



Expert Meeting

Role of women and young people in promoting peace and preventing violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Concept Note

18-19 July 2017, Barcelona

General Objective:

Building on consultations and dynamics that have already taken place on subjects related to the Women, Peace and Security, as well as the Youth, Peace and Security agendas in the Euro-Mediterranean region, this two-day regional expert meeting, jointly organised by the Secretariat of UfM, UNDP and UN Women, aims at taking stock of current research and experience, discussing approaches and lessons learned at the national as well as regional level, developing concrete recommendations and identifying areas for regional initiatives with the objective to address the root causes of violence, radicalization and violent extremism with a specific focus on the roles of women and youth.

Background: Role of women in promoting peace and preventing violent extremism

Seventeen years have passed since United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security was adopted. The Resolution reaffirms the importance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security around the world. Along with seven subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security, the resolution provides an actionable framework for the United Nations, governments, regional bodies and bilateral/multilateral actors.

During the UfM Ministerial meeting on strengthening the role of women in society, adopted in 2013 in Paris, Ministers agreed to “ensure women's participation in reconstruction, peace-building and policy design, post-conflict, by inter-alia implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and by establishing the actual chairs for the women's representatives around the table allowing them to effectively participate in decision-making”.

Since the adoption of the Resolution, there has been increasing evidence that empowering women and improving gender equality can promote conflict prevention, crisis and security management, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, despite rising awareness among

policymakers and experts of this positive correlation, there is still a very low number of women participating in peace and security processes.¹

The changing global context of peace and security over the past years and the changing nature of security threats, such as violent extremism, led to the 2015 adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2242, which links the women, peace, and security agenda with global efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. The Resolution urges Member States and the United Nations system to ensure women's participation and leadership in developing strategies to prevent violent extremism. Women can and should be included in processes, policymaking, and interventions, and serve as advisors in preventing violent extremism.

In December 2015, the Secretary-General to the UN presented a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Among the proposed actions are calls to invest in gender-sensitive research and data collection on women's roles in violent extremism, including on identifying the drivers that lead women to join violent extremist groups, and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on their lives, in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses. It further recognizes the need to build capacity of women's civil society groups to engage in prevention and response efforts related to violent extremism.

In the most comprehensive peacebuilding vision to date, the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted in April 2016 parallel and ground-breaking resolutions on "sustaining peace". These resolutions define peace as both "a goal and a process...which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict." This definition places a renewed emphasis on conflict prevention and effectively eliminates the distinction between post-conflict peace building and other forms of prevention.

Background: Role of young people in promoting peace and preventing violent extremism

A growing body of evidence suggests that young women and men can and do play active and valuable roles as agents of positive and constructive change. At every opportunity, they prove their capacity to be champions, agents and partners in fostering development at local, national and international levels around the world. From countering climate change to peace-building, from strengthening human rights to tackling inequality, it is often young people who pave the way with their innovative ideas and modern approaches.

However, in the Mediterranean region, the potential of young people to be agents of social and economic progress continues to be undermined by a wide range of challenges. These obstacles include but are not limited to the lack of decent work opportunities and of political and social inclusion. In addition, the challenges of political transitions and conflict in some countries of the region have created great difficulties for the development of youth and threatened their security and future.

The region is suffering its worst-ever humanitarian crisis. The flow of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean has increased dramatically in recent years. Over the past four years, 1.4 million migrants and refugees have crossed the Mediterranean; most of them are youth and women.

These challenges, along with other complex factors, have pushed some young people in the region toward radicalization. The involvement of some young people—particularly young men, but also increasingly young women—in violence and extremist groups has led some to paint youth in general as a threat to global security and stability. However, research shows that youth who participate actively in violence are an extremely small minority; the majority of youth does not participate in violence. This non-violent youth majority has a critical role to

¹ OSCE and Inclusive Security – "Designing Inclusive Strategies for Sustainable Security Results-Oriented National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security", OSCE, 2016.

play as agents of positive and constructive change in promoting and maintaining international peace and security, and preventing violent extremism.

In December 2015, the importance of engaging young women and men in promoting peace and security was recognized by the UN Security Council in a ground-breaking resolution on Youth, Peace and Security: Resolution 2250. The resolution emphasizes the positive role young people can and do play in conflict prevention, prevention of violent extremism, and peacebuilding. In particular, the Resolution states that youth should be actively engaged in shaping lasting peace and contributing to justice and reconciliation, as they represented “a unique demographic dividend that can contribute to lasting peace and prosperity” if inclusive policies are put in place. In addition, this Resolution calls for the views of youth to be taken into account during the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements in order to promote sustainable peace building, especially in relation to repatriation, resettlement and reconstruction.

In January 2017, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Member States adopted an action-oriented roadmap centered on Mediterranean youth’s potential for promoting stability and development.² Ministers committed to supporting intercultural and interfaith dialogue and bridging any potential cultural divides in order to fight violent extremism. Through its activities, UfM joins regional and international efforts to address the socio-economic root causes of violent extremism, and aims to develop further high-impact projects and initiatives with a special focus on youth employability and women’s empowerment.

Objectives

With the above frameworks in mind, UFM, UNDP, and UN Women will hold a two-day workshop that will include simultaneous sessions dedicated to the roles of women and youth respectively in preventing violent extremism in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The primary objective of the workshop is to take stock of current research and experience while also identifying key areas for future sustaining peace interventions in the Euro-Mediterranean region. This will involve: addressing the root causes of violence, including violent extremism; understanding and strengthening the roles of women and youth; engaging relevant stakeholders including civil society organizations; and moving the debate towards support for partnership and action in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

By using a two-part structure to look at the roles of women and youth, the consultations will emphasize that both groups are key peace and security agents, but have different roles and needs. UfM, UNDP and UN Women believe that this will be a productive way to identify priorities on the ground and discuss approaches and lessons learned from dealing with the drivers and dynamics of violent extremism at the regional and national levels. The consultations will be geared towards developing concrete recommendations and an action-oriented plan.

Over a period of two days, the participants will address the following areas as they relate to the roles of women and youth, respectively:

- 1- Understand and emphasize a development-based approach of preventing radicalization and violent extremism, and engaging women and youth in the region as social agents and positive drivers of change.

Understanding the development dynamics and drivers of violence in the region and how to better support women and youth as peace-builders and preventers of violence.

- 2- Foster inclusive national, regional and cross-border partnerships (networks and partnerships).

² <http://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-member-states-adopt-an-action-oriented-roadmap-for-the-strengthening-of-regional-cooperation/>

Understanding the different regional contexts, existing partnerships and avenues for building the capacity of local and regional partners. This will also entail reviewing partnership policies and platforms—including those of governments and international organizations—for working with NGOs and CSOs.

- 3- Identify areas for regional initiatives to strengthen the role of women and young people in sustaining peace and preventing violent extremism.

Participants

Participants will include about 40 experts, such as academics, practitioners and advocates focusing on women and youth in the areas of peace and security; preventing violent extremism; and the role of civil society and leadership.