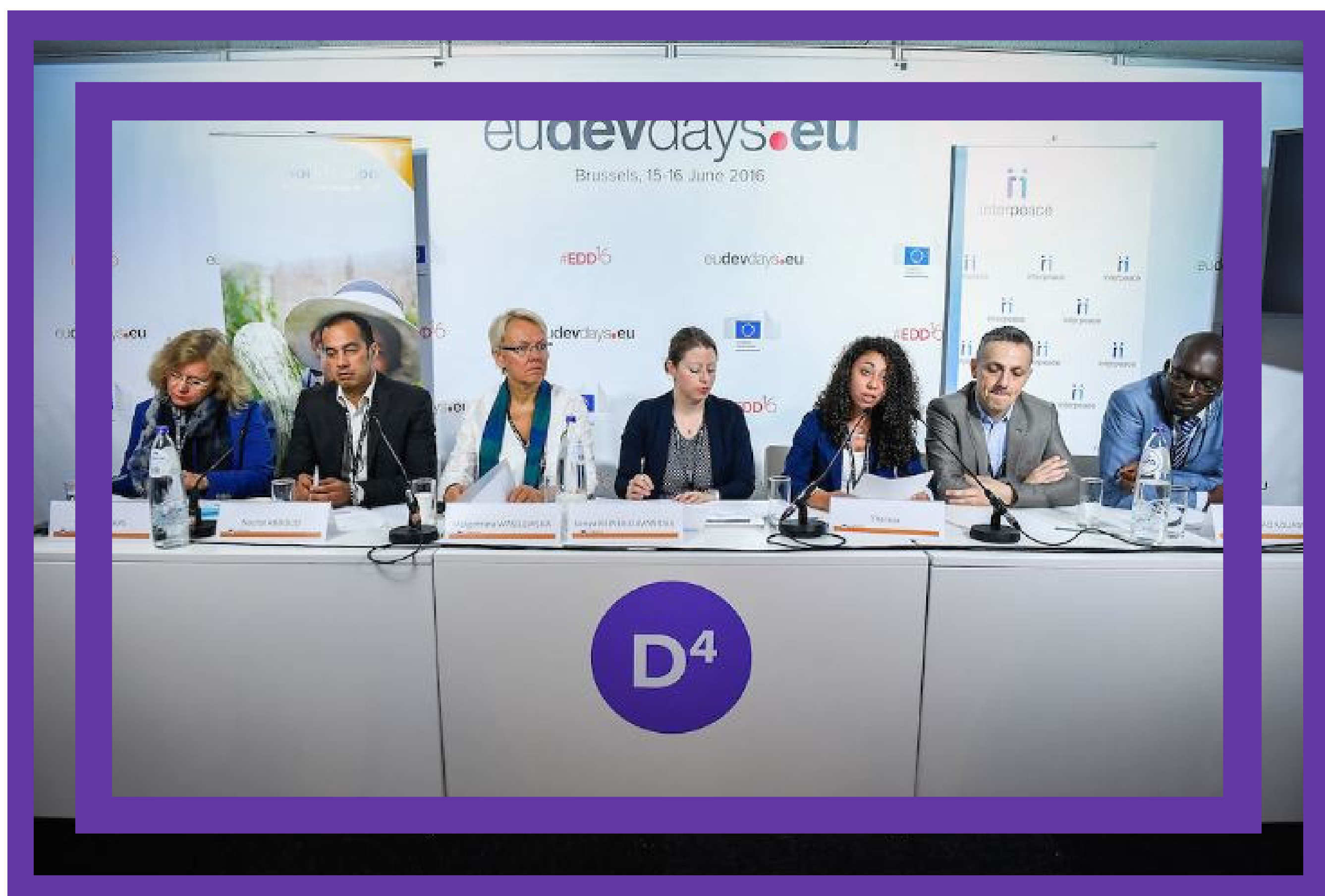


Promoting young people as peacebuilders

The Sustainable Development Goals:
Turning the EU's commitments into reality

EDD16 Lab Session – 16 June 2016



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Short Summary

Violent extremism is growing and capturing the hearts and minds of young people globally. Their sense of disengagement and marginalisation has left them vulnerable to recruitment.

European officials and civil society leaders stressed the importance of engaging youth as allies against extremism, sharing a common goal to build resilience in societies against radical ideologies and to empower change-makers to inspire a culture of tolerance. And not just in developing countries such as Morocco or Egypt, but also in European countries where violent extremism is on the rise.

Speakers agreed on a need to better understand why radical ideologies attract youth in the first place. Research conducted by Search for Common Ground in Morocco on the Islamic State (IS) group revealed that youth have dreams and ambitions that radical groups are expert at manipulating.

For many, IS offers dignity to youth in a world with rampant inequalities and grave uncertainties surrounding their future. The vision of a united Islamic state also attracts young people who want to counter the power and outsized influence of the West. As long as these challenges remain unresolved, youth will remain vulnerable to radical ideologies.

Rarely, speakers agreed, do youth become radicalised in a single moment. It is a long-term shift in thinking that is tough to deconstruct among young minds.

Search for Common Ground finds that fact-based arguments simply do not work, nor do emotional appeals that try to help young people see the terrible harm that violent, radical groups inflict. Really listening to radicalized youth – understanding their experience and world views – occurs far too rarely. By dismissing their perspectives, we are ironically reinforcing their indignation.

Addressing youth grievances, especially in fragile societies, is a core focus of EuropeAid's work. Whether in education or health programmes, youth are conceived as a cross-cutting group that need active, not passive inclusion. When it comes to counter-radicalisation programmes, interventions are targeted at young men who make up over 80 % of radicalised youth.

Within these programmes, the words used to talk about radicalisation and violent extremism has come into sharper focus. The phenomenon has increasingly become synonymous with 'Islamic radicalisation', but this is not how European officials conceive of it. They are confronting radicalisation on many different fronts that extend beyond Islamic extremism.

The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office noted that while they too generically use the words 'violent extremism' and 'radicalisation' in policy papers and funding proposals, the reality on the ground is that they are mostly working with Islamic youth. Political correctness applies less to them in the field.

Understanding the social, political and religious dynamics in countries confronting radicalisation is a major challenge; developing practical, effective solutions is even harder. Policymakers and civil society leaders need to be fully and totally informed to really solve the root causes of radicalisation.

More information: <https://eudevdays.eu/sessions/promoting-young-people-peacebuilders>

Local Voices matter

The EU should draw on local actors' strengths, knowledge and skills for more inclusive context analysis, peacebuilding interventions and investments.

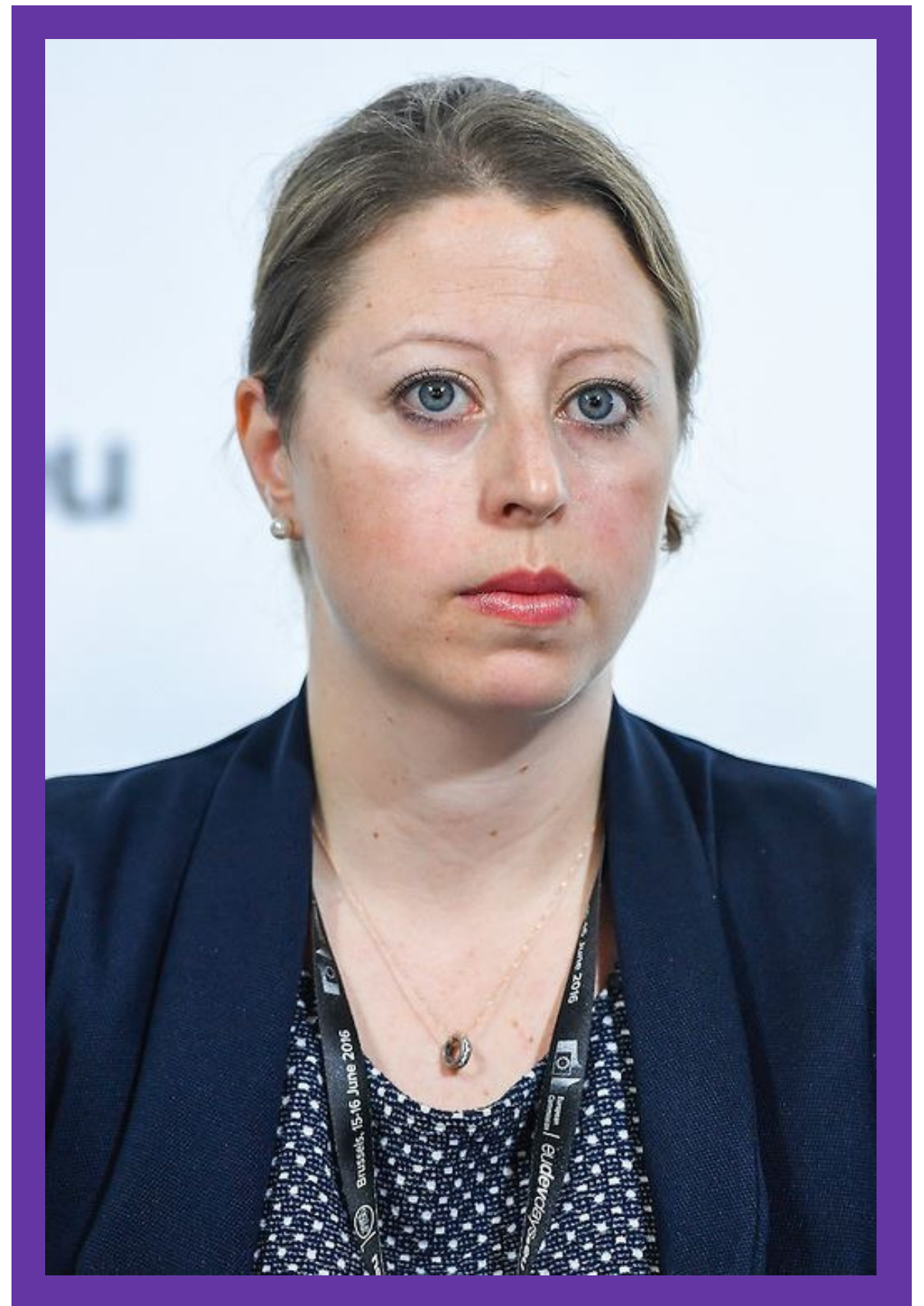
The absence of local populations' perspectives and especially of young people limits the way in which the global community understands and addresses the multiple drivers and root causes of radicalization and violent extremism.

Young people as active agents of change

There is a growing interest at national, regional and international levels in the addressing the increased violence and radicalization of young people. In truth, the silent majority of them are positive change makers actively contributing to preventing violent extremism. For the EU and its member states to develop effective responses, to prevent violent extremism, the meaningful participation of youth at all levels needs to be a priority.

Partner and invest in long term solutions

Any EU stabilization plan should successfully include increased investment in already existing peacebuilding activities ensuring that partnership with young people is at the core of long term solutions that focus on creating alternatives and new opportunities.



Sonya Reines-Djivanides

Executive Director

European Peacebuilding Liaison office

Facts

- Globally 85% of young people live in developing countries.
- Violent extremism is not a new phenomenon, but the traditional response to it has been limited to traditional security approaches
- The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 calls for making youth participation a priority, European Union should lead by example and endorse the Resolution

Key Points

- It is important to better understand how radical ideologies manipulate youth by appealing to their desire for dignity.
- Radicalisation does not occur in a single moment; it is a long-term process that requires specialised approaches.
- Policymakers and civil society leaders need
 - to be fully and totally informed to address
 - the root causes of radicalisation.

Séverin Yao Kouamé

Directeur - Indigo

In Abjidan, Côte d'Ivoire, violent youth groups are called « microbes ». Yet, experience shows that when valued as part of the community and associated to peacebuilding processes, they tend to regain self –confidence and to realize the positive impact that they are able to have.

Such perspective empowers them to take ownership of the dialogue processes and of the actions that tend to reduce violence in their environment.



"Stigmatisation is not the solution. Valorisation is."

Key messages

- Understanding context and how it contributes to draw violent life paths is essential to design a sustainable intervention.
- For Interpeace and Indigo's partnership in Côte d'Ivoire, it appeared that this challenge could only be met when all stakeholders of violence are no longer seen under the lens of their position as victim or perpetrators, but rather as actors of change.

Theresa

Young Peacebuilder – World Vision Lebanon



“I believe, and I want you to believe that we all should not fight extremists, we should rather fight extremism”

The Feast Project

Lebanon is a country which has 18 confessions and went through a civil war between Christian and Muslims. The Feast consists in gathering children of different religions, to help them to communicate and accept each other's opinions and especially accept their religious diversities.

“As for me, it was difficult to build trust, and something inside me was preventing me from opening up to [children from other religious denominations] but after all our meetings and gatherings, I was able to understand them, accept them as they are.”

Lessons learned from the Feast

- Accept the others and communicate well with them, respect and love the others the way they are.
- The other person represents himself and not his entire religion.
- Open up to other persons, give them the chance to express themselves and tell more about their personal faith without judging them, their beliefs, or the religion they belong to.

Noufal Abboud

Country Director, Morocco - Search for Common Ground



Recommendation

We need to step into a long-term engagement and invest in youth leadership while seeking constant innovation and creative solutions from the local contexts

“When seeking to engage youth as influencers in a peace process, we need to take seriously their role not only in constructive engagement but also their potential influence in the radicalisation ramp.”

“It is fundamental to also deconstruct how extremist narratives are socially constructed and/or imagined.”

“The difference between positive and ‘rejective’ (radical) leadership/engagement in de-radicalization is a 5° shift, not 180° turnaround.”

“Experiences are more powerful in trying to shift attitudes, or behaviors. Argue facts less and engage the “soft” side of human relationships more.”