

Report

## Multistakeholder Roundtable Discussions on Intergenerational Dialogue

*– Building a set of best practices across different fora –*

Amman, August & September 2023



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för Mellanöstern och Nordafrika

## Executive summary

As part of the Institute's work on intergenerational dialogue (IGD), a couple of activities were organised in August and September 2023. The sessions built on previous workshops and dialogues and sought to solicit a set of recommendations for promising practices, while also validating the insights already gathered, thereby contributing to the development of a 'guidance note' on IGD – in essence, an analytical framework for how to better engage in intergenerational dialogue.

Participants in the meetings stressed that finding incentives is key to bringing different parties to the table in a dialogue. From an intergenerational perspective, this means that different generations must be convinced of and open to the fact that they not only have something to teach others, but also have something to learn from them. Such incentives were seen as a required mechanism for avoiding the trap of seeing exchanges as a zero-sum game, where one generation's feat is another's loss.

Another set of reflections touched on the distinction between formal and informal fora, and how intergenerational dialogue can be implemented in each. The family unit and the household were highlighted as an important first informal space for intergenerational encounters. The daily life practice of intergenerational understanding and respect can serve as the basis for other forms of dialogue, where the topic of discussion falls outside the private sphere.

A broader reflection by participants highlighted that the lack of dialogue – and dialogue spaces – in the region runs deeper than between generations and will require simultaneous efforts to bridge these gaps on several fronts. For such a structural change to occur, civil society organisations will need to work jointly as well as across civil society/public sector lines – requiring that this door be open.

Participants in these dialogue meetings also reaffirmed the importance of empathy and active listening when engaging in intergenerational dialogue. The starting point to set the tone for a mutually beneficial exchange is to set prejudices and stereotypes aside and to be prepared to open one's attention to the interlocutor(s) in front of you. Understanding that different experiences shape people in distinct ways could allow for a transfer of knowledge in both directions, on equal terms.

## Detailed report

As part of the Institute's work on intergenerational dialogue (IGD), three activities were organised in August and September 2023. The sessions, facilitated by the Institute's Director Charlotta Sparre, built on previous workshops and dialogues:

- On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Institute gathered a range of stakeholders, from the public sector, representatives of civil society, and international organisations, to discuss aspirations and possibilities for best practices when conducting intergenerational dialogue across different fora.
- On August 29<sup>th</sup>, the Institute invited members of the Sweden Alumni Network in Jordan for an exchange on the work on intergenerational dialogue.
- On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, representatives from several civil society organisations convened in a roundtable discussion to consider the specific challenges for the civil society with regards to intergenerational dialogue, as well as potential ways of overcoming them.



A central focus of the discussions concerned **incentives for participation**. If and when dialogue is viewed as a zero-sum game, there are lesser incentives to engage with other generations. Interlocutors pointed to misaligned generational priorities, with the younger generation being perceived as focusing on opportunities and older generations perceived to be more concerned with security. If the prevailing belief is that solutions can only be tailored to one of these priorities, it is difficult to envision how exchanges can be mutually beneficial. The participants agreed that intergenerational dialogue seeks to overcome this trap of perceptions.

Some participants also described that there is a practice of “passing down unfairness”: if one has had to endure hardship in one’s youth to get to a better place when older, this sometimes instils the belief that this cycle must be repeated for younger generations. It was argued that there is a need to break this pattern so as not to reproduce an unhealthy dynamic amongst generations.

Dialogue was described as an intergenerational **trust building exercise**, underlining the simultaneous role of dialogue as the means and the ends. One participant expressed this, stating that *“Dialogue has to start with trust building before it can materialise as something more tangible”*. The conversations also reinforced a conclusion from previous sessions: for such trust to develop, dialogues should take place continuously and repeatedly.

### **How can different actors work to foster intergenerational understanding?**

**Empathy was identified as the core attribute** in setting the tone for intergenerational exchanges as it facilitates understanding of another’s perspective. Empathy must then be viewed both as a prerequisite for- and as an essential building block of intergenerational dialogue. Basing these encounters on empathy will allow preconceived notions to be stripped back to see the human behind the age.

In parallel, empathy was closely connected to the ability to **promote multilevel diversity within intergenerational dialogue**. As one person stated, there is a need to understand the experience of others from an intersectional perspective, while also creating solutions in a way that puts people at the centre and integrates diversity.

### ***“Listen to learn, not just listen to respond”***

Employing active listening in the dialogue was stressed, as was the importance of actively implementing the principles and openness of intergenerational dialogue both in formal and informal spaces. Starting with one’s daily life interactions and human relations, the daily practice of intergenerational dialogue as a cornerstone in broadening the usage of IGD was discussed.

Based on the dialogues, a set of recommendations was borne:

- ❖ **Implement active listening** beyond spaces dedicated to formal dialogue, starting in the family unit, to normalize mutually respectful intergenerational exchanges.
- ❖ Promote a **mentality shift to change inherited practices** that hamper intergenerational equality.

- ❖ **Incentivize intergenerational dialogue** as a means for formulating sustainable, mutually beneficial solutions.
- ❖ **Improve awareness** of conflicting generational priorities through education, arts, and culture, as well as through media/social media to break stereotypes and bridge gaps.
- ❖ **Break the tradition of passing down “generational struggle”**.
- ❖ Increase **exchanges between different sectors**, using intergenerational dialogue is a tool to break silos.
- ❖ Ensure that dialogues are taking place on a regular/repeated basis to **build trust over time**.