



**Recommendations to Increase the Participation of Early Professionals Within
The Partners Network**



Prepared by the “Early Professionals Working Group.”

March 2021



Overview of the Partners Network

The Partners Network is among the world's leading organizations working to win the future of peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and democratic change. As global thought leaders and local implementers, Partners Network centers are using their technical process expertise to help advise and solve local and regional conflicts; then—through the Network—leverage those successes to capture the imagination and engagement of their partners around the world.

By transforming the way leaders think about conflict, sharing values-driven processes, and working together, the Partners Network is achieving peacebuilding impacts on a massive scale, bending the curve of conflict-sensitive development toward a more engaged, accountable, and sustainable future. The Network's purpose is to ensure every member center can access the expertise it needs, share lessons learned, and integrate innovative ideas, tools, and methodologies developed by other centers (and colleague organizations and partners); as well as facilitate organic programmatic collaboration, the joint analysis of global issues, and coordinated advocacy activities.

The Network currently has 19 members, independent, non-for-profits in Albania, Argentina, Bulgaria, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia, Hungary, Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon, Jordan, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, United States, and Yemen. The founding member of the Network, based in Washington DC, **PartnersGlobal**, serves as a coordinator for the Network, working directly with a Liaison Group made up of 5 regional representatives of the member centers (two from Europe, Middle East, Latin America, and Africa).

Background

With support from the PeaceNexus Foundation, the Partners Network has been working to strengthen its internal functioning and collaboration. In October of 2020, a successful global (virtual) meeting was held, with a total of 90 people from the network participating in the four days, including many early professionals who had the opportunity to interact in a network-wide event for the first time. One of the outcomes of the meeting was the creation of an informal early professionals' group to stay in touch over WhatsApp, and other on-going professional development opportunities such as a webinar series on Mediation Practice within the network. With the remaining support from the 2020 Peace Nexus grant, the opportunity was created for



a group of (10) early professionals from the network to form a working group to produce together a series of recommendations for increased participation of early professionals within the Network.

The Early Professionals working group was created with members representing 10 different centers in the network including Argentina, Colombia, Jordan, United States, Serbia, Nigeria, Hungary, Kosova, Slovakia, and Bulgaria. The working group got together to define their scope of work and to provide recommendations for how to better involve this constituency in the business and life of the Partners Network.

Methodology

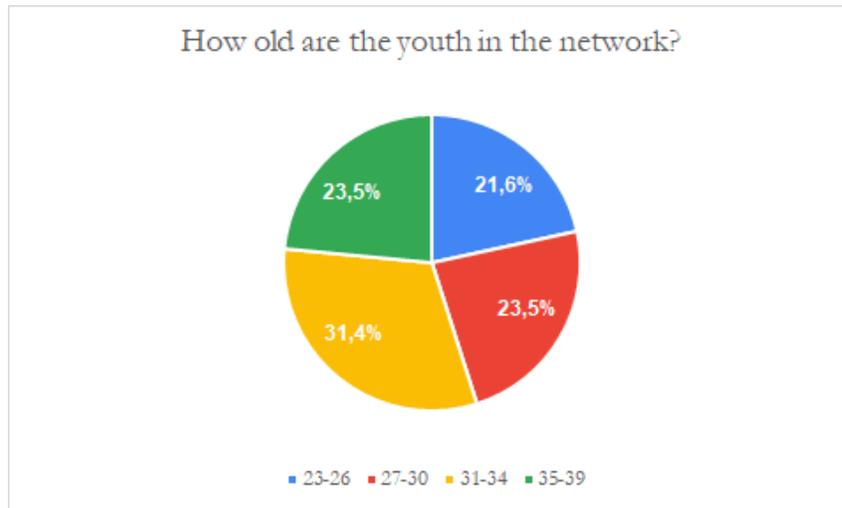
The recommendations in this report are a result of a network-wide survey to gather the input of the target group. The target group consists of the “early professionals” of the network which the working group identified as Network members under the age of 40 and junior staff who are considered new to the network.

The survey questions were developed to gather targeted information to extract the innovative ideas and needs of the network members and use them to support the provision of the recommendations of the working group. Survey questions started with basic information such as name, center, position or title, and languages spoken, to questions that sought to identify their skills, interests, and ideas for the Network.

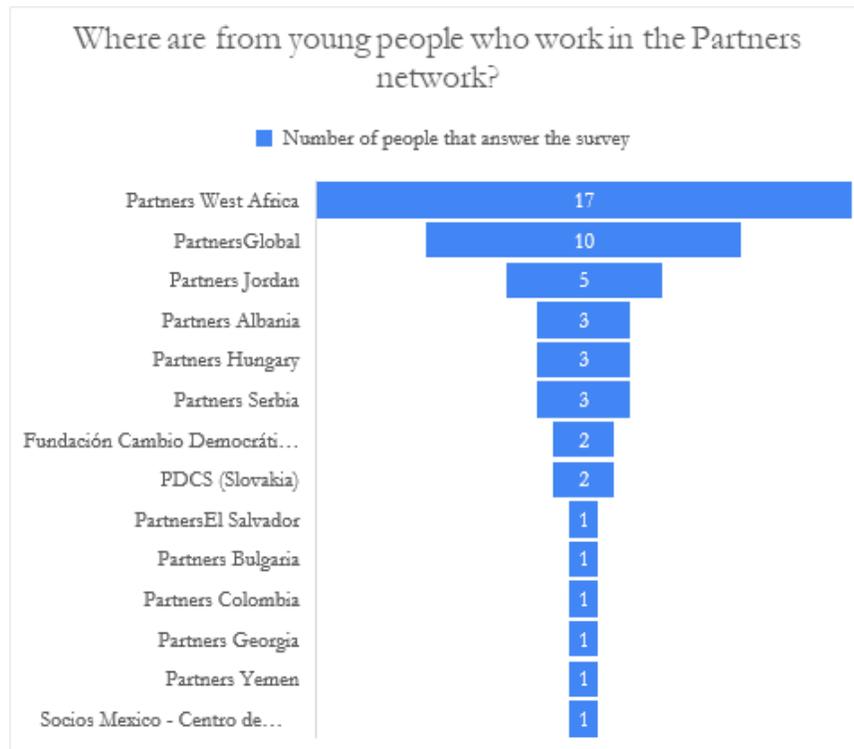
Link to the survey: <https://forms.gle/GyqnrRxY1wyeKoZ8>.

Survey results

A total of **51 people responded** to the survey. The **average age** of all the respondents was 31.4 years old. The breakdown shows that 31.4% of the respondents are between 31 to 34 years of age (16 people), followed by 23.5% of members ranging in age from 27 to 30 years old (12 people), and another 23.5% of members between 35 and 39 years old. Finally, the youngest survey respondents make-up 21.6% of the responses and are between the ages 23- 26 years old (11 partners).



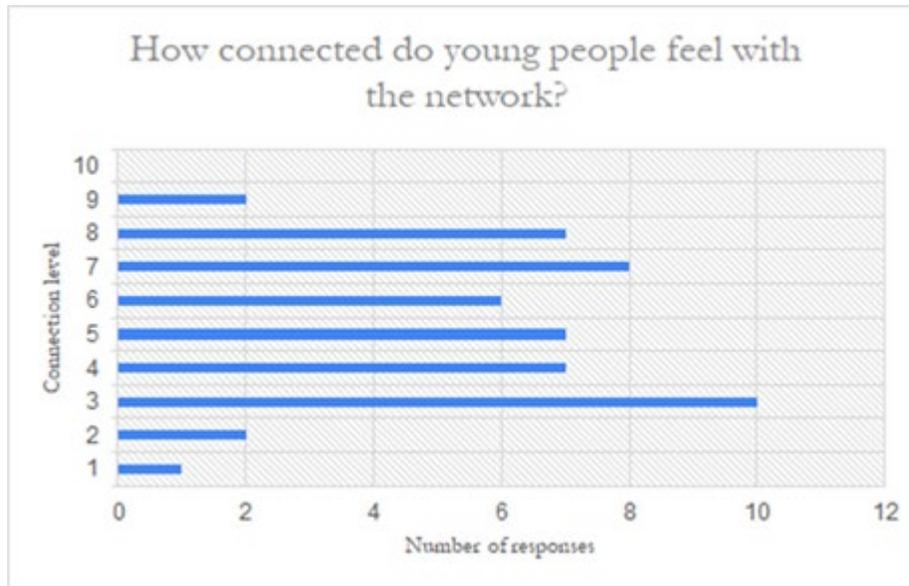
In terms of the different Partners Network Centers represented in the survey, it was found that the majority belong to Partners West Africa Nigeria equaling 33% (17 people), followed by **PartnersGlobal** with 10% (10 people) and continuing with **PartnersJordan** with 9.8% (5 people). Also, staff from Partners Albania, Partners Hungary, and Partners Serbia each made up 5.8% of the survey respondents. Staff from Fundación Cambio Democrático and PDCS made up 3.9% of the respondents. Finally, there was 1.9% representation for each of the following centers: Partners El Salvador, Partners Bulgaria, Partners Colombia, Partners Georgia, **PartnersYemen**, and Socios México - Centro de Colaboración Cívica. Also, the survey respondents have spent an average of four years within the Partners Network, with 11 years being the highest reported.



Regarding the common roles reported, the early professionals included: Programs Coordinator, Grant Assistant, Communications Assistant, Communications Coordinator, Director, Facilitator, Project Coordinator, and Program Associate.

The following areas of interest were collected: human rights, environmental justice, digital activism, conflict resolution, education, women's empowerment, gender equality, facilitation, crowdfunding, social communication, local governance, social accountability, social justice, and innovation.

In efforts to gauge how connected early professionals feel within the Partners Network, we created a scale with the number 10 signaling “very connected” and the number 1 signaling “very disconnected”. Of the responses collected for this question, the average amounted to 5.1.



With the survey results in mind, three emerging themes doubled as concrete recommendations for the Network to consider:

- Multiregional and multigenerational experience sharing
- The need and interest in capacity building efforts for early professionals
- More effective communication strategies for Network members and the Centers

Recommendations :

1. Harnessing the interest in multiregional and multigenerational experience sharing

We recommend the Network create opportunities for a more multiregional and multigenerational exchange through professional development activities. We propose the following idea as a way of getting started:

1.1 “Early Professionals Partners Network Day” – A yearly campaign and virtual retreat to provide the chance for early professionals of the Network to meet and exchange with other colleagues of the Network. Post-pandemic, the retreat could be organized internationally meaning it would take place in a different member country from year to year. Every year it could have one main



topic that consists of lectures on different subject areas and more informal activities, results of this activity can be the creation of a joint multiregional campaign that addresses common issues within regions and centers. We recommend senior professionals of the Network be included in the lectures so that early professionals can meet them in a less formal environment and spend time together.

We recommend this be included as a point of agenda on the annual Partners Network, which would make it more viable budgetary and logistically. Additionally, we suggest including early professionals as speakers, leaders, and facilitators in Network conversations to encourage bidirectional exchange.

1.2 To inspire more informal ways of gathering we recommend the formation of group therapy and wellness sessions. This experience would provide a time and space for mindfulness, which could allow us to collectively share challenging experiences and situations faced in our daily work and larger peacebuilding/NGO sector as well as share tools and lessons. A session of this sort could be combined every so often in the monthly virtual coffee hours.

1.3 Including a special budget for early professionals in annual Partners Network Meetings, that allow Early Professionals to build and increase their skills.

1.4 Exchange experiences/job shadowing for professional development and experiences sharing through travel and or online teamwork.

2. The need and interest in capacity building efforts for the early professionals of the Network.

Bearing in mind that a large number of survey respondents showed a strong interest in receiving education and training, we believe that it is necessary to organize activities within the Network focused on improving our tools, skills, and knowledge sharing.

Some of the topics that were especially pointed out include:

- o Climate Change/ Environmental Emergency
- o Women's empowerment / Women in politics
- o Human Rights
- o Dialogue and Facilitation/ Conflict Resolution
- o Peacebuilding and Conciliation Processes
- o Innovation and Government Reform



- o Fundraising Tools/ Crowdfunding
- o Communication Strategies and Communication Tools
- o Digital Security and Safety
- o Protection of Vulnerable Communities/ Communities' Empowerment/
- o Leadership Skills
- o Language Learning Skills

It is important to emphasize that early professionals are equally interested in peer education and exchange as well as in multigenerational education and exchange. Therefore, we believe that it is necessary to organize various types of workshops, training, and other educational events which can include them either as listeners and/or as lecturers.

Carrying out educational activities in addition to the personal benefits for users will result in improving the capacities of organizations within the Network, greater cooperation between centers within the network, and greater participation of early professionals in the Network.

These educational activities could be organized by the members of the Network taking into account the diverse and rich knowledge the Network has as a group.

2.1 Gathering information related to areas of expertise and areas of interest from Network Members:

Topics of Interest: Based on the existing information gathered during the survey, the Working Group would deliver a list of identified topics for training or workshops. This list would be open to updates according to new needs that could arise in both formal or informal network settings.

To achieve objective 2.1, we suggest the creation of a collaborative repository on a digital platform with:

- o Documents from the main projects developed by each center, uploaded in clear and organized boards.
- o Links to previous lectures or workshops given by members of the network.

Online repositories are a very useful tool that could allow us to find topics for lecturers and/or possible trainers for educational workshops.

We also suggest organizing specific exchange meetings, between all members of the network, focused on collecting information on the areas of expertise from each center and their



employees. During these meetings, the participants would talk about projects they have been working on in their center and transmit their professional backgrounds. These meetings could also allow us to reach a better understanding of the center's members' interest in receiving and or sharing knowledge.

2.2 Addressing the format for workshops/trainings:

Taking into account the global pandemic, workshops and training could be organized online via Zoom or another suitable platform. Given the geographical distance between all the centers, the meetings can remain online even after the pandemic and some can be conducted face to face if resources are found within the center's projects.

2.3 Recommendations for approaching the improvement of language skills:

One of the survey findings we identified expressed the need and interest for a way for early professionals to improve their language and communication skills to better involve themselves in the life and business of the Network. To address this need, we suggest optional one-on-one exchanges between language pairs: experienced speakers (advanced in the intended language) with a non-experienced speaker (non-advanced in the intended language).

For example, the speaker who has the skills in the intended language could give a talk or presentation about human rights or other related subjects within the realm of work and expertise at their center. We consider this methodology useful for the members from different centers who are willing to improve their language skills, and at the same time, it could encourage the exchange of information related to topics of interest.

3. More effective communication strategies for Network members and the Centers

3.1 To work toward this effort we recommend that the Network emphasize and make use of already existing initiatives:



Real-time communication, face to face meetings online or offline. Moments for real-time communication provide great opportunities to practice community building within the network: whenever we're able to connect names to faces, it increases trust and group morale, which in turn provides more engagement on collaboration efforts.

Within the Partners Network, early professionals already have the opportunity for regular online meetings. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Partners Network Global Meeting was held online, making it possible for Network staff to join from all of our 19 centers. Additionally, a new "virtual coffee hour" monthly activity was introduced to the Network members on Zoom, making it possible for Network colleagues to make professional but also personal connections and listen to each center's announcements.

Virtual gatherings, where Network members have the opportunity to share expertise, provide great opportunities for connection, and can even help young members decide who they could turn to - at a later stage - for professional advice, mentoring, or professional partnerships. It would be an added value if non-English speakers could also benefit from these occasions through the use of translation/interpretation services.

3.2 New structures and channels of communication:



- The newly created Early Professionals Working Group established a WhatsApp group so that members can react swiftly and more informally to emerging questions and tasks. It would be a good continuation to keep this group and discuss the role in the communication among early professionals, i.e. due to the nature of WhatsApp, it might be advisable to keep it for short reminders and informal networking.
- We also recommend the creation of an email listserv for all the early professionals of the Network where we could circulate project ideas, professional documents, etc.
- The newly formed Network Communications Committee coordinated by **PartnersGlobal's** Senior Strategic Communications Manager, Jill Slutzker Rucker, comprises members of the early professionals working group members which creates a welcomed overlap between the two groups. The Comms Committee will have a major effect on the visibility of each center's professional activity. The Comms Committee is planning to map the focus areas and the ongoing projects in each center so that the different centers' messages can amplify each other, and Network members can find common ground for cooperation. For a transparent and informative database, the Comms Committee could gather data in a format that serves the Early Professionals Group's purposes as well, e.g. a repository containing the name of the center, areas of intervention, project details, and the names of the people involved with the work. Thus, this could serve as a base for the topics of the Exchange Meetings mentioned in section two.
- In efforts to address language barriers, we recommend the Network, specifically the Communications Committee, acquire translation tools to help those who are non-English speakers participate in Network activities and glean knowledge from the information shared during our formal and informal Network gatherings.

3.3 The continuation of the early professionals Working group dedicated to these and more efforts:

We recommend the formation of a permanent body within the Network to ensure and help to foster youth engagement and participation in Network activities. Bearing in mind all of the above, we believe that it is necessary to have a body that would be focused on participating and strengthening the capacity of early professionals within the Network. The body can function on a voluntary or ad-hoc basis while ensuring an equal geographical representation of participants.

This body would be in charge of implementing initiatives and activities related to the empowerment of early members of the Network, including providing information and



involvement of early professionals in the Network activities. The body will also work toward advocating for early professionals' needs regarding different pieces of training, capacity-building activities, exchange activities, etc.

3.4 Budget for youth

To carry out the recommendations put forth by the Early Professionals group, we propose the creation of a formalized budget for these and other initiatives decided upon by the working group in its future form as a more permanent body operating within the Network.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the expressed interest in more opportunities for early professionals to engage in the Partners Network and build on their professional expertise, we recommend the Network to create concrete opportunities for multiregional and multigenerational experience sharing in a bidirectional format, cultivate capacity building efforts for early professionals, and lastly, develop more effective communication strategies for Network members and the Centers.