

## Conventional Weapons Diversion and Young Women and Next Generation Initiative (YWNGI) Mentorship Alumni Regional Meeting in Brussels

The Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) and the International Affairs Institute (IAI), within the framework of the [Young Women and Next Generation Initiative \(YWNGI\)](#), organized the first Mentorship Alumni Regional Meeting for participants of the YWNGI Mentorship Programme. The event was held on 15 April 2025 at the Flemish Parliament in Brussels, in collaboration with the Flemish Peace Institute.



*Participants in the Alumni Regional Meeting*

The meeting brought together mentors and mentees based in Brussels and surrounding areas, representing both current and past cohorts of the [YWNGI Mentorship Programme](#). This format enabled participants to engage in in-person discussions, share experiences, and strengthen their network, while reflecting on the four editions of the Mentorship Programme.



*Selected Mentees at the Alumni Regional meeting*

The event was opened by **Ettore Greco**, Executive Vice-President at IAI, who spoke about the origins of the Mentorship Programme, its goals and challenges, and emphasized the importance of in-person meetings as a way to gather inputs from participants and strengthen their network and sense of community. He also moderated remarks delivered by **Pedro Arostegui**, Chair of the Council's Working Group on Non-Proliferation at the EEAS, **Sibylle Bauer**, Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at SIPRI and Chair of the EUNPDC, and **Nils Duquet**, Director at the Flemish Peace Institute.



*From left to right: Ettore Greco, Sibylle Bauer, Pedro Arostegui, Nils Duquet*

Pedro Arostegui highlighted the core belief behind the programme: that the voices, insights, and ideas of young women are essential in addressing today's global challenges. He emphasized that this belief is central to the European Union's approach, which acknowledges that collective security relies not only on policies and institutions but also on the strength of people-to-people networks — such as those built through the Young Women and Next Generation Initiative and its Mentorship Programme.

*"Empowering youth - especially young women - is not just the right thing to do, but a strategic imperative for building resilient, inclusive security frameworks".*

*"The EU is proud to support initiatives like the Young Women and Next Generation Initiative —and to see how it has grown from a pilot project into a growing community of young female experts and future leaders".*

Sibylle Bauer and Nils Duquet, both mentors and Advisory Board members since the programme's inception, shared their perspectives on its evolution. They underscored how the initiative has grown into a vibrant and expanding community and reaffirmed their strong support for its mission. As the programme enters its fourth edition, the speakers expressed keen interest in understanding the impact it has had on mentees.





*From left to right: Ksenija Trajkovska, Bianca Voican, Fer Avar, Amanda Narhan Pereira, Karen Van Loom, Precious Eze*

The event continued with a **Roundtable discussion** among mentors and mentees, moderated by **Paola Tessari**, Senior Fellow at IAI. After brief introductions, mentees reflected on their experiences in the programme and how it shaped their professional aspirations. For some, it sparked new areas of interest; for others, it expanded their knowledge of the field. All mentees emphasized the value of the relationships formed: from professional networking and participation in high-level conferences to lasting personal connections and friendships. The roundtable also featured suggestions for improving the programme and highlighted the importance of fostering connections across different cohorts to strengthen the growing community.



*From left to right: Ettore Greco, Federica Dall'Arche, Nils Duquet*

The regional meeting also featured a **hybrid lecture** by **Dr. Nils Duquet**, moderated by **Federica Dall'Arche**, Senior Associate at the VCDNP. Dr. Duquet addressed the issue of **conventional weapons diversion**, explaining how legally traded arms can be diverted into illicit markets throughout their lifecycle.

He outlined international normative frameworks and initiatives aimed at curbing the illicit proliferation of such weapons and discussed the involvement of non-state actors — including religious extremists and far-right groups. Duquet also explored how emerging technologies, such as **3D printing**, are being used to manufacture firearms and how arms trafficking has fuelled both past and ongoing conflicts. The lecture concluded with an interactive Q&A session.

The VCDNP and IAI warmly thank the Flemish Peace Institute for hosting the event and the European Union for the generous support in making this event possible.

The event was organized under the frameworks of the YWNGI, an initiative by the VCDNP and IAI on behalf of the [EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium \(EUNPDC\)](#), which aims to inspire young women and the next generation to explore careers in non-proliferation, arms control, and disarmament. The initiative provides mentorship, workshops, and outreach opportunities to address gender and age imbalances in the field.

More information about the Young Women and Next Generation Initiative (YWNGI) and the Mentorship Programme can be found below:

Mentorship Programme <https://vcdnp.org/mentorship/>

Young Women and Next Generation Initiative <https://vcdnp.org/young-women-and-next-generation-initiative-ywngi/>

Additional Resources:

Opening Statement by the EEAS

Recording of the Event

Agenda of the event

