EU-CORD members are harnessing the power of the greatest change agents in a society: youth

We are in the 11th month of the year, and I welcome you all to our final Spotlight focusing on Youth!

In Autumn, we held several webinars, amongst them a co-organised webinar with Caritas Europa and ACT Alliance Europe on European Union Development Funding: Trends and Implications for CSOs, a Funding webinar Q&A with MzN, the Humanitarian and Partnership Forum, four Regional Forums and two forums on Reframing Partnerships.

The Secretariat also participated in the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) Annual Forum held in Berlin from 17-19 October. We spoke on panels focusing on Shared Common values and Localisation and hosted an open forum on Faith, feminism and Development Cooperation.

The Annual Forum reaffirmed Faith-based actors’ shared desire to achieve the SDGs while acknowledging faith’s critical role in a large part of the world.

In the same week, we launched our inaugural Climate Champions showcasing campaign, highlighting the pivotal work ten of our members are engaged in to green the world and assist those who are least responsible but most affected by the climate crisis. If you haven’t yet engaged with the innovative projects on display, head to our X and LinkedIn accounts and our website for a dedicated page for all ten champions.

Our winter commences with a combined General Assembly and Advocacy Forum from 7–8 November in Zeist, Netherlands. We look forward to engaging on various topics, including localisation, lobbying for the climate crisis, religion, human rights and the local context and others.

Finally, young people must have equal opportunities to shape their local community’s social, economic, political and cultural life. Young people are key drivers of positive change and essential partners to advance sustainable and inclusive development. Yet they are often excluded from economic, social, political and other decision-making processes. This edition spotlights how our members support young people and decision-makers to ensure that the Youth have the agency to contribute effectively to all areas of their lives.

Warm regards,
Tabeth Masengu
Within the EU, Youth has gained prominence across crucial policy initiatives, including those by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), Council Conclusions on Youth in External Action, the European Consensus on Development, and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024.

Within DG INTPA, the Youth Sounding Board comprises individuals aged 19-29 from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the EU. As an advisory body focusing on youth participation and empowerment in EU external actions, the 2021–2023 cohort played a pivotal role in developing the Youth Action Plan.

Globally, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Mauritius have implemented Youth Sounding Boards, and the OTC Youth Network has been established to foster stronger connections between Youth residing in these regions and the EU.

Beyond the EU, initiatives like the Youth Political and Civic Engagement Cohort promote global youth involvement in political and civic affairs. Additionally, the Global Changemakers Association stands out as a remarkable network dedicated to empowering Youth to create more inclusive and equitable communities worldwide. Their vast online library offers free toolkits and webinars, facilitating skills development, grant access, and the expansion of international networks.
Help a Child: Improving access to capital for Youth in Rwanda

Help a Child works in rural and remote areas in some of the poorest countries in the world.

The issues that families and young people face often relate to poverty and lack of access to capital. These factors make it very challenging to start a business and escape the poverty cycle.

To address this issue, Help a Child launched a ‘revolving fund’ pilot in Rwanda in 2022. A revolving loan fund is a pool of funds that recycles money as loans are repaid. This construction has been used in the development sector to provide financial resources directly to the beneficiaries. Private donors from the Netherlands provide the initial capital injection.

Infrastructure for access to capital is complicated in remote areas. MFIs (microfinance institutions) are simply not there, and the distances to the nearest loan facilities are too far. Youth often lack collateral, such as land or houses, which excludes them from becoming eligible for loans.

The revolving fund project aims to boost the economic growth of parents and Youth within our project areas.

These loans are not meant for regular household expenses but as starting capital for a small business. During this project, the loans were not provided to individuals but only to groups of participants. These groups had been previously formed and thus had a history of engaging in saving activities together. The added aspect of access to capital allowed them to invest in a small (agricultural) business together. This also proved to be beneficial for the cohesion of the group.

At the beginning of the pilot, there was a fear of low loan repayments. Although it can be very challenging for our target group, the overall payback rate in the project in Rwanda was 90%. This means that most small businesses created with the investment became profitable enough to repay the loan.

For instance, some participants have bought cows or pigs, and today, they can produce plenty of organic manure; some cows have started giving milk for household consumption, and chicken rearing is producing eggs, enhancing child nutrition. Therefore, families have access to an improved diet, and at the same time, they can take care of their basic financial needs. Some beneficiaries sold a large cow to buy land and a smaller cow. The beneficiaries highly appreciated the loans because they gave them an opportunity they would not have otherwise had.

The ‘revolving fund’ pilot in Rwanda is a testament to the remarkable progress achieved within the communities we serve at Help a Child. With a remarkable repayment rate and tangible success stories of improved livelihoods and enhanced nutrition, this initiative is a beacon of hope and empowerment.
“I defend human rights, and I want to feel safe” is the message sent to parents, teachers, policemen, and civil servants by four young people from Moldova, who initiated the campaign A safe environment for Child Human Rights Defenders in February 2022.

Aisu, Elvira, Gheorghe and Romana have been participating in an intervention implemented by the Child Rights Information Centre (CRIC), supported by ERIKS Development Partner in Moldova. Within this intervention, the four adolescents became child rights defenders. Romana and Aisu advocate for the rights of sexual minorities. Gheorghe works for the environment and promotes children’s rights to peaceful assembly. Elvira is a media ambassador for the Sustainable Development Goals and promotes gender equality.

Guided by the CRIC, they initiated different campaigns tackling important issues faced by children and young people in Moldova: raising authorities’ awareness on the poor situation of school toilets (2018), preventing bullying in schools (2019/2020), researching for the first time on children’s perceptions around sexual education in schools (2021).

However, their activities, and those of other children, have not been visible enough and are rarely supported by legal duty bearers. Child Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) have also been bullied and abused because they are children speaking out. Adults have refused to participate in decision-making processes, even if these were about children and young people.

Therefore, the campaign A Safe Environment for Child Human Rights Defenders aimed at raising awareness and requesting publicly to protect CHRD from all these abuses. With the support from CRIC, Aisu, Romana, Gheorghe and Elvira discussed the situation of CHRD in Moldova with representatives of national and international civil society, Ombudsperson office, diplomatic missions accredited in Chisinau (capital of Moldova) and UN institutions in Geneva during the Universal Periodic Review.

As a result of these efforts, in January 2022, the Ombudsperson’s Office launched for public debate the concept of the Law on Human Rights Defenders. CRIC and a group of civil society organisations with a long-term commitment to children’s rights requested to integrate the concept of
CHRD into the law so that the State Republic of Moldova recognises and protects them. The draft law includes all the suggestions from children and young people and establishes mechanisms for protecting children involved in promoting and defending their rights.

As of September 2023, the text of the law is under debate, and the network of the CHRD has grown considerably. In November 2022, 45 CHRDs from Moldova and Ukraine reported to national authorities their right not to be discriminated against in school based on their physical appearance and sexual orientation and the lack of sexual education in schools. On the 8th of March, 2023, the group issued a public declaration against a journalist who used the image of a teenage girl in an undignified way.

We want all girls, regardless of their opinions and regardless of how they look, to be safe and treated with respect. Mass media has an important role to play in promoting inclusion and diversity regardless of the age of the people they report on.

Currently, 18 CHRDs from Moldova and Ukraine, together with children from all over the world, help the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop an international campaign about children's rights.

What next? CRIC, which has been fighting for children's rights since its founding in 1999, will continue supporting children to make their voices heard and adults and authorities to consider children's opinions when making decisions for themselves and society. Child Human Rights Defenders — Aisu, Elvira, Gheorghe, Romana, and their colleagues will continue talking to their peers about children's rights and put on the national and international agenda topics important for children and young people. The network, recognised nationally and internationally, is more robust daily. The future of the children of the Republic of Moldova is in good hands.
Tearfund Netherlands and Terepeza Development Association: creating green employment opportunities for youth in Ethiopia

The effects of climate change profoundly affect people’s livelihoods in Wolita, Ethiopia and have led to chronic food insecurity in the region.

Ethiopia has a large youth population; over 70% of the population is under 30. Many young people drop out of school early, with just over 30% attending secondary school. As a result, high unemployment levels mainly affect Youth, and the needs of unemployed and underemployed Youth are considerably more significant than the current government initiatives provide for. Consequently, persistent youth unemployment contributes to social issues and migration from rural areas.

Tearfund Netherlands, working through a local partner, the Terepeza Development Association (TDA), is creating green employment opportunities for young people in Wolita. With a focus on environmental sustainability and inclusive approaches, the project

1 Learning and development! UNICEF Ethiopia
trains and supports young people in the region to create self-employment opportunities and find employment.

The project helps identify locally scalable opportunities and promotes market-oriented activities to create green jobs for unemployed young people. The project builds the capacity of young people through training, enabling them to take advantage of identified opportunities. Training includes entrepreneurial skills, life skills development, financial management, efficient water management, agricultural technical skills and inclusion. The project trains young people and offers continuous support and follow-up, including on-the-job coaching. The on-the-job coaching provides training in critical areas such as market analysis and assists with links to both suppliers and the market.

Self-help groups offer an opportunity to work together on income generation and individual initiatives. The self-help groups help young people save, from which flexible loans are made at very low-interest rates. They are also valuable learning platforms. One self-help group member who successfully cultivates cassava and other vegetables says, “I now proudly contribute financially to my family. I also encourage my sisters to look for their development opportunities”. Links are fostered between the established self-help groups and youth groups to share learning and train the members of the youth groups.

Awareness raising is carried out through the local churches. Working through the churches, messages stressing the importance of inclusive green development and youth employment reach the local community.

Through various activities, connections are made between the young people and other actors such as government, financial institutions and educational agencies. An essential part of the project is developing the lobby and advocacy skills of the young people and encouraging them to engage in dialogue sessions with different stakeholders. Forums are organised to unite local government agencies and Youth, providing a platform where young people can engage with local authorities about the barriers to employment they face. Furthermore, lobby committees with youth and village leadership representatives have been successfully established in villages, focusing on youth access to employment, finance and loans.
Fida International and Tanzania Federation of Disabled Peoples Organisations: Towards informed decision-making and disability-inclusive sexual and reproductive health care services

Arusha, Tanzania
“"I gave birth to six children at a young age and had never heard about modern contraceptive methods," shares Christina Peter from the Tanzania League of the Blind. She highlighted attitudinal and information barriers faced by girls and young women with disabilities in making informed decisions about their future, health, and bodies. Another obstacle is the scarcity of training among healthcare providers in disability-inclusive and age-appropriate service provision.

Recognising the urgent need to address this critical gap, a multi-partner project entitled "Her Resilience Enabled" was launched in Arusha, Tanzania, supporting Finland’s development cooperation. Through the project, a centre of excellence for disability-inclusive sexual and reproductive health services has been established at the Selian Lutheran Regional Referral Hospital of the North Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT).

Fida International is partnering in this project with the ELCT, the Tanzania Federation of Disabled Persons organisations (SHIVYAWATA), the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) under the World Council of Churches, and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM).

Happiness Koisiaga, the Secretary of SHIVYWATA of the Arusha Region, states, “It is vital for women and girls with disabilities because it helps them to access welcoming and respectful sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services”. Having trained health care providers on disability allows girls with disabilities to share their challenges so that doctors and nurses may receive and treat them properly.”

Moving from disabling barriers towards a centre of excellence
Establishing a centre of excellence involves conducting an accessibility assessment, implementing infrastructure changes, creating a baseline for disability inclusion capacity, and delivering specialised training for healthcare providers to address the unique needs and challenges of girls and young women with disabilities.

In September, a 5-day training session was co-facilitated
by Fida International, representatives from disability organisations, and the Tanzanian Ministry of Health. The training modules were crafted using materials developed by UNFPA and disability organisations.

“In essence, establishing a centre of excellence for disability-inclusive services means that although people may enter the hospital having different kinds of impairments, barriers in the hospital environment have been removed, and information, communication and infrastructure are no longer disabling but enabling,” explains Virpi Mesiälälehto, the lead facilitator of the training.

The imperative for informed consent: Emphasis on autonomy and dignity

During the training, the co-facilitators from the organisations of persons with disabilities described the devastating realities of girls and young women with disabilities to the medical staff. For instance, substituted decision-making is still a common practice, as is forced sterilisation due to misconceptions about poor parenting.

Medical professionals were trained in various disability types and communication approaches with diverse women and girls, ensuring accessibility through alternative formats such as easy-to-read materials, braille, sign language interpretation, lip reading, and adjusted speech speed and repetition.

They were also briefed on the crucial legal requirement of ensuring informed consent for individuals with disabilities. The lack of sign language interpretation (SLI) substantially obstructs deaf girls and women from accessing services and obtaining informed consent. Encouragingly, the Ministry’s representative disclosed ongoing government initiatives to incorporate SLI into college-level curricula soon.

“They can decide for themselves!”

Training sexual and reproductive healthcare providers on informed consent for individuals with disabilities is a key step toward a more inclusive healthcare system.

Remy Mnzava, Projects Development Manager at Selian Lutheran Regional Hospital, affirms: “We hope to see an increase in the number of women and girls with disabilities receiving SRH and GBV services. Recently, we have redesigned our Hospital Information Management System to accommodate data for the disability status of our clients. Data disaggregated by disability will be collected to inform the government and all interested partners about the need for this work and all future efforts”.

These healthcare training opportunities ensure girls and women with disabilities, like Christina Peter, access inclusive sexual and reproductive health services and education without discrimination, respecting their autonomy.
“The Youth Empowerment theory focuses on processes that enable participation, enhance control through shared decision-making, and create opportunities to learn, practice, and increase skills. Empowerment theory suggests that engaging Youth in pro-social, meaningful, and community-enhancing activities that they define and control helps them gain vital skills, responsibilities, and confidence necessary to become productive and healthy adults.”

— Zimmerman, Marc A. (January 2000)

Awareness raising is essential for social change and requires effective communication strategies. In Lumbini Province in Nepal, the Samvad program is being used. Samvad, which means dialogue in Nepali, employs various techniques and approaches to communicate and raise awareness about gender equality. These include regular discussions held at Samvad centres, forums, and networks. Samvad participants engage in ongoing conversations with families, conducting dialogues aimed at fostering understanding and support. Additionally, street dramas are performed to convey messages effectively, and special occasions like International Women’s Day are commemorated. The program also collaborates with local government entities to plan and implement initiatives.

These approaches aim at breaking social and cultural barriers to girls’ education, child marriages, and other discriminatory behaviours. The conscientious effort of Samvad graduates has successfully changed the behaviour of the people in their community. For example, many families sent their daughters to school instead of engaging them in child marriages, thus reducing the cases of child marriage in the community.

Youth capacity building and empowerment activities occur at all Samvad program levels, from Samvad centres to province-level networks. These include non-formal discussions at Samvad centres and networks, formal training for income-generating activities, and re-joining schools for dropouts. At Samvad centres and networks, various topics, including life skills, policy advocacy, and gender-based violence, are actively discussed. Adolescents are not only encouraged to pursue their school education with financial support but also receive assistance when engaging in skill-
based training and income-generating activities. Over a year, the diverse topics covered at Samvad centres have equipped adolescent boys and girls to question and access programs and resources earmarked for their community. Samvad program participants identify their challenges and set clear life goals. These everyday lessons build the capacity of Youth, which in turn educates their families and community members, contributing to the transformation of society where all men and women can realise their rights and perform their duties without any fear of discrimination.

The Adolescents and Youth actively engaged in the Samvad program emerge as effective communicators and significant agents for change. Empowering them with knowledge and skills on critical societal issues, including gender inequality, drug addiction, child marriage, quality education, and sanitation, is of utmost importance. With this awareness and skills, adolescents and Youth become agents of transformation within their communities. They are pivotal in reshaping community behaviours, norms, and culture through awareness-raising activities.

Collaboration with local government bodies for financial, technical, and moral support is key to successful awareness-raising activities and continued evidence-based advocacy/lobbying. Providing financial support to the families of program-involved adolescents for income-generating activities is crucial in shifting the behaviour and attitudes of community members as it enhances the effectiveness of communication and awareness-raising initiatives.

The participatory learning, sharing, and action process, focusing on everyday life topics, is crucial in achieving desired outcomes. In the Samvad program, participants identify their challenges, establish life goals, and work hard to pursue them. Discussions encompassing various topics, including life skills and income-generating activities, hold equal importance in fostering societal transformation towards greater equality and justice.
Mission Alliance in Cambodia and the Philippines

Unleashing community development potential through a youth lens

Mission Alliance is testing approaches to empower young changemakers as young minds play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their communities. The energy, innovation and resilience inherent to Youth are as inspirational in low-income countries as in high-income countries. Investing in this generation is not only morally right but strategically imperative.

Cambodia has a young population, where 32% are aged 10 to 24 years. Mission Alliance tests and refines youth-led development through training and coaching in some parts of Cambodia. One tool used is Leaderonomics, a curriculum that nurtures leadership qualities in Youth and youth organisations through workshops and resources to develop effective leadership skills and foster a culture of inclusive leadership. Leaderonomics is a value-based approach where ethical and principled decision-making equips Youth to be proactive change agents.

There is a documented increase in female participation in community initiatives where Leaderonomics is implemented, and upcoming studies will draw lessons on how this approach influences youth employment and income generation.

Bringing together Youth with diverse backgrounds, one girl pointed out that she wants to see more people focus on waste management and nature. One of the boys added: “One of the problems here is muddy water. Many people let the animals linger around water sources, so there are a lot of diseases”.

Engaging Youth in sports can be a powerful and positive force for community development. In addition to contributing to health and well-being, it teaches teamwork, collaboration, leadership in play, community integration and conflict resolution. Sports events bring communities together, creating space for social interaction, and Mission Alliance collaborates with the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia (EFC) on linking sports activities to education services, such as combining youth camps, sports and football tournaments with Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Leaderonomics workshops. The initiative includes reflections through local task forces, PAR tools, and coaching for youth leaders.

One of the youth camps occurred in the Prey Lang Forest, a rainforest threatened

by deforestation. Several participants are concerned about protecting the forest, and some volunteer to patrol it to protect it from illegal logging. A lesson captured by one participant was that Youth can become even stronger by sharing knowledge, being open with each other and working together.

Mission Alliance aims to disseminate and scale up the leaderonomics approach, building on Cambodia’s testing and documented results. Local NGOs are eager to explore new ways of engaging Youth and building on resources that are present in the communities. Looking ahead, the optimism expressed by the Youth and their organisations reflects a collective commitment to shaping a future where people thrive and actively contribute to their communities.

The story of K Youth

On a hot afternoon in the Phillipines, at the intersection of three alleyways, 15 youths listened to what Lilok Foundation, Inc. community organisers had to say concerning forming a youth group. Asked who was willing to be the point person, a 23-year-old young man lifted his hand and said, “I will do it”. This was the start of Kasunduan Youth, also known as K Youth, which would spread awareness of mental health and gender equality along the creek-side communities of Barangay Commonwealth in Quezon City. K Youth is named as such because most of its ten core members live near Kasunduan Street, and it also reflects their desire to promote Kasunduan (agreement). It envisions “the youth (of Quezon City) responding to challenges regarding mental health, environment, gender and others.” Its mission is to pursue the moulding of knowledge through training, workshops, retreats, community organising and network building. Its core members are 17-27 years old, with eight boys and two girls.

They started as tambays (Youth neither in employment nor education who hang out on street corners). With no interest in community issues, especially gender and mental health, they only sought to have fun. Some were members of community and university fraternities that are known for engaging in gang-like activities. They also engaged in discriminatory behaviour towards girls, women and homosexuals.

However, the K Youth found new ways through the Wholistic Communities Project of the Lilok Foundation and Mission Alliance. They organised and facilitated education sessions on gender and mental health. They also organised a gender equality night attended by 70 participants and a youth camp with 33 participants from Quezon City and Rizal Province. Climate change mobilisations are also one of their activities.

From being perpetrators of gender discrimination, they now hold each other accountable. Those previously involved in petty crime reflect on where their lives would be if not for K Youth. A high school student is now considering community development as a career while he previously thought his only option was criminology, as being a police officer was a “man’s profession”. Now empowered as an effective facilitator and leader in K Youth, he dreams of a community development course.

However, K Youth have similar struggles as other Youth- with half of them in their senior high school year. Balancing community work with the growing demands of a global curriculum is challenging. Still, they dream of reaching more people with advocacy by working with the local Youth Council or partnering with the National Youth Commission.

A Philippine hero once said, “The youth are the hope of the nation”. Mission Alliance is excited to see what these Youth will achieve as they dream of facilitating kasunduan among their fellow Youth.
LM International is dedicated to securing the rights of the Romani people and advancing social inclusion and cohesion in Europe. Together with their longstanding partner, Life & Light Foundation, LM has promoted youth and Roma inclusion in Romania and the Republic of Moldova since 1997.

According to the Romanian National Statistical Institute, in 2021, 46% of the Romanian population lived in rural areas. The Roma minority has endured a long history of marginalisation within Romanian society. Systemic neglect of their rights, limited access to education, and scarce qualifications have impeded their integration into the labour market and left them excluded from the decision-making process.

The joint initiative, Better Home, was designed to address these challenges. It serves to:

- Enhance participation in compulsory education and high school for Roma children in Buhea de Jos and Bughea de Sus.
- Empowering the local Roma community in Bughea de Jos to participate in public decision-making processes, with the active involvement of Roma from Bughea de Sus.
- Improving the health of the Roma community in Valea Măcelarului through targeted health campaigns, following the successful model implemented in Bughea de Sus.
- Increasing the employability of Roma adults in Valea Măcelarului by offering them training courses, drawing inspiration from similar cases in Bughea de Sus.
- Enhancing Roma families’ overall quality of life through improved access to public services, a cleaner environment, and essential material support.

With the support of LM International, the Life & Light Foundation has provided the communities with access to safe and clean water. Working directly with families and schools, they have also ensured access to quality education for many children and Youth. A safe space where they have the opportunity to learn and thrive.

The Roma themselves have begun to assert ownership over their lives. Indeed, significant behavioural transformation is occurring within these communities. With increased social cohesion in terms of greater awareness, respect, and shared responsibility among Roma and non-Roma people. Teachers have noted decreased conflicts between Romanian and Roma students,
and Roma children are now attending school, enjoying their right to education and the opportunities available.

Carmen’s story is a strong testimony of such transformation. She is the first student from her village to graduate high school.

While her peers initially attended school with her, they eventually dropped out due to early marriages, pregnancies, and other reasons. Although unable to read or write, Carmen’s parents have been supportive and stubborn. They got married when they were 15 and 17 years young, and say that their own experiences have driven them to prioritise Carmen’s education and future, determined to prevent her from facing the same challenges they do.

As we mark our 3rd edition of Spotlight, the context of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory conflict has again highlighted how fragile our world is. May we join to pray that leaders worldwide respect civilians’ protection and adhere to international humanitarian law. We implore all to recognise and act upon the fundamental truth that a vicious cycle of violence, hatred, and vengeance can only perpetuate more of the same.

Let us pray for an end to the trend towards spiralling attacks against civilians in numerous other countries affected by war worldwide. May our faith drive us to catalyse efforts for sustainable peace.

EU-CORD is a network comprised of 25 NGOs that work in relief and development alongside their national civil society counterparts in 87 countries. We are a not-for-profit organisation registered under Belgian law and in the EU Transparency Register.

For more information on our organisation, see www.eu-cord.org or contact Tabeth Masengu, Advocacy Coordinator, at tabeth.masengu@eu-cord.org.

This Spotlight was edited by Dr Tabeth Masengu and Ms Emily Tucker.