleonora Insalaco (Anna Lindh Foundationn)

#### A fast reaction to gather data

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed organisations to work extensively and rapidly to quickly understand how the crisis would impact young people in the short, medium and long term, advising and supporting governments and/or youth in matters of research, data analysis and policy development.

E.g.:

• INTERGOVERNMENTAL LEVEL

The *OECD* launched a survey on "youth and COVID" providing evidence to governments to better cope with the uncertainty and to support inclusive recovery plans after the crisis. The survey reached 47 member countries also with the support of the European Youth Forum who is distributing the survey.

The results are gathered in a <u>policy brief</u> on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on young people and youth organisations.

CO-MANAGEMENT (CSOs AND GOVERNMENTS)

THE JOINT COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CMJ) OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE YOUTH DEPARTMENT launched a <u>survey</u> directed to people working or volunteering in youth organisations, initiatives and networks across Europe on the effects of COVID-19 in youth work and youth activities. The study aims at better understanding the situation across Council of Europe member States in order to provide appropriate support to youth organisations and constructive guidance to governmental bodies working on youth-related issues.

 UN SYSTEM AND YOUNG PEOPLE THE UNITED NATIONS MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH built a platform to map youthled actions leading the response to health, social, and economic consequences of the pandemic. The platform serves to showcase youth-led activities, to support key INGOs and UN agencies in the identification of partnerships and resources, and to connect like-minded young people. <u>https://www.unmgcy.org/youth-initiatives</u>

#### A learning process and an opportunity for a digital shift

Adjusting to the digital dimension was particularly challenging for international institutions and intergovernmental organisations due to the lack of know-how and "smart working" culture.

However, the need to keep implementing activities without creating major gaps in yearly work plans pushed organisations to be creative in finding solutions and to be fast in learning new methodologies.

Increased familiarity with digital tools and on-line resources enabled the launch of new initiatives and the setting up of new platforms allowing the organisation to, in certain cases, hold more activities than forecasted and reaching new groups with more cost-effective resources.

The initial excitement concerning the on-line experience is likely to increase the number and the quality of on-line activities in the future promoted by these types of organisations/institutions, implementing a digital shift that although announced was not always vigorously pursued.



"This is a learning process; we were forced to look for digital tools to reach more young and more intensively. Time will show whether the quality of this engagement will be the same" Agata Sobiech (European Commission)

#### Many actions but lacking coordination

Organisations moved to the on-line world quite fast setting up a considerable number of initiatives in a short amount of time. However, this quick reaction and eagerness "to be online" lacked investment in strategic and coordinated efforts. As a result, there is the risk of overlapping activities and non-efficient allocation of resources coupled with unclear impact of those activities in terms of benefits for young people. A more coordinated approach could improve quality and efficiency of activities and have a greater impact.

"Duplication of efforts may also overwhelm/exhaust youth who engage with us" Maria Kypriotou (UNESCO)

#### Adapting programmes and encountering new challenges

The circumstances offered an opportunity to explore, test and reflect on different aspects of the adaptation process and programme implementation through digital means.

Even though webinars and online meetings using platforms such as Zoom are helpful, this should not represent the main element of the digital transposition of youth-related work. A structured dialogue which encompasses a continuous flow of communication with different stakeholders (educators, youth, media, civic society, etc.) is needed. Moreover, it is important to hold facilitated encounters, each of them focused on different aspects: from a first meeting to take stock of the situation, to a second one assessing priorities, and finally coming up with the design of a new plan and new activities.

This creates two different type of challenges:

<u>Organisational challenges</u>: this comprehensive dialogical process forced organisations - especially the ones having a multi-level and multi-stakeholders' approach - to reorganise their entire workflow: drawing an extensive online roadmap, deconstructing the initial project and redesigning it according to stakeholders' inputs and finally reallocating funds.

An additional element of stress is the uncertainty around the feasibility of the alternative plans designed: especially youth organisations who invest a lot of energy in the design of contingency measures without being sure if and which of them will be implemented.

<u>Qualitative challenges</u>: the process of adapting activities to the on-line scenario creates issues in terms of impact assessment of such a shift. The challenge is discerning what can be transferred on-line ensuring the quality standards of the actions implemented, bearing in mind that certain elements of the projects cannot be adapted to the virtual scenario without compromising its effectiveness.

Resources and know-how necessary for such an impact assessment and on-line transposition of quality standard of off-line initiatives remains quite limited.

Not only the direct implementation of activities, but also the management of granting schemes and the policy development processes had to take into consideration the new circumstances. E.g.:

- The <u>UNAOC</u> "youth solidarity fund" is generally directed to youth organisations relying on a strong volunteer base. The fact that these organisations are currently not able to mobilize people had a huge impact in the implementation of their activities. Considering the current challenges, UNAOC is allowing an extra degree of flexibility for re-shaping its projects.
- The new <u>ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE</u> (AC) was recently elected and started its mandate working directly on-line without the possibility for members to neither physically meet each other nor get to know members of the CDEJ (AC's governmental counterpart). Therefore, the co-management structure of the Youth department encountered some difficulties considering that the functioning of this body relies on a constructive dialogue inclusive of different perspectives on youth policies.

"The challenge is not only about the transferring of the activities on-line, but also to understand what can be transferred ensuring quality standards and to re-assessing the impact on the beneficiaries of such a shift." **Rocío Cervera (North-South Centre of the Council of Europe)** 

#### Crucial role of data gathering for youth policies development

To organise any evidence-based youth policy work, the availability of data is a crucial factor. Unfortunately, adequate data sets that accurately define the current reality and the kind of policy response we might need are not yet available.

This is due to the fact that until the COVID-19 pandemic the world was defined by certain key indicators and targets (on youth employment, on poverty, on health...). In light of the current developments, these measurements need to be revised, several considerations need to be made and new targets identified.

The challenges are to identify the relevant information, to understand what the best way is to gather it and how to use it to design and implement effective policies and to prioritise governments' funding commitments.

#### Youth organisations better equipped to manage the new virtual dimension

While the world seems to have slowed down during the pandemic, we witnessed a high level of engagement from the youth's side.

Youth associations lead on-line initiatives with less difficulties than larger and more structured institutions. Their fast, creative and effective capacity to react was also showcased at the level of UN agencies, creating new spaces for young people to be heard.

The importance of youth participation was highlighted during webinars and other events promoted by intergovernmental organisations. Voluntary work of young people was acknowledged as crucial to cope with the crisis, filling gaps in social structures and fostering solidarity.

In the digital era, young people have an extra gear due to their extensive use of on-line resources and the by now rooted "on-line working culture" within many youth networks.

Digital tools and methodologies are already systematically in place especially in youth organisations operating at regional and inter-regional level. The need to overcome physical distances while maintaining a high level of cooperation and coordination among partners is not a recent issue for youth networks (mainly due to their limited financial resources).

E.g.:

- <u>UNOY:</u> several activities were already conceived to happen virtually such as: i) the interactive open on-line course "Erasmus+ virtual exchange youth peace and security"; ii) the "ALLY" project preventing violent extremism in South Asia; iii) the Asian Youth4peace mentoring and funding scheme using the Youth 360 methodology.
- <u>YOUTH FORUM OF THE ARAB REGION</u>: Though the feasibility of the 2020 edition of the forum promoted by UNFPA is still under evaluation, <u>the youth flagship projects</u> designed by young people during the previous youth forum (2019, Tunisia) are ongoing and led by youth through digital means. The project designed last year was already considering the development of an interactive online platform.

# "The pandemic also caused disruption to young people of their learning, educational and professional paths. However, they are the ones maintaining social cohesion in the communities through volunteering innovative initiatives"

Erida Dobrushi (Republic of Albania - Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE)

#### Undermining the advocacy work of youth organisations

The cancellation of major events (e.g.: ECOSOC youth forum) is jeopardizing the possibilities for CSOs to be heard in relevant institutional settings and to advance the youth agenda.

The few events that were adapted to the on-line format did not allow the necessary space for meaningful interaction. Inevitably, the condensation of a two-day event in a two-hour on-line session drastically limited young peoples' opportunities to contribute to the discussion, to meet decision makers and to build partnerships. In a context where the space for civic society is already shrinking, these circumstances are further hindering youth participation.

#### Rapid change of agenda, priorities and policies

E.g.:

- The <u>EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM</u> already published the "<u>European Youth Blueprint to Recovery</u>" presenting a series of facts, data and policy recommendations aiming to help youth organisations to reorganise post-pandemic and influencing the institutional responses.
- The JOINT COUNCIL ON YOUTH OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE is currently working on a Recommendation on "Youth shrinking space for civil society" which also takes into consideration the impact of the pandemic. Likewise, it is expected that the pandemic will impact the review process of the Recommendation on young people's access to rights by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers that will happen next year.

On the other hand, the pandemic provided unexpected opportunities to highlight and advance youth agenda elements related to climate change and the environment.

The reduction of carbon emissions due to the lockdown and travel restrictions contributed to an increase in public awareness on such issues and to strengthen young people's demands for a more sustainable and green economy.

#### An integrated approach towards hybrid solutions

There is no doubt that virtual exchanges can hardly replace the value of face-to-face events. Especially when working on intercultural dialogue where physical interaction and "living together" is essential. Therefore, rather than shifting all work on-line, the focus should be about how to better integrate the on-line dimension in current processes. A first step could be re-assessing mobility needs: while for capacity building initiatives it remains fundamental for young people to meet physically, for partners meetings and short conferences among professionals an investment in on-line solutions might be appropriate.

"Hybrid events" could constitute a realistic scenario where localized physical meetings would integrate a greater digital space or where a series of small-scale national initiatives would digitally connect within an international framework.

Some pilot projects are already planned in this direction:

- The North-South Centre's Lisbon Forum (annual two-day event with high-level institutional representatives, field experts, academia and practitioners from the educational and youth sector) for the year 2020 will integrate a physical meeting within an on-line space;
- The ASEF's virtual <u>Young Leaders Summit 2020</u> on "Sustainable Development in a post-COVID-19 world" is embedded in a one year hybrid youth programme including capacity building, policy dialogues, youth surveys and is designed back-to-back with the Summit of Asian/European Head of States this November in Cambodia.

#### Global overview: shared concerns:

All stakeholders share similar concerns related to:

- the quick digital adaptation of physical activities which creates uncertainty concerning the assessment of the quality, the outcomes and the impact of the actions;
- the need to gather reliable data and to map relevant activities in the short term puts organisations under stress and increases the burden on young people to increase their engagement online (surveys, mapping, campaign, etc.);
- part of the funding might get lost due to limitation on the extension of the projects' implementation period and of the degree of flexibility allowed for the readjustments of the budget;
- the cancellation of many events in 2020 might lead to tight and frantic schedules for 2021, with the risk of overlapping events. Joint scale events and synergies of agendas among like-minded organisations might mitigate the 2021 scenario.



# **On-line dimension and outreach of youth multipliers**

Instant poll n.4:



Access to digital tools varies across the globe: in some regions the on-line dimension creates more barriers due to lack of digital skills, limited access to technology or even absence of internet when it comes to young people in remote areas.

However, there are certain positive aspects of the new digital engagement with young people:

- It makes it possible to organise more activities (considering practical and financial reasons);
- It engages more stakeholders and allows for the participation of groups encountering difficulties with travel and/or obtaining visa. In this sense, a digital approach may increase outreach and inclusiveness;
- It allows for a more tailored approach in capacity building (e.g. for training courses' follow-up, UNAOC put in place a one-to-one mentoring process supporting the work that former participants are doing around the world);
- It opens the doors of events which tended to be reserved: more organisations are considering allowing a broader access to meetings that in their physical version were restricted.

"It might be the moment to consider the great opportunities that the digital means allows to address the new forms of exclusion" *Mihai Dragos* (Council of Europe - Advisory Council on Youth)



# State-of-art of interregional cooperation in the context of covid-19 pandemic



The need to strengthen inter-regional youth cooperation, to foster solidarity and to highlight mutual interdependence is widely acknowledged.

Even though the inter-regional dimension is recognized as fundamental, very few initiatives currently have such a dimension: webinars and other similar events dealing with the COVID-19 response had a rather national or regional focus. Especially in these current circumstances, coordination meetings gathering stakeholders at inter-regional level are crucial to increase the impacts of activities.

More than a space to share activities, these meetings should promote synergies and the setup of a practical framework for joint initiatives.

#### "More than webinars, we need to support youth-led national/local initiatives by giving to young people something concrete and close to their reality." Samir Anouty (United Nations Population Fund - Arab States Regional Office)

#### Critical points of the current state of inter-regional youth cooperation

- There is the fear that governments might not perceive the youth sector and its work for cooperation and dialogue a priority to address during the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. To address this concern, the Anna Lindh Foundation launched the call <u>"#Covid-19: Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue and Cooperation</u> <u>must continue</u>" an advocacy action to keep the international youth cooperation as a high priority in governments agenda.
- The full and long-lasting commitment of partners is a critical issue especially for inter-regional structures based on volunteerism. The digital boost brought by the COVID-19 pandemic might help to mitigate the risk of disengagement, guarantying more accountability and better monitoring of the actions agreed to be undertaken by each partner.
- Differences and specific issues present at regional level affect the inter-regional level: umbrella organisations and other youth-led structures, trans-national platforms where youth converge and where structured mechanisms representing young people are fundamental elements to enable national/regional stakeholders to participate in inter-regional coordination efforts.

If in some countries these elements are well established, in others they are less developed due to variances in the economic, sociocultural and political systems among countries of the same region.

Moreover, in some regions national youth structures are often influenced by governmental agendas, undermining their international cooperation capacity.

"These informal meetings help to re-connect with former partners and can trigger the interest of other youth organisations and build up from there." Leonie Nagarajan (Asia-Europe Foundation)

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#### Recommendations

It is essential to streamline the different inter-regional cooperation mechanisms/frameworks by:

- setting up stable channels, platforms and methodologies to allow regular exchanges and fast partnership building;
- making scale resources, know-how and funding to support youth-led organisations available;
- linking the international scope with national levels;
- encouraging strategic/action plans for the establishment of a practical framework for joint activities;
- enabling synergies among organisations having common or complementary agendas to limit the duplication of initiatives and overlapping of programmes.

"Different organisations have different needs, but also different strengths and expertise to offer. This justifies that we coordinate and support each other." Mridul Upadhyay (UNOY peacebuilders)



#### Instant poll: n.6

#### What is a common concern that justifies coordination for the benefit of young people?

- To Increase meaningful participation of young people in political and economic life, providing tool and ensuring representation in policy making process, thus improving good governance: a stronger interregional coordination will support to channel the voice of young people
- To foster global citizenship and address human rights issues emerging as a result of the current situation, e.g. health, shrinking space for civil society, environmental sustainability, intercultural dialogue and peace and security.

\*aggregated data from open question's replies on chat

"Youth-led organisations are under the spotlight for their creativity and adaptation, becoming role models for global solidarity. Let the youth act & shine!" Roy Ibrahim (International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations)

#### **FINAL EVALUATION**

1) Do you think the meeting helped in finding a common ground and increase mutual understanding among youth stakeholders?



#### 2) Do you feel that this meeting contributed to push forward inter-regional cooperation?



#### 3) Do you consider pertinent the topics discussed and the questions raised?



#### 4) Do you retain pertinent and useful to participate at the next meeting in mid-October?



#### Short-term follow-up:

#### In these 10 days after the meeting....





I was completely absorbed by my regular tasks and responsibilities with no much time to reflect and follow-up the meeting

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