



POLICY BRIEF: BEYOND DIVIDING LINES

Youth-led Civic Engagement for Peace in Libya

- Since the end of the Libyan revolution in 2011, the country remains in a state of political instability with a deteriorating economy and security situation. Young Libyans are particularly affected by the ongoing conflict, facing negative perceptions of youth, widespread poverty and unemployment, and a lack of support and safe spaces for participation.
- Libyan youth are engaged in various approaches to mitigate the effects of the ongoing conflict, and to build peace and social cohesion in their communities, such as through advocacy work, by using social media for campaigning or by providing humanitarian relief.
- To remove barriers for youth-led civic engagement in Libya policy makers and other stakeholders are recommended to work towards a shift in the general perception of youth, provide meaningful and safe spaces for participation, and sufficient financial support.

Introduction

It's been eight year since the 2011 Libyan revolution. The toppling of Muammar Gaddafi's rule has created a power vacuum that has left the nation fragmented into competing political and military factions based in Tripoli and the east. Amidst political instability and the deteriorating security situation, youth civil society are actively contributing to the democratic transition of Libya.

A variety of youth-led civic engagement can be observed in Libya, including advocacy programmes for women's participation in the peace process, art-based initiatives to provide spaces for youth to express their aspirations and needs, and community development work. However, discouragement and lack of support by older

generations, negative perceptions of youth, as well as the unstable security situation hamper young people's ability to participate in such activities.

Key objective of this policy brief is to propose a number of recommendations to stakeholders in Libya to facilitate young people's engagement in civic engagement by increasing motivators and breaking down barriers.

Context

Libya became independent in 1951, having been under the British mandate since the dissolution of the Italian colonies. It remained a monarchy for 18 years until Gaddafi acquired governance in 1969 through a *coup d'état*, turning Libya into an authoritarian regime. His



regime lasted until 2011, when a revolution broke out, and two years later issues of political unrest and insecurity started to affect all aspects of life.

Although its population is composed mainly of people of Arab and Imazighen descent of Sunni-Muslim faith, Libya has endured many different civilisational periods that still inform its culture today. The Libyan society is constructed on the institution of family as well as tribes, to which each family belongs. Libyan youth constitute 60% of the population, representing the majority of 6.5 million Libyans. Libyan women and youth were at the forefront of the revolution in 2011, and are leading many of the still-existing civil society organisations (CSOs) that emerging during that time.

Being the gateway for refugees on their way to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean sea, Libya is heavily impacted by a flow of migrants reaching the country. With more migrants arriving in the country seeking work to fund their journey to Europe, opportunities in Libya's already weakened economy decline steadily, contributing to increasing unemployment and poverty rates.

Youth-led civic engagement in Libya

Types of youth-led civic engagement

Libyan youth are engaged in various approaches to mitigate the effects of the ongoing conflict, and to build peace and social cohesion in their communities. In our study, advocacy and educational activities were clearly the activities that youth engaged in most, followed by small-scale activism and social media initiatives.

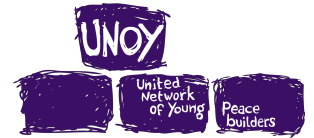
The young-women-led organisation Together We Build It! runs advocacy programmes to promote women and young people's political inclusion and participation in the decision-making processes, including the national reconciliation and transitional justice processes that Libya is currently undergoing. The organisation builds their advocacy efforts on UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, Security and UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, Security as a reference framework.

The organisation H2O, established in 2011, is focusing on promoting peace through a process of democratic transition. Based in the Tripoli area but operating in different regions of Libya, H2O aims to connect local and international stakeholders, and develops civic engagement methods and education programmes to increase youth engagement and help peers to express their ideas and opinions, translating them into demands.

"Each and every human being is different in their own way, and we should learn how [to] accept this . . . [I]n our differences we can improve our community . . . If I can plant this seed in the Libyan mindset, it would be an accomplishment"

Young woman from Tripoli, Libya

Other Libyan youth groups like Tripoli Good and I am Tawfeeq are providing humanitarian relief to vulnerable communities, with many international aid workers withdrawing from Libya due to intensified violence and security risks. Due to the damaged economic situation in Libya and lack of cash liquidity, many young people launch start-ups as income generating activities benefiting the community at the same time.



Youth-led civic engagement in Libya also takes on innovative forms. Hexa Connection uses technology as a tool through to advance youth development, and has organised the first national robotics championship for youth in Libya. The women-led artistic hub WaraQ foundation reclaims public spaces to allow young people to express themselves through art, to challenge cultural bias on gender roles, and to foster dialogue among divided communities. Another young artist has started a project called Libya's Monuments to document lost historical landmarks in Libya, creating greater public awareness of the importance of safeguarding Libya's cultural heritage.

Social media and other communication platforms have been invaluable to Libyan youth in search of safe spaces to express their opinions freely and to create solidarity networks.

Boosters

Young people's inner motivation proved to be one of the main boosters for their civic engagement to improve not only the community but also themselves as active citizens. This inner drive granted them the required strength to actively engage, breaking the negative perceptions of youth.

Self-development opportunities are also motivating for young people intending to build their capacities and expand their knowledge, especially in light of the high unemployment rate among youth in Libya. Exchange programmes and scholarships are usually perceived as a chance to get exposed to different cultures and new perceptions.

The support of family and friends is expressed as an important factor to motivate young people to engage as peacebuilders. Youth require

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encouragement from their community members to withstand conservative values and norms of a majority of Libyan society. Without their close support youth might feel discouraged and insecure. Young Libyans are therefore increasingly encouraging each other by providing spaces or technical support, forming networks to foster solidarity among peers.

Among the external and contextual motivating factors expressed by youth are the relative freedom of expression Libyans gained once the suppression of the Gaddafi's regime ended. Additionally, support of the international community – for example through financial aid, sponsorship, advocacy work or capacity building opportunities – encourage Libyan youth to take necessary steps to make a change.

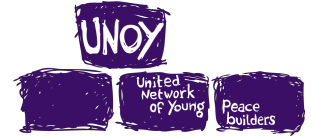
"What I gained from my civic engagement is skills of team working, communication, planning, public speaking, self-trust, networking"

Young man from Zuwara, Libya

Barriers

Negative community perceptions and lack of support from older generations have been identified by many young people as major limiting factors, discouraging youth from participating in civic engagement as their their abilities to make a change and take a leadership role are being undermined. This is reflected in the traditional norms as well as the Libyan social structure. Negative stereotypes of youth are further reinforced by media.

Other limiting factors for Libyan youth to engage in civic engagement are widespread poverty and unemployment, as the struggle to survive and make ends meet is a key priority for many



young people. With the economy dropping since the 2011 revolution, increasing life expenses, extended power cuts, blackouts, and lack of fuel, gas and water are persistently affecting the quality of life of Libyans. The deteriorating security situation since 2014 presents a major threat to young people's personal security and mobility, who are increasingly fleeing the country, often times illegally migrating across the sea to seek asylum in Europe in quest of safety and security.

Another barrier to youth-led civic engagement is the limited support provided by governmental actors. The combined lack of spaces of (political) participation, technical and practical support for civic engagement projects and initiatives, prevent young people from gaining experience and training in the field. Although there seems to be a good will from some governmental sectors, limited resources available to governmental actors are a barrier to provide sufficient support. Youth furthermore express that due to this lack of recognition, trust and support many wish to be dissociated from the political scene.

It must be taken into consideration that limiting factors play out differently on different genders. Social norms and a lack of awareness are barriers for young women to engage in political participation. However, motivators are mostly across all genders, with the only exception being the motivation of young women to engage in issues related to gender discrimination. Gender-based violence, relative absence of women on the political table and decision making process, social norms are a main focus points for youth organisations across Libya.

Policy Recommendations

1. Governmental actors should support meaningful spaces for inclusive participation that are not affected by tribalism and regionalism, and promote dialogue and reconciliation between regions and cities across the conflict divide – involving youth and women as essential partners.
2. Governmental actors, international organisations and local civil society should promote and ensure youth inclusiveness and youth participation in the political sphere and the decision making process, according to their expertise and experience.
3. UN agencies and civil society organisations should continue to support and strengthen young women and young men's initiatives and efforts towards civic engagement by providing them with technical support, flexible funding, trainings and opportunities, with specific attention to youth in rural areas of Libya.
4. Media should be committed to cover stories on the important role that young people are playing in conflict-affected communities and the positive impact they can have. More public awareness and communication strategies should be developed to change the narrative around youth and explain how youth are engaging in peacebuilding and related initiatives.
5. Youth and civil society organisations should prepare young men and women to be advocates for gender equality and ensure they de-centre, become aware of the dominating role of men in decision-making which affect the type of activities organised.



- The international community should support Libyan governmental actors, local civil society organisations and youth groups in the implementation of the UNSCR 2250 and 1325 on a national and local level.

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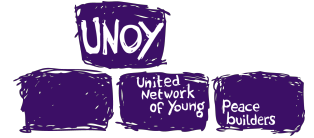
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Project description

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