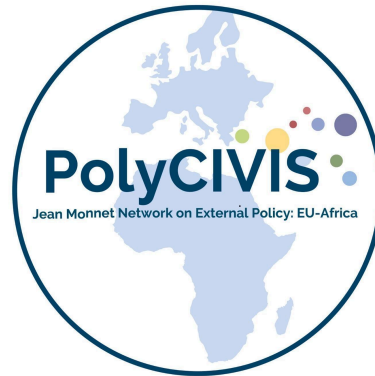


# The Aix-Marseille Polycrisis Declaration

June 2026

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## Introduction

The PolyCIVIS Network<sup>1</sup>, consisting of 21 African and European Universities, and funded by the European Union Erasmus+/Jean Monnet Programme, held its Final Conference, facilitated by the Aix-Marseille Université (AMU), at the Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme (MMSH) in Aix-en-Provence, France, during the period 2-5 June 2026. Within the margins of the Final Conference, a Discussion Forum with the theme "**Polycrisis: Youth resilience in the face of conflict, forced migration, and climate change**" was held on Wednesday, 3 June 2026.

Building on the provisions of the Joint Position Paper<sup>2</sup>, "**Deepening African-European science cooperation by tapping the potentials of European University Alliances**," adopted by representatives of the CIVIS member universities and six African strategic partner universities in Marseille on 11 March 2022, the PolyCIVIS Network seeks to strengthen and expand African-European collaboration in research, education, and policy engagement. The PolyCIVIS Network aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the concept of polycrisis<sup>3</sup>, and its implications for global governance, socio-economic development, and security, thereby contributing to evidence-based responses to complex and interconnected global challenges.

At the Discussion Forum, African and European academics and stakeholders discussed how Africa and Europe can contribute to youth resilience in the face of the polycrisis driven by conflicts, forced migration, and climate change.

The Discussion Forum underscored the **centrality of youth agency in responding to the polycrisis, calling for the institutionalization of youth leadership, meaningful participation in governance, investment in education and employment, support for youth-led peacebuilding and climate action, strengthened mental health and social inclusion, and deeper AU-EU cooperation to advance sustainable and equitable solutions for future generations.**

## Background

The Discussion Forum was chaired by Malte Brosig (University of the Witwatersrand), and the following speakers made contributions to the discussions:

- Karin Bäckstrand (Stockholm University)
- Germain Ngoie Tshibambe (Lubumbashi University)
- Simona Mariana Ioan Corlan (Bucharest University)
- Anaïs Thizy (French YPS, WPS Coalition & EU YPS Network)
- Fadma Ait Mous (Hassan II University of Casablanca)
- Youssef ben Nassirou Ba (Lédéa Bernard Ouedraogo University)


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<sup>1</sup> For further details, see <https://civis.eu/en/discover-civis/civis-alliance-projects/polycivis>

<sup>2</sup> For paper, see

<https://civis.eu/storage/files/civis-position-paper-african-european-science-cooperation-march-2022.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The term "polycrisis" is defined by an era of interconnected global challenges. Characterised by trans-boundary effects, multiple causality, and complex system properties, the polycrisis presents unique obstacles to traditional forms of governance.



Discussants were Faith Mabere (University of the Witwatersrand) and John Oti Amoah (University of Cape Coast).

The Forum recognized that the contemporary world is increasingly characterized by interconnected and mutually reinforcing crises. It acknowledged that conflict, political instability, democratic backsliding, climate change, environmental degradation, economic insecurity, and forced migration interact in complex ways that transcend traditional policy boundaries. These overlapping crises create conditions of uncertainty that affect societies across Africa and Europe, while disproportionately impacting younger generations.

Furthermore, participants recognized that demographic realities differ significantly across the two continents. While many African countries experience rapidly growing youth populations, Europe faces aging societies. Yet despite these differences, young people across both regions confront shared challenges, including economic exclusion, barriers to meaningful political participation, climate vulnerability, insecurity, displacement, and uncertainty about the future.

The Forum affirmed that youth should not be understood merely as victims of the polycrisis. Young people are active agents of resilience, innovation, peacebuilding, civic engagement, and social transformation. Their experiences, knowledge, and leadership are indispensable for developing effective responses to contemporary polycrisis conditions.

The discussions highlighted the urgent need to move beyond fragmented approaches that address climate change, conflict, migration, governance, and development separately. Instead, integrated and systemic approaches are required to understand and address the complex interactions among these challenges.


## Discussions

The proceedings were focused on two discussion items. The topic of the first session was ***"Youth in Africa and Europe at the epicenter of the polycrisis: Conflict, migration, and climate change as intersecting drivers of vulnerability."***

Participants highlighted that young people are living through an era in which crises do not occur independently but multiply and reinforce one another. Climate change, conflict, migration, economic insecurity, governance failures, and democratic erosion are increasingly interconnected.

The Forum noted that climate-related pressures contribute to resource scarcity, livelihood insecurity, and displacement, which may in turn exacerbate social tensions and conflict. Simultaneously, conflict and political instability undermine educational opportunities, employment prospects, public services, and social cohesion, often resulting in migration and displacement.

Particular attention was given to the experiences of young people in conflict-affected contexts, including the Sahel, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other



regions facing prolonged insecurity. Discussions highlighted that youth are frequently positioned simultaneously as victims and solution providers. While exposed to violence, unemployment, displacement, and exclusion, many young people also demonstrate remarkable agency in creating community responses and advocating for change.

Participants stressed that structural inequalities, including gender disparities, socio-economic exclusion, geographic marginalization, and unequal access to education and employment, significantly shape youth experiences of vulnerability. Rural youth, displaced youth, young women, and other marginalized groups often face compounded disadvantages.

The Forum also emphasized the psychosocial dimensions of polycrisis. Uncertainty regarding prospects, repeated exposure to instability, and limited opportunities for meaningful participation affect young people's well-being, identity, and sense of belonging.

Participants further recognized that debates on governance and democracy must take account of local realities and evolving political dynamics. While democratic governance remains essential, there is a need to strengthen institutions, accountability, inclusion, and citizen trust beyond electoral processes alone.


The second topic discussed was ***"Resilience and solutions: African and European youth-led innovation, governance, and peacebuilding in times of polycrisis."***

The Forum affirmed that young people across Africa and Europe are already responding to polycrisis conditions through peacebuilding initiatives, civic engagement, climate action, humanitarian innovation, and community-based resilience practices.

Participants cautioned, however, against romanticizing resilience. Resilience often emerges from necessity rather than choice and should not be used to excuse inadequate policy responses or state responsibilities. Youth should not be celebrated solely for adapting to adverse conditions while structural drivers of exclusion remain unaddressed.

Discussions highlighted the importance of youth-led innovation in areas such as digital technologies, climate adaptation, humanitarian response, and community mobilization. Nevertheless, participants emphasized that innovation cannot substitute for quality education, employment opportunities, effective public institutions, or social protection systems.

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the need to move beyond symbolic youth participation. Young people are frequently consulted but rarely granted meaningful influence over decisions that shape their futures. Genuine participation requires institutional mechanisms that enable youth to contribute to agenda-setting, policy design, implementation, and evaluation.



Participants also stressed the importance of recognizing youth as a diverse and heterogeneous population. Effective policies must account for differences related to gender, class, geography, education, disability, migration status, and cultural context. Finally, the Forum underscored the importance of co-creation, intergenerational dialogue, and partnerships between governments, academia, civil society, international organizations, and youth-led movements. Sustainable solutions to polycrisis conditions require collaboration across sectors, scales, and generations.

## Recommendations

### **i) Adopt integrated polycrisis governance frameworks**

Governments, regional organizations, and international partners should develop integrated policy frameworks that address the interconnected nature of conflict, climate change, migration, governance challenges, and socio-economic exclusion. Policy responses should move beyond sectoral silos and strengthen coordination across humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, environmental, and governance institutions.

### **ii) Institutionalise meaningful youth participation**

National, regional, and international institutions should establish formal mechanisms that enable young people to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Youth participation should extend beyond consultation and include representation in policy design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Institutions should ensure that participation mechanisms are accessible and adequately resourced, including through support that enables the participation of young people facing financial, geographic, social, or other barriers, with particular attention to rural youth, displaced youth, young women, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups.

### **iii) Strengthen AU-EU cooperation on youth and polycrisis responses**

African and European institutions should deepen cooperation on climate governance, peacebuilding, migration management, education, and youth employment. The African Union and European Union should jointly support youth-led initiatives, knowledge exchange platforms, and cross-continental networks that promote resilience and innovation.

### **iv) Invest in education, skills development, and employment pathways**

Governments should prioritize investments in quality education, vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and labor-market integration. Educational systems should be aligned more effectively with labor-market needs while promoting civic education, democratic values, digital literacy, and climate awareness.



#### **v) Address structural drivers of youth exclusion**

Policies should tackle the underlying causes of youth vulnerability, including poverty, inequality, corruption, weak governance, limited access to public services, and exclusion from political and economic opportunities. Efforts to strengthen resilience must be accompanied by broader reforms that promote social justice, inclusion, and equitable development while recognizing that young people often bear a disproportionate share of the cumulative impacts of interconnected crises. Resilience should not be treated as an unlimited resource or a substitute for addressing underlying vulnerabilities.

#### **vi) Support youth-led peacebuilding and conflict prevention**

Governments and development partners should increase support for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, local mediation efforts, and community-based conflict prevention mechanisms. Support to youth-led initiatives should be flexible, long-term, and accessible, recognizing young people as existing leaders and strategic partners in sustaining peace and strengthening social cohesion, rather than solely as beneficiaries.

#### **vii) Promote youth-centred climate action and adaptation**

Climate policies should actively incorporate youth perspectives and leadership. Investments in locally driven adaptation measures, climate-resilient livelihoods, sustainable agriculture, and environmental stewardship should prioritize youth engagement and ownership.

#### **viii) Strengthen mental health and psychosocial support**

Governments, educational institutions, and humanitarian actors should expand access to mental health and psychosocial support services for young people affected by conflict, displacement, climate shocks, and economic uncertainty. Youth well-being should be recognized as a central pillar of resilience.

#### **ix) Advance gender equality and inclusive participation**


Policies should address gender inequalities and political polarization while promoting inclusive participation of young people in governance, security, peacebuilding, and development processes. Gender-responsive approaches should be integrated across all resilience-building initiatives.

#### **x) Promote co-creation of knowledge and evidence-based policymaking**

Academic institutions, policymakers, civil society organizations, and youth networks should strengthen collaborative research and knowledge-production processes. Young people should be recognized not only as sources of data but also as co-creators of knowledge and solutions.

## **Conclusion**

The Forum concluded that young people are not merely living through the polycrisis, they are helping to define the pathways through which societies respond to it. Building resilience requires more than adaptation; it requires inclusion, participation, justice, and structural transformation. Rather than relying on individual action, this



resilience should be enabled, implemented, and sustained by governing structures and institutions.

The participants called upon governments, regional organizations, international institutions, civil society, academia, and development partners to place youth at the center of efforts to address conflict, forced migration, climate change, and democratic challenges. Sustainable responses to polycrisis conditions will only be achieved when young people are recognized as equal partners in shaping a more peaceful, resilient, and equitable future.

## PolyCIVIS: Confronting the polycrisis in Europe and Africa

PolyCIVIS is a Euro - African collaboration that brings to the forefront the global polycrisis, allowing a better understanding of the impacts of several concurrent major societal crises challenging the world in the form of a polycrisis.

In the wake of the global polycrisis, urgent challenges have emerged, prompting PolyCIVIS to take action. Our initiative is dedicated to addressing these pressing global issues and their interconnected consequences.

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