

Event report:

The Youth Action Plan in EU external action – a new era of global youth empowerment?

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On the 12th of December the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Multinational Development Policy Dialogue (KAS MDPD) organised a discussion round titled "The Youth Action Plan in EU external action – a new era of global youth empowerment?". Invited speakers from the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Youth Sounding Board (YSB) of the European Commission Directorate General for International Partnerships and the African Union (AU) Diaspora Youth Initiative discussed how the new [Youth Action Plan in EU external action](#) (YAP), published by the EU Commission, could strengthen youth engagement.

The discussion was based on the findings of a KAS MDPD study titled "[Time for the EU to implement the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda: Could Finland serve as a role model?](#) (2022)"

Main results of the discussion

The discussion showed that the Youth Action Plan in EU external action (YAP) is an important step forward and offers new tools to engage with the global youth. Even though its financing is limited, it opens up new possibilities for youth engagement, especially in the global south. Thus, it should also be equipped with necessary financial and organisational means. Besides funding, the challenge of stabilising coordination and exchanges between the actors allocating funds and the youth on the ground remains. Consequently, the discussion revealed three main aspects that need further attention from EU and EU member states decision makers:

- (1) The implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in the YAP needs to be followed by competence building within the EU institutions as well as in EU member states and youth organisations.
- (2) A monitoring system to see if the strategies and projects of the YAP are successful, must be implemented using qualitative and quantitative data from the ground. This monitoring system should be inclusive and include youth members.
- (3) The Youth Sounding Board (YSB) of the European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships is an important tool that needs to be introduced to other Directorate-Generals in the EU commission and to other EU institutions. Moreover, each EU delegation should be mandated to have a local, or regional, youth sounding boarding. These would better integrate the global youth into EU decision making processes and enable them to engage with the EU. YSBs can encourage the global youth to strive for a change for the better in their local communities, while promoting the EU as a positive force, especially in the global south.

Summary of the discussion

At the beginning of the event, Theresa Rohrhirsch presented the main findings and key recommendations for the EU from the recently published study by the MDPD with the title "Time for the EU to implement the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda: Could Finland serve as a role model?". She pointed out that the that the EU's new Youth Action Plan contains concrete measures to implement the UN Youth, Peace and Security agenda (UNSCR 2250). She did, however, point to the importance of including the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda also in other EU policy frameworks, which intertwine with the peace and security topic. Most importantly, looking at the current situation in the EU, she also highlighted that it is important to better institutionalise youth engagement within in the work of the EU commission to achieve meaningful and sustainable youth participation.

The representative of the EEAS and the member of the YSB introduced the key features of the YAP and talked about the development process. Both stressed the importance of the having developed a YAP, as the vast majority of youth live in low-income countries and are disproportionately affected by instability, conflict, or the COVID pandemic. It was therefore seen as a success that the UN Youth, Peace and Security agenda is part of the YAP, which aims to support young people in conflict situations and their efforts to promote peace. In this context, it was also stressed that the YAP focuses on supporting young human rights defenders, as young people who defend human rights are particularly vulnerable. Another

achievement, according to the EEAS representative and YSB member, was the involvement of young people in the development of the YAP through consultations, where youth stakeholders were able to share experiences. The member of the YSB also pointed out that they especially tried to involve people from marginalised communities to raise their voices.

During the event, the shortcomings of the EU's Youth Action Plan (YAP) were also discussed. The main criticisms were related to the financing of the plan and its programs. Two aspects stood out here.

First, the budget for the YAP is limited, and if divided among all the countries the EU is active in and has delegations in, only a few things can be realised with these resources. Second, even though the action plan developed more progressive mechanisms to engage young people, accessing funding is still hard and complicated for youth. Young people in rural areas, in particular, with little or no internet access have almost no opportunity to request funding, despite the fact that they are frequently the target group for funds. Another problem is the long process to receive funding and the process of documentation, which is often not manageable for young people, especially if they are already living in conflict zones.

Another perspective on the YAP and the engagement of young people was presented by the secretary general of the AU Diaspora Youth Initiative. She highlighted that the role of young people, either as perpetrators or victims, is particularly prevalent on the African continent. According to her, these stereotypes must be overcome, as young people are needed to overcome crises. Regarding European engagement with the African continent and young people, she underlined the need for community-centred approaches that are not based on European solutions but African solutions in partnership with the international community.