

# Report from a regional conference on Intercultural and Intergenerational Dialogue

Amman, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023



**Swedish Dialogue Institute**  
for the Middle East and North Africa

## **Executive summary:**

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted a roundtable conference on Intercultural and Intergenerational Dialogue. The meeting took place in conjunction with the annual in-person meeting of the Institute's Advisory Committee.

Participants from the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, representing diverse expertise in academia, civil society, diplomacy, and international organizations, gathered to explore prospects for dialogue in times of crisis and to develop thinking on what and how collaborations can be developed, once there is a more conducive climate for such initiatives.

The meeting constituted an opportunity to discuss challenges and opportunities for cross-regional and intercultural dialogues. Furthermore, the Institute's recent work on intergenerational dialogue, including the newly published "guidance note" was presented and discussed.

The meeting provided a comprehensive exploration of dialogue prospects during crises. Despite expressing frustration and sadness over the recent developments in the region, participants recognized the pivotal role of dialogue in achieving peace and security.

The recommendations highlighted the need for inclusive, rights-based approaches and the significance of long-term transformative solutions. Despite its challenges, consensus emerged that dialogue in various forms is essential for achieving long-lasting peace, security, and sustainable development.

## Detailed report

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted a roundtable conference on Intercultural and Intergenerational Dialogues. The meeting took place in connection to the annual in-person meeting with the Institute's Advisory Committee. The participants who came from the Middle East and North Africa region as well as Europe, gathered a broad expertise from academia, civil society, diplomacy, and international organisations.

Amidst the recent tragic developments in the region, participants gathered to discuss prospects for dialogue in times of crisis and to develop thinking on what and how collaborations can be developed, once there is a more conducive climate for such initiatives. Challenges and opportunities for intercultural dialogue was discussed and the Institute's recent work on intergenerational dialogue, including the newly published "guidance note", was presented.



## Prospects of dialogue in terms of crisis

The participants pointed to a situation of mistrust between the MENA region and Europe, catalyzed by the ongoing calamity. They situated the current crisis within a wider context of a rise in global conflicts, increased polarization, and spread of misinformation. Several participants – both from the MENA region and from Europe – argued that the legitimacy of the international system was put into question, due its inability to prevent the great loss of human life in the war that erupted in the aftermaths of the terrorist attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, as well as due to the lack of enforcement of international law and respect for human rights. Several European voices spoke with concern about rising populism, internal polarization, and growing tensions in Europe, both between EU members and within segments of their respective societies, including between older and younger generations.

Participants of diverse backgrounds and perspectives all agreed that any initiatives seeking solutions to the ongoing conflict will have to apply a rights-based perspective. Several representatives coming from the EU stressed that a future two-state solution must apply rights on an equal basis. Opinions from the MENA region, however, overwhelmingly expressed disillusionment with the possibility of a two-state solution, referring to the unequal structures that currently characterize Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Some of the possible solutions to rebuilding the Mediterranean relationship and promoting a culture of dialogue between the regions included undertaking joint efforts to resist the global trends of democratic decline and the spread of misinformation. The importance of bringing together actors from the Arab world and from Israel in these dialogues was underlined, while recognizing the challenge of doing so in times of crises.

Suggestions for what could constitute such initiatives included multitrack dialogue, intercultural exchanges, and continued support for organizations promoting peace and development on the ground. Several participants stressed the centrality of making the Euro-Mediterranean partnerships more equal, underscoring that existing “dependence structures” were impeding trust building. A central recommendation was to think of long-term transformative solutions to promote sustainable peace and equality across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The participants stressed the importance of defining clear purposes and goals for dialogues, identifying nuanced voices, and working on perceptions within different groups in the two regions, as well as between the MENA region and Europe. Timing, diverse dialogue approaches, and psychological support were deemed crucial. Additionally, several participants highlighted the importance of continuous and regular dialogues at multiple levels during crises. They also underscored the crucial significance of addressing root conflicts.



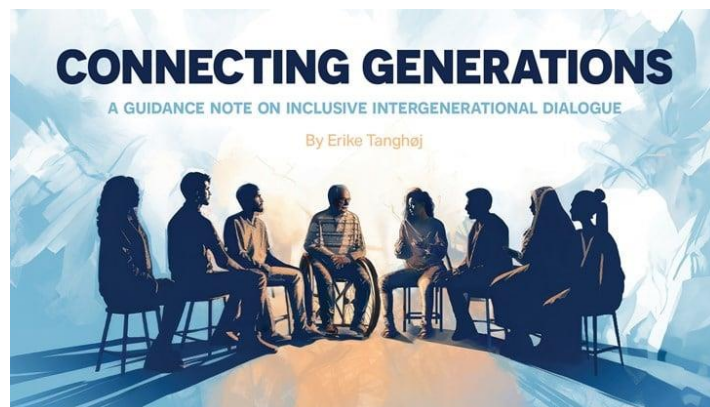
## Intergenerational dialogue

During the meeting, the Institute's work on Intergenerational dialogue was presented, including the recent "[Connecting Generations - a guidance note on Intergenerational Dialogue](#)", by the author Erike Tanghøj<sup>1</sup>.

The participants welcomed the guidance note and saw it as a vital tool for dialogue and for trust-building among different generations and regions, addressing unequal power dynamics. The guidance note was seen as a supportive tool in designing and conducting dialogues, involving different generations, and strengthening their connections. It was argued that the guidance note's importance lies in its incorporation of best practices applicable to various dialogue settings. The participants emphasised that intergenerational dialogue, centred on sharing experiences and personal stories, help creating human connections, fostering empathy and mutual understanding between people of different generational identities. These dialogues can provide a platform for addressing tension and conflict, as well as helping in addressing inherited traumas.

Some participants stressed that different sources of information, with younger generations favouring online communication, may pose obstacles to engagement in discussions with older generations. It was acknowledged that finding common ground between generations could be challenging, especially in addressing issues such as climate change, where approaches and methods might differ. With these challenges in mind, participants noted the guidance note's potential to serve as a useful and important tool to plan for and carry out dialogues aimed at overcoming generational obstacles.

Suggestions for its effective use included mainstreaming the intergenerational perspective in work on thematic areas such as climate change, gender, peace, and security. Capacity-building, transfer of knowledge, and training of trainers, were recommended for implementing the intergenerational perspective in dialogues, making sure that organisations become better at building on the diverse perspectives and experiences of different generations bring to the table and how this benefits society. Full application of intergenerational dialogue within initiatives, mediations, and activism was encouraged.



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<sup>1</sup> The guidance note was developed in a collaborative process over several months and a joint product of the Dialogue Institute and the [Folke Bernadotte Academy \(fba.se\)](http://fba.se), Swedish agency for Peace, Security and Development.

## Cross-regional and Intercultural dialogue

In the session on intercultural dialogue, it was underscored that recent developments have affected the trust between the MENA region and Europe and hence also the prospects for such cross-regional and intercultural dialogues. Several participants argued that it is important to recognize that the current tension is not primarily based on cultural or religious differences but is rather politically motivated and requires a redirection of dialogue to address underlying issues, such as political, economic, and social factors, including occupation.

Recommendations from a meeting on intercultural dialogue<sup>2</sup> conducted by the Institute in October 2023 were presented and the participants reflected on these and developed some further key recommendations and priorities, including:

- Fostering of humanitarian dialogue to address immediate needs and build empathy and encouraging self-reflection within communities.
- Undertaking efforts to decentralize, diversify, and democratize dialogue to overcome stereotypes and to transform donor-receiver relationships into genuinely equal partnerships.
- Taking measures to counter “demonization of the other” through deepened and broadened cultural understanding, through a multitude of actions from meetings and exchange programmes to cultural activities and through media. Despite the utility of virtual platforms, physical exchanges were considered more effective and important to foster cross cultural relationships and to promote mutual understanding.
- Recognizing the potential of media, tech companies and modern presenting tools that can facilitate dialogue and address challenges related to disinformation. At the same time it was underscored that media and social media also at times play a harmful role by exacerbating negative biases of “the other” and thereby contributing to widening gaps and mistrust.
- Acknowledging the links between intercultural and interreligious dialogues, broadening the dialogue by involving diverse stakeholders and using culture as a tool when conducting dialogues.
- Supporting collaborative and innovative initiatives between businesses and entrepreneurs to both foster economic ties and to strengthen human connections cross regions.
- Tapping into collaborative projects and to EU funding. Participants were reminded of the important work done by organisations like the Anna Lindh Foundation and its network of networks, as well as by other actors, including the Dialogue Institute, in initiatives that contribute to enhancing mutual understanding and respect and to intercultural exchanges between the MENA region and Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> See report on the Institute’s website: [Intercultural Dialogue meeting – Oct 2023](#)