

GUIDANCE NOTE: YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND INCLUSIVE PEACE

Introduction

This guidance note is the result of a World Café Workshop co-hosted by the European Parliament and the European Institute of Peace in Brussels on 28 May 2024, as part of a series of events held to mark the Institute's 10-year anniversary. **Forty-five young political leaders and activists from across the globe** participated with attendees from the European Parliament's Young Political Leaders Alumni Network, Forbes, Friends of Europe, and colleagues within the Institute's network of personnel, advisors and practitioners working in the fields of conflict resolution and peacemaking.

The format of the workshop followed a World Café style, where participants were divided into separate tables that focused on four broad questions relating to youth engagement: inclusivity, communications and frontier technologies. They are: *To empower youth and bridging generational gaps in peace efforts; To find new more inclusive and localised paths to peaceful resolution of conflict; To make the case for non-violent conflict resolution in a changing geopolitical environment; To navigate the impact of emerging technologies in conflict resolution.*

Exploring these prompts, that can encapsulate some of the challenges from a youth perspective, each group was tasked with developing recommendations aimed at policymakers and peace practitioners on how to connect generations and build peace through dialogue. Based on the workshop, a small working group of young leaders and the Institute's personnel met to craft this guidance note. We acknowledge and are grateful to all the participants of the workshop whose thoughts are reflected in the following, as well as to the small working group for their time in formulating this note.

Recommendations

Empowering youth and bridging generational gaps in peace efforts

1. Recognition of Youth Diversity

Acknowledging that youth is not a homogenous group. Young people represent various intersecting identities, including gender, ethnicity, bodily ability, sexuality etc. Building non-exclusionary networks that represent the diverse range of concerns facing young people of different political persuasions and intersecting identities is vital. These networks should find sensitive and inclusive language to articulate the diverse array of worldviews and explore how conflict affects people differently.

2. Establishing Intergenerational Structures

Empowering young people and bridging generational gaps through formal and informal structures are critical components of sustainable peacebuilding efforts. Young people bear the burden of past generations' conflicts, yet they also carry the potential for change. In both formal and informal structures, a special emphasis must be placed on investing in meaningful mentorship

programmes, guiding young people to navigate and eventually transform these systems, whilst also improving mutual understanding and respect between generations.

3. **Facilitation of Dialogue in Safe Environments**

Facilitating intergenerational dialogue in safe, and neutral environments involving those directly affected by conflict. It is unacceptable that processes to discuss conflict take place without those directly affected. Capacity building units within new or established peacemaking organisations are needed to provide visa, travel and other technical and logistical support to mediators and activists operating in conflict zones. A frequent barrier to dialogue initiatives and in-person fora to build trust is an inability to secure visas and realistic travel options.

Inclusive and localised paths to peaceful resolution of conflict

1. **Recognition of Track II Dialogues**

Acknowledging the relevance and importance of Track II dialogues and encouraging youth engagement within these formal and informal structures. Grassroots movements, marginalised communities, private organisations, religious groups and other civil society actors have an important role to play. These groups must be encouraged to engage younger members whenever appropriate to do so.

2. **Localisation of Peace Negotiations**

Creating working groups that bridge the gap between Track I and Track II dialogues, whilst remaining cognisant that a binary choice between government and civil society actors is not an accurate depiction of the balance of power and influence. A less-hierarchical, 360-degree approach incorporates an understanding and mapping of the distribution of entry points for dialogue, identifies online influencers and power brokers among individuals, groups and movements, young and more experienced actors, government and civil society.

3. **Sustainable Funding for Track II Peace Structures**

Ensuring more predictable and sustainable funding for Track II peace structures, involving civil society and the local community. Legally-binding guarantees for sustainable funding are needed to build trust between donors and recipients that transcends shifting political priorities and interests. The sudden withdrawal of funds frequently leaves conflict resolution actors exposed and vulnerable to reprisals and leads to the erosion of trust. Participatory and peer-driven youth-led movements can provide inspiration for funding models that are more sustainable and geared towards tangible outcomes. Establishing long-term financial commitments and diversified funding sources can help insulate these efforts from economic and political instability, ensuring that peace initiatives can continue uninterrupted.

Making the case for non-violent conflict resolution in a changing geopolitical environment

1. Adherence to Ethical Journalism Practices

Urging news organisations to adhere to a mutually agreed ethical code of journalistic practice that reflects contemporary society and the constantly evolving media space. An ethical code within established media can help limit the proliferation of fake news and sensationalised clickbait. In an era of deep fakes and TikTok journalism, there is a market and scope for ethical media abiding by strict journalistic standards promoting a nuanced and unbiased retelling of historical events related to conflicts. Establishing an ethical code and other best practices will further ensure that content produced is conflict sensitive and not exploitative of individuals affected.

2. Research and Development on Media Impact

Advocating for increased research and development in the collection and assessment of quantitative and qualitative data regarding the impacts of media in conflict zones. Understanding the role social and news media play is important in assessing the knock-on effect in conflict-related contexts. Increasing the understanding of how media platforms operate can support the promotion of unbiased storytelling, defuse tensions, polarisation and foster peaceful outcomes.

3. Promoting Dialogue and Storytelling

Promoting direct exchange, dialogue and storytelling by creating virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) among different spheres. These communities offer an online platform allowing individuals who hold a common concern to connect, exchanging information to deepen knowledge networks by sharing experiences, fostering understanding and building bridges between diverse groups. This can be combined with in-person gatherings to provide a sense of community and common purpose.

Navigating the impact of emerging technologies in conflict resolution

1. Leveraging AI for Peacebuilding

Promoting collaboration between private sector and governmental actors to develop mutually beneficial solutions that leverage AI for peacebuilding purposes. This includes utilising AI to identify and counter misinformation, support conflict resolution efforts and enhance communication channels that foster understanding. Encouraging cross-sector partnerships can lead to innovative strategies that leverage AI and social media for its positive impact.

2. Regulation of Certain Social Media Algorithms

Advocating for better regulations around social media algorithms to monitor and filter extremist content, thereby disabling echo chambers of propaganda. Effective regulation includes implementing transparent algorithmic accountability, requiring social media companies to disclose how their algorithms work, and ensuring that these algorithms are designed to detect

and mitigate extremist content. Regulating social media algorithms can reduce the risk of online platforms being used to incite violence and promote hate, thereby contributing to a more peaceful digital environment.

3. Investing in Media Literacy

Investing in media literacy across generations to counter misinformation, disinformation and malinformation and encourage positive online engagements. Several approaches can be implemented, such as capacity building through the creation of workshops on how to navigate polarised contexts online. Increasing education in media literacy can counter the spreading of fake news through new technologies especially with the advent of new AI technologies. This would result in less polarisation on media and platforms and promote a more conciliatory approach to conflict resolution.

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