

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

North-South Centre's
Intercultural Conference

Kotor, Montenegro
24-25 October 2024

Kotor Declaration

Preamble

The Conference "Digital Resilience: Youth Strategies Against Racist and Xenophobic Acts through Computer Systems" organised in Kotor, Montenegro on 24 and 25 October 2024, under the auspices of the [North-South Centre of the Council of Europe](#) (NSC), in partnership with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, and with support of [CyberSouth+ project](#), a joint initiative of the European Union and the Council of Europe, addressed the growing challenges posed by online hate crime, based on xenophobia, and racism, particularly their impact on young people.

Recalling the [Reykjavik Declaration](#) and the role of the NSC as a key external instrument of the Council of Europe, the Intercultural Conference of the North-South Centre organised in Kotor was the first of its kind, being a new initiative of the NSC's [medium-term strategy](#) 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 explore opportunities for mutual development based on internationally recognised standards of shared concern. It brought together group of stakeholders from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East - law enforcement officials, decision makers, international organisations and experts, and civil society, including young people, which jointly recognised:

- The alarming surge in online hate speech and related crimes, which is driven by global conflicts, socio-political instability, polarisation, and technological shifts, disproportionately affecting young people, who are both victims and, at times, contributors to these harmful behaviours.
- The lack of age-specific data on perpetrators of online hate crimes, which complicates the development of effective, youth-targeted strategies.
- The limited understanding among young people about existing legal frameworks and their implications, the increasing spread of disinformation campaigns particularly affecting young people, and the lack of education on safe ICTs use, that results in a gap in young people's understanding of the dangers and of their responsibility in the digital sphere.
- The crucial intersection of cybercrime laws and freedom of expression in ensuring that combating hate speech does not infringe on fundamental rights. The conference presented the discussion paper "[Freedom of Expression within the Context of Action on Cybercrime - Practical Considerations](#)," which provides guidance for policymakers, legislators and criminal justice practitioners in this regard.
- The important role of the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and its First Additional Protocol, which remain central tools in combatting online racism and xenophobia globally. While the First Protocol focuses on substantive criminal law by requiring Parties to criminalise a number of acts of xenophobic and racist nature, the Convention's procedural tools for cybercrime

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investigation, collection of electronic evidence, and international cooperation are essential for enforcing provisions against xenophobia and racism¹. Additionally, the [Second Additional Protocol](#) enhances cooperation and electronic evidence disclosure with built-in protections for human rights and data privacy.

- The importance of regional instruments in addressing cybercrime and hate speech, like the [Malabo Convention](#) of the African Union and other initiatives that address human rights, AI, and emerging technologies. Its [Transitional Justice Policy](#) also offers a framework for post-conflict reconciliation.
- The value of specific education programmes of the [Arab League of Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation \(ALECSO\)](#), Montenegro's Strategy for Interculturalism and Social Cohesion, the [Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#) and the "[Human rights Education for Youth \(HEY\)](#)" of the North-South Centre as well as of civil society and youth-led initiatives are crucial to enhance young people's competence and resilience in the digital space².

Considering the challenges and opportunities identified, the following recommendations are put forth to guide ongoing and future efforts aimed at fostering resilience and cooperation in combating cybercrime and promoting digital responsibility among youth.

Recommendations

- National authorities should be encouraged to join the Budapest Convention and its additional protocols. Those within the membership of the African Union should also be encouraged to accede to the Malabo Convention.
- Criminal justice authorities should use criminalisation as the last resort. Priority should be given to introducing restorative justice measures where applicable, especially where young people are involved.
- Criminal justice authorities should introduce regulations requiring social media platforms to moderate content and remove illegal content promptly upon complaint.
- National authorities and international organisations responsible for both, formal and non-formal education, shall be invested in preventive programs to raise awareness of young people on digital safety skills and on hate crime legislation.
- National authorities and international organisations shall also promote programmes to enhance mutual understanding, shared experiences, and the values of interculturalism and social cohesion, through empathy and solidarity, and overall human security, focusing on youth-oriented actions. The latter includes fostering international cultural youth exchanges and

¹ States may wish to consider the findings of the good practice study entitled "[Implementing the First Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on Xenophobia and Racism](#)", which highlights the importance of the First Protocol in light of the growing number of hate speech and hate crimes online, documents the practices of Parties to the Protocol and other States, explains key issues and concepts, and promotes synergies between the Protocol and related instruments and initiatives.

² The Conference featured examples of the work of [Global Campus of Human Rights](#), [FAD-Juventud](#), [African Youth Ambassador for Peace \(AYAP\)](#), CAREP Montenegro, [Hate Trackers](#) or [Hate Blockers](#) among others.

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platforms where youth voices across regions can influence policies on digital resilience, where models like the [African Youth Ambassadors for Peace](#) or the [youth co-management system of the Council of Europe](#) could be expanded to other regions.

- Local partnerships in diverse cultural contexts should be encouraged, as local organizations can better tailor initiatives to specific community needs and reach young people without access to mainstream digital literacy resources.
- Efforts should be made to promote the creation of inclusive, non-hierarchical spaces where young people can share experiences, cultivate empathy, develop critical thinking, and strengthen fact-checking skills.
- The [NSC's Human rights Education for Youth programme of the Council of Europe \(HEY\)](#) should prioritise the development and adaptation of training courses related to digital skills and safety on a range of topics related to international standards in the field of media literacy, freedom of expression, data protection, cybercrime, hate speech and artificial intelligence.
- The NSC should leverage its mission and geographical scope to coordinate a working group that provides an annual report on specific actions, training opportunities, and outcomes as a follow-up to this conference, that engages a strategic coalition of partners from both the Global North and South, including ALECSO and the African Union.

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