

CONCEPT NOTE

UNESCO/UNOCT WEBINAR

Youth and Digital Spaces: addressing and countering the exploitation of the COVID-19 pandemic using Media and ICTs

Date: 02 June 2020, 14.30 to 18:00 (EAT)

Link: [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)

Background

Media and digital spaces significantly affect young people's lives. They provide them with boundless opportunities for not only accessing information, but also creating, curating, and sharing knowledge. These platforms also promote exchanges and intercultural dialogue that further common values, human rights, tolerance, and peace. However, these spaces are also increasingly being used by some actors to spread hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and incitement to violence, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Global containment and shelter-in-place policies to manage the COVID-19 crisis, have resulted in more time spent online, with many people seeking out information and answers to allay anxieties and fears surrounding the pandemic. This has created a captive mainstream audience for violent extremists to exploit and recruit, preying on gaps in information, disseminating conspiracy theories and disinformation, spreading violent extremist narratives, and seeking to recruit and accelerate their movements. Young people are particularly susceptible to being exposed to and engaging in this content. The use of simplistic narratives and memes, catchy tunes and humour create subtle and sometimes ambiguous, yet powerful propaganda which is 'hidden in plain sight' and engages mainstream audiences, particularly youth. Misinformation is widespread, creating rumors about the virus and its cure(s), and generating hate speech and memes which scapegoat and vilify certain groups, and in some cases, which directly or indirectly promote violence.

Tech companies are rapidly trying to respond to the exploitation of their platforms by hate groups and violent extremists but are largely relying on automated systems. These groups are finding ways to avoid detection and having their content flagged through use of shortcuts and abbreviations and are encouraging their followers to use them. There is strong coloration and substantive research to support the notion 'from hate speech to hate crimes', and intelligence agencies have warned about the growing threat from violent extremist groups and their increasing propensity towards acts of terrorism and other forms of violence. UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes have enhanced efforts to tackle the 'infodemic' and hate speech arising out of the crisis. The UN Secretary-General has called for concerted global action against coronavirus-fueled hate speech, which was followed by the release of the [United Nations Guidance Note on Addressing and Countering COVID-19 related Hate Speech](#) by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

Justification

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted the [United Nations Resolution 2250 \(2015\)](#), which emphasizes young people's important role in building peace and countering violent extremism. It further recognizes the essential role, the media, Internet and information networks play in sustainable

development. Moreover, the [United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism](#), also stresses the importance of linking legal responses and security measures to persuasion strategies, which must be an essential component of actions taken.

Combating hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and violent extremism requires innovative and lasting solutions, underpinned by a strong commitment to ensuring cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders at all levels, particularly by including young people.

Encouraging and enabling civic engagement of young people in promoting human rights, cultural and linguistic diversity and intercultural understanding is essential for peace building and sustainable development. Fostering empathy, confidence and understanding among peoples and generations, requires efforts to encourage individuals and communities to discover what they have in common and respect their differences, take an interest in and value their culture and that of others, and accept their shared humanity. Actively promoting the concept of a common and shared cultural heritage as a factor for unity and dialogue on a global scale is also important, besides making it meaningful and relevant in young people's daily lives.

For young people to play an active and important role in detecting and countering misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, cyber bullying and violent extremist propaganda, they must hone their skills in critical thinking, digital literacy, conflict resolution and communications. They also need opportunities to exchange views, communicate and cooperate effectively, and to develop new digital competencies – including responsible digital citizenship. With these skills and opportunities, young people can positively and proactively use digital and media platforms to advocate for dialogue and peace at the local, regional and global level, underpinned by respect for human rights.

All of this demonstrates how important it is to increase young people's media and information literacy by focusing on environments that are socially, technologically and strategically favorable. Mastering the use of technological tools should include a dimension that is not only practical, but also ethical. UNESCO has extensive experience in helping young people become key players now and in the future through capacity building, citizen engagement opportunities, education, training and skills acquisition, critical thinking and sports. The [Québec's Call for Action](#) urges citizens and the international community to take action and inspire establishment of an inclusive and conducive environment for ensuring the effective prevention of violent extremism. This is to promote social inclusion, sustainable development and lasting peace. Combating hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and violent extremism requires innovative and lasting solutions, underpinned by a strong commitment to ensuring cooperation and coordination among all stakeholders at the national, regional, and international levels.

Since 2011, UNESCO has spearheaded international, regional, and national interventions on Media and Information Literacy (MIL) that includes content covering information, media, and technological competencies. While MIL education has a fundamental role to play in building resilience to violence, encouraging a culture of peace, and promoting living together and human rights, MIL also provides societies with key competencies for life-long learning. Echoing the global concern around misinformation during this pandemic, [UNESCO through its MIL Alliance Response to COVID-19](#) provides resources that can be adapted, translated and used to enable citizens to help stop the spread of misinformation, control the information fog, and better focus on developing healthy media and information environments for all. UNESCO has also [produced info graphics and social media messages](#) that can be used to verify

information, counter disinformation, combat discrimination, address hate speech and promote best practices.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa intends to strengthen its cooperation with governments, youth organizations, academia, think tanks, civil society in the Eastern Africa region by organizing an online webinar to empower young people to counter and prevent online hate, cyberbullying, racism, and violent extremism, for promotion of peace building and sustainable development during COVID-19 Pandemic. This initiative will partner with United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) which has experience in strengthening the capacity of governments and civil society, including youth, to better understand and address hateful and violent extremist narratives, and co-design and develop locally relevant narratives to promote unity, cohesion and community resilience over division and violence. Both UN agencies have the ability to draw on the extensive network, including the Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Working Group of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, and build on the existing practices to address these challenges through locally tailored interventions.

Key Objective

To identify and discuss issues, challenges and opportunities for good practices related to countering and preventing online hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and violent extremism arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic, using Media and ICTs, and to identify effective measures that can be adopted by young people to prevent, address and counter these issues.

Expected Outcomes

1. Participants empowered with relevant knowledge to be agents of change in countering online and offline hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and violent extremism using ICTs and Media during the COVID-19 pandemic in Eastern Africa;
2. Increased awareness of issues, best practices, and challenges related to countering online hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and violent extremism using ICTs and Media during the COVID-19 pandemic in Eastern Africa;
3. Increased awareness of available tools, networks, and resources to counter online hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and violent extremism using ICTs and Media during the COVID-19 pandemic in Eastern Africa;
4. Strengthened collaboration in advocacy and policy development among UNESCO programme sectors, governments, academia, private sector, and the UN family towards countering hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and preventing violent extremism in Eastern Africa.

Activities

Part I: Expert Group Webinar

The closed group webinar will bring together regional and international researchers, specialists, public policy experts, youth leaders, and media practitioners to discuss issues, challenges and good practices in supporting and involving young people to counter and prevent, online hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and violent extremism, inter alia, by using Media and ICTs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also identify effective measures that can be adopted to prevent and combat online hate speech,

cyberbullying, racism, in order to promote peace building and sustainable development, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This webinar also aims to increase understanding of how online hate speech, cyberbullying, racism, and violent extremism is affecting young people in particular, and how ICT and Media could play a role in addressing such divisive and harmful impacts.

UNESCO and UNOCT will mobilize panelists from the region, and internationally, to share good practices and examples demonstrating MIL skills among young people that can be used to counter and preventing online hate, cyberbullying, racism, and violent extremism to promote peace building and sustainable development during COVID-19 Pandemic in the region.

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Participants

The participants for the closed webinar is specialized experts, researchers, think tanks, media professionals, development practitioners, youth leaders, and the regional donor community.

Partners

The webinar will be organized in cooperation with government ministries from Eastern Africa, UNESCO National Commissions, United Nations Communications Group (UNCG), academia, think tanks and civil society organizations from Eastern Africa Region. UNESCO will also build on existing synergies among its Communications & Information, Culture, Education, and Social and Human Sciences Sectors.

Technical specifications

Confirmed participants will be connected through [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#). Questions can be sent in advance to the moderator, Mr. John Okande, jo.okande@unesco.org, or via the use of the 'chat function' during the the Q&A session.

Polite Notice - Webinar Guidelines

In order to ensure clear communications throughout the webinar, participants are requested to mute their microphones and disable any video. Only panelists speaking or presenting will be asked to active their microphone and video.

AGENDA

14:30 – 18:00 [Nairobi local time]

14:20 – 14:30	Connecting to online platform Microsoft Teams
14:30 – 14:40	Welcome and Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. John Okande, National Programme Officer, Communications & Information Sector, UNESCO
14:40 – 15:00	Opening remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, Director of the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for Eastern Africa Mr. Jehangir Khan, Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre, UNOCT Ms. Cecilia Barbieri, Chief of Section of Global Citizenship and Peace Education, UNESCO
15:00 – 15:45	<p><u>Panel 1: COVID-19 and the rise of disinformation, hate speech and violent extremist narratives online (Global perspectives)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chairperson: Guy Burger, Director for Policies and Strategies, UNESCO <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>What are we observing in terms of hate speech, cyberbullying, racism and violent extremism during the Covid-19 pandemic?</i> <i>How have individuals, hate groups and violent extremists exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to promote division online?</i> <i>What are the issues and challenges presented by Media and ICTs during the COVID-19 pandemic?</i> <i>What have been the international responses and which lessons could be learned from that experience?</i> Panellist: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr. Alton Grizzle, Programme Specialist, Media and Information Literacy, UNESCO Mr Andrea Cairola, Programme Specialist, Section of Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, UNESCO Mr. Thibault Chareton, Media and Migration Project Management Specialist, UNAOC Dr Olunifesi Adegunle SURAJ, Senior Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos
15:50 –	<u>Panel 2: Experiences and Impacts in the region</u>

<p>16:35</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairperson: Ms. Grace Omondi, Head of Strategic Communications Unit, IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>What is the experience of this phenomena in the region? Testimonies?</i> 2. <i>What are the unique risks and experiences of young people in the region? Are there any differences according to age or gender?</i> 3. <i>What, if any, have been the impacts on social cohesion, resilience, and peace?</i> 4. <i>What are the related ethical issues related to use of Media and ICTs during this pandemic?</i> • Panellist: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Hugue Charnie Ngandeu Ngatta, Programme Specialist, Social and Human Science Sector, UNESCO • Ms. Fatma Ahmed, Communications Adviser, UNOCT • Mr. Hussein Sengu, Project Coordinator, Search for Common Ground (Tanzania) • Ms. Abena Nyamesem, Senior Manager, Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications, IFAP Ghana
<p>16:40 – 17:25</p>	<p><u>Panel 3: Regional responses for addressing and countering COVID-19 related online hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, radicalization and violent extremism</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairperson: Ms. Rebecca Besant, Regional Director for Central and East Africa, Search for Common Ground (Rwanda) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>What are the unique responses being taken in the regional and what can be learned from them?</i> 2. <i>How are young people and organizations that work with youth responding, and what good practices can be learned?</i> 3. <i>What are the available resources, programmes and activities?</i> 4. <i>How are responses coordinated across sectors and actors?</i> • Panellist: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Julien Duval, Countering Violent Extremism/Counter Terrorism Advisor, European Union • Ms. Simona Cruciani, UN Office of the Special Adviser for Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect • Ms. Wevyn Muganda, Founder, Beyond the Lines, Kenya • Ms. Lillian Nalwoga, Policy Officer, Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) (Uganda)
<p>17:25 – 17:35</p>	<p><u>Special presentation: UN Verified</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Charlotte Scaddan, UN Department for Global Communications

<p>17:35 – 17:50</p>	<p>Recommendations</p> <p>Measures for addressing and countering Covid-19 related Online Hate Speech, Cyber bullying, Racism, Radicalization, and Violent Extremism.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identify specific recommendations and practices that can be taken forward in the region b) Identify what can be taken into the subsequent youth session <p>Summary from Session Chairs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Alton Grizzle, Programme Specialist, Media and Information Literacy, UNESCO • Ms. Grace Omondi, Head of Strategic Communications Unit, IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism • Ms. Rebecca Besant, Regional Director for Central and East Africa, Search for Common Ground (Rwanda)
<p>17:50 – 18:00</p>	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. John Okande, National Programme Officer for UNESCO Communications & Information Sector, UNESCO • Mr. Adel Elsayed Sparr, United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT)

**Agenda subject to change.*

Lead Rapporteur

Ms. Rachel Fischer, Researcher, Ethicist & Co-Chair: International Centre for Information Ethics, South Africa

Resources

- **Countering online hate speech:** <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231>

- UNESCO free tools and messages for online and media communication on COVID-19, addressing fake news, and promoting media and information literacy
- **Media and Information Literacy:** <https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy>
- **Media: conflict prevention and reconstruction:**
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000138983>
- **Preventing violent extremism through education: a guide for policymakers:**
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247764>
- **Fostering Freedom of Expression:** <https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-freedom-expression> UNESCO guides on PVE through education
- UNESCO free tools and messages for online and media communication on COVID-19, addressing fake news, and promoting media and information literacy
- Nurturing the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people during crises, UNESCO COVID-19 Education issue note
- Harnessing culture in times of crises, UNESCO COVID-19 Education issue note
- UNESCO Virtual Experts Meeting on Education as a tool for prevention: addressing and countering hate speech