



Global Learning Hub  
for Transitional Justice  
and Reconciliation



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**Transformative Transitional Justice in Practice:  
Confronting Challenges, Recognising Successes**  
Practitioners' Conference, 21-22 October 2025

CONFERENCE REPORT  
DECEMBER 2025



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## 1. Introduction

The Global Learning Hub for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation hosted participants from around the world for the 2nd practitioners' conference on "**Transformative Transitional Justice in Practice: Confronting Challenges, Recognising Successes**" from 21-22 October 2025 in Berlin.<sup>1</sup> Amidst growing global challenges to the field of transitional justice evidenced by democratic backsliding, authoritarian resurgence and the erosion of human rights, the conference offered a collaborative space for peer-learning with the aim to:

- **Convene practitioners** from diverse contexts to strengthen global partnerships and build an inclusive global community of practice.
- **Inspire transformative action** by cross-contextual learning from concrete examples of transformative transitional justice and co-developing recommendations.
- **Support practitioners** by creating an open, reflective space to share struggles, experience peer support, and explore ways forward.
- **Influence policy** by highlighting the importance of locally rooted knowledge and practice to shape policy discussions and overcome barriers to transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> The first practitioners conference on transformative transitional justice took place in 2023. Key insights are summarised in the "Reflection Paper. Agency – Power – Space. Exploring the transformative potential of transitional justice", Practitioners' Conference, Berlin 2023, available at: <https://transitionaljusticehub.org/pages/conference-transformative-potential-transitional-justice>.

Re-affirming the need for more transformative impact of transitional justice, the conference theme focussed on how to make transitional justice truly transformative — rooted in structural change, participatory and people-centred design, and sustainable long-term vision. Two overarching questions guided the conversation:

- What **factors, conditions, and strategies** enable transformative transitional justice?
- What are the **challenges and struggles** practitioners face in their work and how can they be overcome?

Approximately 80 experienced practitioners from 38 countries and various thematic and professional backgrounds were invited by Hub partner organisations to actively share their experiences, identify common challenges, and co-create actionable recommendations. Representatives from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the African Union and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights were also present. The participatory conference design, facilitated by moderator Natasha Walker, prioritized various spaces for horizontal exchange, considering every participant as a valuable resource person. The following constitutes a synthesised overview of the very rich reflections, conclusions and recommendations generated throughout the two-day conference.

## **2. Setting the scene: perspectives on transformative approaches to transitional justice**

The opening conversation brought together three perspectives from members of the Global Learning Hub on key elements and practical manifestations of transformative approaches to transitional justice.

*Jasmina Brankovic* (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation / CSVR) reminded us that the paradigm of “transformative” transitional justice emerged out of a critique of “mainstream” transitional justice as being Euro-centric, state-centric, elite-driven and highly prescriptive. Instead, transformative approaches purport the need for context-specific and informal transitional justice processes beyond the state which build on (pre-existing) local resources, structures and practices and are actively shaped by affected communities at all stages. The transformative vision expands a narrow legalistic (civil and political) human rights discourse to encompass social, economic and cultural root causes of violence and seeks to address systemic injustices. It reconsiders transitional justice as a long-term, iterative and pluralistic process, rather than a technicist, mechanism-oriented and short-term endeavour. In its goal-orientation, transformative transitional justice shifts the focus away from reforms, instead seeking deeper societal change, challenging systems of exclusion and promoting more inclusive, just and peaceful societies.

Looking at Germany’s experience in providing reparations to victims of the German National Socialist Dictatorship, *Ralf Possek* (EVZ Foundation) reflected on the potential and limits of the transformative effect of large-scale reparation programmes. While not framed in terms of “transformative” transitional justice at the time, individual reparations for victims and relatives of forced labour (during WWII) at the beginning of 21st century had a significant impact on recipients’ social status by acknowledging their experiences and creating attention for their stories within their own communities in Eastern Europe but also in Germany. On the national level, their stories became part of the collective

memory and inspired a variety of artistic and cultural expressions of dealing with Germany's Nazi history. Yet, both effects noticeably faded after 10 years. In the case of the Roma and Sinti minorities, however, Germany failed to address historical persecution and deeper socio-economic patterns of discrimination as well as historic and ongoing marginalisation. Awareness raising campaigns were not effective, and individual scholarships for Roma to study law did not bear the expected fruits in terms of igniting a series of strategic litigation. After 20 years of scholarships for Roma in Eastern Europe, however, an eco-system of self-organisation evolved which now carries the work forward.

Referring to the transgenerational dimension of transitional justice, *Sofija Todorović* (Youth Initiative for Human Rights / YIHR), reflected on the impact of traumatic experiences of (gender-based) violence on successive generations in the Balkans. She observed that the generation born after the post-war transition and democratisation were exhibiting greater hatred than generations before – often further instrumentalised by the political elite to stay in power. Considering this transgenerational effect of trauma, young people need to be considered not merely as recipients of lessons of the past, but as active advocates for transforming the past to shape the present and future of society. Their role is key in any effort aimed at combatting revisionist and violent narratives, transforming societal norms particularly in relation to misogyny, and ultimately preventing re-occurrence of conflict and violence.

To conclude this session, the three Hub representatives reflected on some challenges to transformative transitional justice in practice and how to overcome them. In addition to investing in long-term processes, relationships and trust-building, they suggested that practitioners need to reflect on their own role in perpetuating patterns of exclusion. They need to join forces to strengthen the connection between local, contextualised efforts and institutional processes and structures at the national and global level. While using the political momentum of heightened (national and international) awareness to set up permanent transitional justice mechanism, institutionalised approaches need to ensure their independence and funding well beyond the short attention-span of the public and donors to enable the continuity and iterative process transformative change requires. On the personal and organisational level, practitioners need to acknowledge that “transformation hurts”, often creating adverse reactions, resistance and lack of understanding amongst affected communities and society at large.



### 3. Experiences from the field: what enables – what hinders transformative transitional justice practice?

In this first interactive session, conference participants exchanged on their respective practical experiences. They identified conditions and enabling factors for transformative transitional justice in practice, discussed major obstacles and drew some initial lessons learned for their work.



#### ***Victims and survivors are the agents of change***

The active participation of victims, survivors, families and survivor networks stood out throughout the conference as an essential condition for transformative approaches to transitional justice. In many contexts, women survivors, as well as youth and women-led movements function as catalysts for community activism, informal mobilisation and major drivers for transformative agendas. Survivor agency is not only a key factor to ensure that agendas and processes meet their needs but directly contributes to transforming social relations by acknowledging that the voice, leadership and power for change rests with affected communities. However, in many instances, exclusion from decision-making processes, perpetrator-dominated narratives and a lack of space for dialogue between competing “truths” limit their possibility to effectively shape transitional justice processes. This is further compounded by attempts at instrumentalising or “hijacking” survivors’ voices. In addition, the effects of trauma, stigma and fatigue as well as challenges to safety and security can undermine active participation and agency.

### Learnings

*To support survivor agency, practitioners therefore need to commit to trauma-informed, long-term approaches, with flexible methodologies allowing for different experiences and multiple truths and ensure safeguarding mechanisms against re-traumatisation. Inclusive strategies and dialogical methods need to be adopted to counter exclusion and divisive narratives.*

### **Local communities hold the solutions**

Conference participants widely confirmed that from their experience, the transformative potential of transitional justice rests on an approach that is grounded in locally owned, community-led initiatives. In practice, however, transitional justice processes adopted on the national level are often far removed from the realities of affected communities. International solidarity with locally owned solutions is therefore key. As are efforts to build bridges between local and national actors and support community outreach. In doing so, a practical obstacle frequently encountered is a fragmented civil society landscape with organisations often forced to compete for scarce funding and political space and further weakened by political strategies of divide-and-conquer.

### Learnings

*To support community resilience and create an enabling environment for transformative transitional justice, practitioners therefore need to invest in community-level trust-building through inclusive spaces for interaction and dialogue that promote solidarity, empathy and collective support. They should also function as bridge-builders between the local and national level and facilitate the design of processes accessible to local actors (in terms of language, formats, etc.).*



### ***Strong alliances and multi-actor coalitions are essential for impact***

Strong alliances and broad-based coalition building was identified as a strategic enabling factor to ensure the impact of transformative approaches to transitional justice. To build coalitions spanning local, national and international levels and bridging civil society and government bodies, strategic allies need to be identified inside institutions and organisations. These allies can function as champions for change, carry the transformative agenda and mediate or translate between different perspectives. Strong alliances for transformative change profit from multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral cooperation, including actors from the cultural, academic and business sector. In practice, however, effective collaboration and alliance building is often curtailed by gatekeeping roles of elites – activists as well as political actors – and the imposition of normative or reductive frameworks, unfit for local contexts, by international actors.

#### ***Learnings***

*To support strong alliances and broad-based coalitions, practitioners need to pay attention to equal and transparent partnerships, carefully navigating power asymmetries while being mindful of their own positionality. They play a crucial role in forging bridges and communication channels between a broad range of actors and leveraging international support but need to be wary of attempts to instrumentalise foreign support or promote hidden agendas.*



### ***Political, institutional and structural factors are enablers as well as obstacles***

Participants discussed several political, institutional and structural factors decisive for transformational change. To tackle systemic root causes, a minimum of democratic space, political will of relevant decision-makers, a common vision and shared values amongst key stakeholders, as well as an institutional environment responsive to change are crucial. In addition, analysing institutional and structural obstacles and developing a strategic reform agenda should be an integral part of transitional justice efforts *early on* and not be left as a recommendation to be followed up afterwards. However, these enabling factors are rarely fulfilled in practice. Instead, perpetrators maintain a grip on power and autocratic tendencies, institutional resistance and official denial often perpetuate impunity as the political realism in transitional justice contexts.

#### ***Learnings***

*To promote an enabling political and institutional environment for transformation, practitioners and external actors supporting transitional justice efforts need to adopt a long-term perspective that looks beyond constraining political landscapes and limited institutional agendas. Being strategic about sequencing and leveraging institutional champions and political change makers is instrumental for seizing windows of opportunity as well as ensuring continuity in the face of political constraints. In addition, the political reality in most contexts necessitates continuing risk assessment, including safety risks for local partners and survivors, a strict application of the do-no-harm principle and in consequence adaptive and flexible programming.*

### ***Transformative approaches build on adaptive learning and context-sensitivity***

Looking at their own work, participants highlighted the need to learn from different contexts and the experiences of others – both regarding failures and successes in advancing transformative transitional justice. Only through adaptive learning based on practical evidence of what works and what does not can the field move forward. At the same time, learning processes and knowledge generation in the field needs to be aware of entrenched power dynamics within, such as specialised expertise held by elites or international experts. They need to reflect the complexity, positionality and ambiguity of hermeneutic endeavours, rendering explicit *whose* frameworks and experiences are prioritised over others and *why*.

#### ***Learnings***

*Practitioners must themselves become invested in adaptive learning cycles. This entails continuously reflecting on their own role as part of a system of knowledge, striving to deconstruct hegemonic “standardised solutions” while respecting and promoting locally produced knowledge.*

### ***Strong vision, emotional drivers and resilience-building are important motors***

Inquiring into the values and emotional drivers that keep practitioners motivated to strive for transformative transitional justice – despite multiple obstacles on the way – participants emphasised the courage, resilience and strength of survivors and affected community as a source of inspiration. Empathy, care and solidarity with those most affected, as well as amongst practitioners themselves

were mentioned as important ethical principles. They uphold dedication to transformational change in the face of the risk of burnout, fatigue or ego conflicts. The longevity of transformative transitional justice – being described as a marathon rather than a sprint – was mentioned as a key challenge not only politically and programmatically, but also on a personal level. Perseverance and a strong vision for the future would be needed to stay engaged when the momentum for change seems to have passed.

#### Learnings

*To sustain commitment in adverse environments, practitioners must well manage expectations – both external and internal – and build long-term strategies, including resilience building for teams and communities to deal with moments of stagnation or even regression. Remaining resilient as a community of practices necessitates distributed leadership to mitigate dependency and exhaustion as well as strong solidarity-based alliances for sustained advocacy, balancing competing priorities and needs.*



## 4. Deep dive into key factors contributing to transformative transitional justice

In four thematic workshops, participants explored in-depth several key factors for transformative transitional justice processes – spanning methodological, actor-related and structural aspects.

### 4.1. Pushing the boundaries from below: the role of social movements in strengthening transformative approaches to transitional justice

This workshop explored the role of social movements and activism in the context of transitional justice and their potential for contributing to more transformative agendas, processes and outcomes. Based on practical examples of different protest movements and activist networks, the discussions illustrated achievements as well as challenges. Participants identified key factors determining the effectiveness of movements and activism in contributing to more transformative transitional justice and developed several recommendations.

#### **Key takeaways**

Across four examples from Myanmar, Zimbabwe, the Basque Country and Chile, the workshop explored how social or protest movements contributed to transitional justice efforts. Their achievements spanned from raising awareness and initiating collective action by means of mass mobilisation, creating space for community participation and ownership, reclaiming control of conflict narratives to shaping a transformative gender perspective in the constitutional convention. While recognising their successes in each context, the discussion also highlighted common challenges of staying mobilised, maintaining momentum and building an inclusive agenda. Several factors emerged as critical in this respect, including the degrees of (in)formality, organisational structures and lifespans. In particular, participants pondered the complementarity between the spontaneous nature of social movements and more strategic and sustained work of civil society organisations. “A movement you cannot plan or design – it happens” was the summary of one workshop participant. Creativity was needed, as well as the opening of windows of opportunity, for social movements and activism to thrive.

In **Myanmar**, the *Civil Disobedience Movement* raised awareness of fundamental human rights for a population living in an oppressive system.

In **Zimbabwe**, grassroots transitional justice initiatives helped set a path in developing bottom-up guidelines and countering one-sided narratives.

In the **Basque Country**, the *Lokarri* movement proved the importance of an inclusive and member-financed initiative, resulting in greater ownership and flexibility and seizing opportunities throughout the peace process.

In **Chile**, the revolutionary protests shed light on the socio-economic factors of transitional justice and paved the way for a strong feminist agenda in the negotiation of a new constitutional agreement.

To move forward, the workshop discussion further expanded on cross-cutting questions: what types of actions are effective in driving change toward transformative transitional justice? How to sustain the momentum and prepare the ground when public interest is fading or windows of opportunity are

closing? How can external actors support without risking delegitimisation or co-optation of the movement?

### ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations emerged from the workshop discussions.

For activists and social movement actors:



- Develop strategies to avoid criminalisation of movements and co-optation by institutions or political actors.
- Organise in syndicate structure to sustain momentum and consolidate transformative agendas without fully institutionalising a movement.
- Ensure effective organisation by distributing roles and tasks efficiently and consider the available capacities to avoid fatigue.
- Conceive achievable objectives and formulate adaptive strategies to respond to changing contexts and needs.
- Involve all layers of civil society in advocating for inclusive transformative transitional justice and especially include justice needs of minorities.

For external actors supporting social movements:

- Prioritise technical advice over funding. Funding mechanisms should be owned by the movements to maintain independent decision-making. Supporting sustainable finance mechanisms should be prioritised (e.g. crowdfunding infrastructure).
- External actors should support in moments of stagnation or political backlash to rebuild and sustain mobilisation.
- Non-financial support could include the creation of exchange and learning spaces outside the country to allow space for reflection, strategic review and learning from experts and peers.

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### **The workshop was organised by the Berghof Foundation**

With inputs from

- Roselyn Hanzi, Zimbabwe Layers for Human Rights, Zimbabwe
- Irune Martínez Rebolledo, Legal Advisor, Human Rights Expert, Chile
- Paul Rios Garaizar, Lokarri, Spain
- Nyaim Moh Moh Zaw, ASIA Justice and Rights, Thailand

Facilitated by Véronique Dudouet and Johanna Lober, Berghof Foundation

## 4.2. Meaningful victim participation: what is needed for change?

This workshop took a closer look at the transformative role of meaningful victim participation in transitional justice processes and the obstacles to realising this potential in practice. Based on practical examples of victim-led engagement and drawing on concrete local experiences, the discussions illustrated how transformation, as defined by victims, can manifest and the conditions necessary to achieve it. Participants identified key success factors and innovative strategies for meaningful participation. The discussion resulted in recommendations for policymakers, peers and practitioners.

### ***Key takeaways***

Three practical cases illustrated the transformative impact of victims' participation in transitional justice processes in Syria, Nepal and The Gambia. These examples highlighted how victims and survivors organise themselves, establish advocacy spaces, and redefine their roles as social and political actors. From a comparative perspective, several aspects crucial for the realisation of meaningful participation were identified. They include creating the necessary physical and symbolic conditions for effective participation, understanding participation as a continuing process instead of a one-time event and going beyond symbolism and "hearings" by ensuring victims have an actual place at the table and a real influence on the construction of narratives and decision-making. Investing in strong collaboration between victim-led organisations and leadership development are crucial. So too is the recognition of the diversity of experiences and forms of violence, as well as their implications for the design of participation mechanisms. Ultimately, meaningful participation must be geared towards transformative change: empowering victims, driving structural changes within institutions and contributing to non-recurrence.

In **Syria**, thorough documentation and support networks enabled victim associations to participate directly in transitional justice processes and decision-making spaces. Coalitions between movements strengthened the voice of victim organisations.

In **Nepal**, following the failure of state-led transitional justice mechanisms, survivors organised autonomously to lead local transitional justice processes. Survivors became community and political leaders, driving reforms, demonstrating that meaningful participation can generate structural change even in the absence of strong state commitment.

In **The Gambia**, a dedicated Women's Unit in the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission strengthened the accountability for gender-based violence and promoted structural equality.

In terms of innovative strategies, the discussion focussed on the importance of linking formal and informal processes to ensure broader, more flexible, and transformative participation of victims. It highlighted that participation does not depend solely on institutional mechanisms, but also on the strengthening of community ties, psychosocial support and the use of tools adapted to local realities. Supporting community-based networks and support structures stood out as a key strategy to promote survivor agency and sustained participation. The need to invest into organisational development and capacities was highlighted as victim-led organisations are essential for authentic participation, building trust in the process and ensuring victim-centred memorialisation. Various

means and tools – such as art, storytelling and exhibitions – were identified as being essential in promoting meaningful community level participation informed by the local context as they allow victims to express their experiences with dignity beyond formal legal language. Yet, logistical and psychosocial support was stressed as being equally important to ensure that victims can speak freely and safely. Eventually, participants stressed that it is not enough to provide space for catharsis or testimony – participation must translate into actions that strengthen dignity, equality, and justice.



### ***Recommendations***

Several recommendations emerged for policymakers, peers and practitioners seeking to promote meaningful participation, improve institutional responsiveness and prevent the recurrence of exclusionary practices:

- Create an environment that supports local stewardship, for example by offering technical and advocacy capacities, while ensuring that decisions are driven, rooted in, and tailored to, local realities.
- Ensure victims participate from the earliest stages of transitional justice processes and take part in decisions on the process design and implementation at all stages.
- Prevent monopolisation of state-centred justice definitions by recognising and supporting community-led and victim-driven initiatives as legitimate transitional justice practices.
- Mitigate frustration and fatigue from prolonged processes through sustained communication, realistic timelines, visible interim results, and continuous psychosocial support.
- Build strong connections between formal mechanisms and informal, community-based initiatives (e.g. storytelling or collective healing) to enhance legitimacy, inclusion, and trust.
- Design flexible participation mechanisms that respond to victims' realities, are adaptable over time and offer practical and safe support for victims' engagement.
- Treat participation as both a right and a transformative process that empowers victims as active agents shaping justice, contributing to sustainable peace and preventing recurrence of violence.

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### **The workshop was organised by Impunity Watch**

With inputs from

- Yasmen Almashan, Caesar Families Association, Syria
- Ram Bhandari, National Network of Families of Disappeared and Missing Nepal, Nepal
- Fatou Baldeh, Women in Liberation and Leadership, The Gambia

Facilitated by Esther Kamau, Impunity Watch and Barbara Unger, Berghof Foundation

### 4.3. Healing the future: trauma-informed intergenerational approaches

This workshop explored how trauma-informed, intergenerational approaches can contribute to more transformative transitional justice and what practices, tools, and conditions make such engagement safe, inclusive, and effective. As a starting point, the workshop recognised the deeply disruptive nature of traumatic experiences of violence and its individual, social, political and transgenerational effects. Crucially, trauma and its associated silence and stigma are not confined to one generation; they both erect barriers between generations, whose experiences of violence often differ profoundly, and are simultaneously transmitted across time, leaving lasting effects on how societies remember and respond to violence. In this context, intergenerational approaches to transitional justice that engage older and younger generations in processes of reckoning, repair, and reform are essential. Reflecting on practical examples, participants discussed how trauma-informed intergenerational approaches contribute to more transformative transitional justice and explored innovative methods and formulated several practical recommendations.

#### ***Key takeaways***

Based on presentations of concrete cases from Cambodia and Germany, comparative discussions highlighted that intergenerational trauma is widespread. Addressing and confronting traumatic issues related to historical violence and repression could often in itself be considered an act of justice for victims. The examples demonstrated that dealing with trauma constitutes not only a personal but also a political act, with the potential to reshape institutions and societies.

In **Cambodia**, practitioners have implemented intergenerational family and community-based dialogues, enabling Khmer Rouge survivors and civil parties to process trauma and foster healing across generations.

In **Germany**, direct dialogues between young adults and their grandparents about the GDR past built openness and connected histories to futures.

Participants reflected on the different ways in which trauma-informed intergenerational work contributes to transformative change: for example, it enables victims to raise their voices and reclaim agency. By confronting what is otherwise left unsaid, such approaches break cycles of violence, interrupting the perpetuation of trauma across generations. They also shine a light on economic, political, and social power structures that sustain root causes of conflict.

Artistic forms of expression, oral testimonies, and intergenerational dialogue were identified as powerful tools to strengthen empathy and compassion across divides. Storytelling across generations was described as a catalyst for social and institutional change, while safe spaces and expert accompaniment were identified as essential for protecting those who engage with their traumatic experiences. In terms of the methodological approach, a key lesson learned from trauma-informed intergenerational approaches was the importance of focussing on shared values rather than identities, enabling connections across generational divides. Participants also emphasised the need to involve perpetrators in the process as the acknowledgement of suffering and the confession of wrongdoing constitute vital steps in a collective healing process.

## ***Recommendations***

Building on the discussions, several recommendations for practitioners and policy-makers were proposed to strengthen trauma-informed intergenerational approaches to transitional justice:

- Increase awareness and knowledge about historical trauma, its mechanisms, and its transmission across generations, integrating this into educational curricula.
- Involve all segments of society in trauma-related work, including victims, perpetrators, and wider parts of society.
- Collaborate with artists and other unconventional groups to develop creative and accessible forms of trauma-informed intergenerational work.
- Establish public spaces, such as exhibitions, memorials, and cultural forums, for engaging with intergenerational trauma.
- Ensure that institutions addressing intergenerational trauma remain independent and receive neutral, sustainable financial support.
- Provide reparations alongside comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support for victims and survivors.
- Pay close attention to timing, recognising that readiness to engage with trauma varies across individuals, communities, and generations.



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**The workshop was organised by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights / YIHR**

With inputs from

- Panha Pich, Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation, Cambodia
- Jan Stassen, Museum für Werte, Germany

Facilitated by Sofija Todorović and Rina Kadiri, YIHR

#### 4.4. Towards (re)distributive justice: the transformative potential of collective reparations

This workshop explored the transformative potential of collective reparations and their role in promoting more equity-driven, redistributive transitional justice. Participants discussed enabling conditions and success factors in achieving more transformative reparations and drew insights from three case studies for future strategies and recommendations.

##### ***Key takeaways***

The three case studies, from Colombia, Morocco and a European Roma-led initiative illustrated the transformative potential and practical challenges of collective reparations. In comparative perspective, these cases offered several insights. First, the active participation of the collective subjects of reparation programmes in both design and implementation is a critical element for realising their transformative potential. Community participation enables acknowledgement of historical marginalisation by the larger society. It (re)establishes agency, mobilizes collective action, and supplies the necessary material, social, and political resources. The political and social recognition of collective harm and its integration into majority memory culture were highlighted as transformative dimensions as well as prerequisites for long-term structural change and redistribution of power. Where economic initiatives were not accompanied by foreseen symbolic reparations, such as the transformation of a former prison into a museum, the reparatory effect was diminished. While the cases showed the importance of seizing windows of political opportunity for collective reparations, they also showed that shifting political will and budgetary discontinuity undermined sustained implementation and long-term transformative impact. Hence, participants cautioned against a romanticised image of collective reparations, as it is often a long, complex and painful process.

The workshop discussion also focussed on the link between historical injustices, present day inequalities and future impacts. Participants explored how a collective reparatory framework could integrate an intergenerational dimension, for example in the context of colonial continuities. They also explored the challenges of addressing wrongs with indeterminate future effects, particularly in the context of environmental and climate harms. One key learning that emerged from this discussion was that guarantees of non-repetition and prevention more broadly are key to transformative approaches to reparations and must be considered in the design of collective reparations programmes.

In **Colombia**, the legal recognition of collective and historical harms, the participation of indigenous communities, women's leadership as well as cross-cultural approaches contributed to transformative change.

In **Morocco**, the collective reparation programme provided socio-economic redress, reconnected historically marginalised communities with state institutions, and improved gender justice.

On the **European level**, Roma-led advocacy and research reframes Roma inclusion as collective reparation for historical injustices. Roma leadership and participation had transformative effects.

## ***Recommendations***

Building on the discussions, several recommendations emerged on how to promote the transformative potential of collective reparations:

- Support the organisation, mobilisation and participation of affected communities in the design and implementation of collective reparation programmes.
- Build concrete measures to guarantee non-recurrence of historic injustice and collective harms into collective reparation programmes right from the start.
- To unleash the transformative effects of collective reparations, material reparations and economic initiatives need to be intertwined with public acknowledgement and symbolic reparations.
- Focus the discussion and resources on re-distributive justice needs of victims and ensure sustainable funding for collective reparations.
- Build permanent institutions which can facilitate socio-political changes by supporting, e.g. memorialisation initiatives, civic education, advocacy or empowerment of marginalised groups.
- Invest in mediation and bridge-building capacities to facilitate collaboration and to balance different interests and needs in multi-layered, decentralised collective reparation programmes.



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**The workshop was co-organised by the EVZ Foundation and Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation / CSVR**

With inputs from

- Patricia Tobón, former Commissioner of the Truth Commission, Colombia
- Isabela Mihalache, European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network, Belgium
- Habib Nassar, Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, Switzerland

Facilitated by Maria Wilke, EVZ Foundation and Bobuin Valery, CSVR

## 5. Learning across contexts: peer-consultations

### ***Peer-consultation methodology***

A central objective of the conference was to share good practices and confront common struggles in the pursuit of more transformative transitional justice practice. As such, creating a peer consultation process that stimulated solidarity, collaborative thinking and mutual advice was integral to the overall vision of the conference. Participants were offered the opportunity to present an issue or problem they were confronted with in their work and receive ad-hoc advice from their peers.

The peer-consultation process followed a highly structured methodology: Case givers were asked to briefly present key facts around their issue, before answering questions and listening to peers' observations. Later, they were to reflect on what resonated or surprised them. Peers first observed and questioned to clarify the case, then shared impressions and hypotheses without judgement, followed by proposing concrete, context-relevant solutions. Proceedings were led by the facilitator, who guided reflection and managed time and group dynamics. This methodology allowed participants to jointly reflect on the presented issue in a structured way and generate new perspectives or innovative solutions in a short timeframe. The diversity of contexts, experiences, cultural and gender-related perspectives brought in by all participants was essential to the success of this format.



### ***Summary of reactions from case givers, facilitators and peers***

The methodology was well received by case givers, with most highlighting that it created a safe space to share their challenges and a useful and open format for tangible peer advice. They felt solidarity in the challenges they faced, a sense of “strength in numbers” and encouragement to continue their work. There was a shared sense that the combination of perspectives from different backgrounds, regions and experiences significantly enriched the reflection, generated new ideas and ultimately better equipped us to tackle the challenges we face.

Participants in the role of the “peer” also valued the structured space for listening and speaking. They highlighted the “openness and trust” that this process encouraged, as well as the sympathy and solidarity that comes from experiencing trust in sharing, listening and reflecting together. This sentiment was replicated by facilitator feedback, who found the methodology easy to apply and beneficial for facilitating mutual exchange and learning albeit challenging in terms of the limited time given.

*“Peers often come in with (an) objective mind, allow them to guide you. You may be pleasantly surprised.”*

*“I felt heard and grateful to meet such people who gave me such new perspectives which I will take with me and implement them in my work.”*

*“Much more quality listening and talking than in usual format. Allows deeper reflections although it seems a bit strict at the beginning.”*



## 6. Taking stock and moving forward

During the concluding plenary discussion, participants drew out cross-cutting learnings from the intensive workshop discussions and identified key successful strategies and variables essential to move transformative transitional justice forward. As the conference came to a close, they also reflected on open questions and areas where they saw potential for further reflection.

### 6.1. Cross-cutting learnings and successful strategies to move transformative transitional justice forward

#### *The role of different actors and their interrelations in promoting transformative change*

Throughout the conference, a broad consensus had been established around the centrality of meaningful, victim-centred, participatory methodologies across all phases of transitional justice, while avoiding tokenism, instrumentalisation and the risk of re-traumatisation. In reflection of this, participants strongly reaffirmed that **survivors and affected communities** need to be the agents and leaders within transitional justice, not simply the recipients or beneficiaries. The participatory approach was identified in itself as a transformative moment of shifting roles and identities from victimhood to active citizenship. At the same time, it was seen as important to allow for a nuanced and context-specific understanding of those complex identities, including overlapping roles and blurred boundaries with the possibility of victim-perpetrator cycles and their political capture. Engaging **perpetrators** in truth-telling, dialogue, and accountability processes was thus considered essential for understanding perpetrators' motivations and roles and design effective strategies for reconciliation and prevention.



With transformative transitional justice being as much about addressing past atrocities as it is about present-day legacies of violence and the future orientation of society, **youth** were highlighted as a key (f)actor. The effects of the intergenerational transmission of trauma as well as the transformative potential of intergenerational dialogue and healing strongly resonated with participants. Several participants highlighted that efforts to address how unhealed pasts affect younger generations must be designed *with* youth instead of for youth – ensuring genuine inclusion while focusing on their present-day perceptions of the past and their future oriented interests.

With view to the crucial role of **civil society and grass-roots level** actors in pushing for more transformative transitional justice agendas, participants once again emphasised the importance of strong coalitions and movement-building – based on multi-actor alliances – as a central strategy for achieving scale, legitimacy, and protection – especially in hostile political environments.

Several characteristics of effective coalitions were mentioned, including:

- Inclusivity: involving all relevant stakeholders, including “spoilers”, marginalised groups, and transgenerational participants.
- Support: sharing learnings, mobilising resources, and preventing isolation.
- Solidarity: enabling collective action grounded in shared values rather than fragmented identities.

While the **role of state representatives and institutional actors** was seen in guaranteeing accountability, opening archives, ensuring reparations, and creating conditions for institutional reforms and safe participatory processes, they should act as facilitators not drivers. Even where genuine political will is present, state actors need to be mindful of institutional legacies of violence and symbols of unequal power-relations as well as the persistent mechanisms of socio-economic exclusion delegitimising officially-lead processes. With regard to **international and transnational actors**, participants saw their role in transformative transitional justice as a largely supportive one: providing solidarity, facilitating comparative learning, ensuring technical and financial support while respecting local agency. The discussion also stressed the relevance of broadening the circle of actors to include the (national and international) **private sector** into strategic efforts for more transformative impact. This being particularly pertinent when addressing the socio-economic root causes and present-day effects of structural violence and marginalisation.

### ***Relationship between formal and informal processes***

Closely linked to a complementary view of different actors and their interrelations, participants reflected on the added value of combining both formal and informal transitional justice spaces, and on fleshing out their interrelation. In many contexts where formal authorities are weak or absent, local agency can be strengthened through traditional mechanisms, informal justice efforts, community resources, and other locally embedded processes. With formal institutions often underfunded, bureaucratic, politicised, or obstructed by limited political will and impunity, transformative transitional justice needs to move beyond normative, state-centred approaches. It should focus on actual entry points and opportunities that work in each setting. Participants shared how for many victims – especially marginalised groups – informal settings provide safer, more trusted spaces for participation, healing, and truth-telling. These spaces can advance transformation even where political

will is weak. However, participants also emphasised that informal mechanisms (dialogues, community rituals, arts, storytelling, traditional dispute resolution) can complement formal tools (courts, truth commissions, reparations programmes) but not replace them. Thus, successful strategies should articulate the interplay between both “spheres” in a complementary and permeable manner and promote innovative institutional designs (e.g. hybrid mechanisms, mixed community-institutional platforms) allowing cross-fertilisation and mobility between both spheres.

### ***Supporting the sustainability of transitional justice efforts***

Another set of cross-cutting lessons learned centred around the question of how to increase the sustainability of transformative transitional justice efforts. Participants emphasised the need for long-term strategies that go beyond project cycles and short-term interventions but understand transitional justice as an incremental, multi-phase, transformative process requiring constant adaptation to evolving needs and circumstances. While a holistic vision is important, a realistic approach should focus on small but meaningful progress and a step-by-step, flexible, process-oriented planning. Investments should prioritise building on what already exists in a given context (traditional practices, community networks, and local leadership, etc.) to enhance continuity and local ownership.

Sustainability also rests on the ability to maintain momentum in phases of adverse political environments and closing windows of opportunity. Participants pointed to the relevance of continuing support for social movements, civil society coalitions and collective action throughout these periods of “drought”. Preparing the ground for sustained engagement requires investing in networks and resilience-building for victims, communities and practitioners alike. It also requires investing in different aspects such as mental health and psychosocial support, rigorous documentation, community outreach and public education to generate lasting support. Donors need to cater for flexible, long-term,



and redistributive funding structures that sustain victim groups, social movements, and civil society organisations. The latter being crucial, as financial independence strengthens autonomy, reinforces agency and resilience, and supports capacities to confront obstructive political environments.

### ***Transformative methodologies: documentation, storytelling, digital innovation and artistic expression***

In terms of the “how to” promote transformative transitional justice, participants raised several methods and tools they considered particularly successful in practice.

 **Documentation:** beyond a tool of truth-seeking, documentation can be designed as part of a strategy for empowerment, e.g. through participatory evidence gathering and archiving. Public story telling of individual and communal experiences can contribute to transforming social relations by enhancing empathy, fostering mutual understanding, promoting plurality of perspectives and strengthening grassroots activism.

 **Artistic methods:** visual arts, performance and other artistic forms of expression can help turn implicit experiences into explicit, sharable narratives, while respecting socio-cultural characteristics and sensitivities. They can be a powerful tool for awareness raising where civic spaces are limited and facilitate the creation emotional connection, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. These creative practices can reclaim identity, counter denial, build empathy, and allow victims to narrate their own histories in empowering ways.

 **Digital tools:** significantly expand reach, especially to youth and remote communities and can help bridge generational divides and encourage broader civic involvement. Promising tools include: social media campaigns; digital documentation; online storytelling; use of AI for low-cost educational material; technology-enabled spaces for save (or anonymous) participation.

### ***Strategies, values and mindset enabling transformative change***

In contexts with weak political will or obstructive governments, progress towards transformative transitional justice can still be achieved by creating safe spaces for dialogue, public awareness, and community-led initiatives. Participants highlighted that even small participation spaces can initiate broader transformations. Key strategies in challenging political contexts included:

- Advocating for victim voice and presence.
- Building supportive networks for work under repression.
- Recognising and addressing the political roots and systems that perpetuate injustice.
- Recognising and addressing cultural marginalization, denial, or erasure as part of an instrumentalisation of transitional justice.
- Sensitising against authoritarian misuse of trauma narratives for political control.
- Integrating prevention as a political priority into institutional and social reforms.

The success of transformative approaches was seen as much dependent on external factors as on the values, language and mindsets of those actors involved, including activists and practitioners. Core principles for successful engagement mentioned by participants included:

- Acknowledging the persistence of the past, transgenerational dimensions of trauma and internalised processes of dehumanisation: not erasing harm but transforming the systems that sustained it.
- Promoting shared values rather than fragmented identities to build broad-based coalitions.
- Using trauma-sensitive, inclusive terminology that accounts for diverse identities, promotes agency and dignity and avoids stigmatisation.
- Being aware that participation is shaped by gender, race, class, sexuality, migration status, age, and intersectional forms of marginalisation.
- Engaging with political dynamics, power structures, and economic interests that shape injustice to build bridges and establish common ground.
- Rejecting self-censorship and opening space for honest critique.
- Ensuring ownership of processes by local actors and victims.
- Retaining the flexibility to rethink, adapt, and change direction.
- Acknowledging human relationships as guarantees of success, not just institutions.
- Focussing on context-specific, pragmatic strategies rather than normative or externally imposed models.



## 6.2. Potential for further reflection and ways forward

In their final reflection, participants identified a wide range of issues meriting further exploration and discussion – ranging from thematic issues pertaining to different aspects of transformative transitional justice, methodological questions as well as ideas for strengthening community building amongst practitioners.

### ***Substantive themes meriting further reflection***

To further advance the transformative potential of transitional justice, participants underlined the need to broaden and deepen reflections on the linkage between transitional justice and contemporary security challenges, ecological issues as well as structural inequalities. Re-examining the different pillars or dimensions of transitional justice (truth, accountability, reparations, non-recurrence) regarding their respective “transformative potential” was considered worth exploring. Closely linked was the question of how to define and measure transformative impact and determine *when* transitional justice would have achieved its transformative goal and come to an “end”.

Another set of open questions circled around the central role of inclusive collective memory culture(s). Participants highlighted their relevance for strengthening democratic culture and the profound impact acknowledgment of past injustices can have for human rights as core democratic values. At the same time, critical reflection would be necessary on the potential tension between a more systematic institutionalisation of memorialisation processes and the risk of political capture and instrumentalisation. In the era of social media, further thought should be given to how to balance the need for simplifying narratives in order to reach audiences, while preserving the complexity and accuracy of representations of trauma and justice, and the role of different communication channels in this regard.

Another valuable line of inquiry concerned the tension between local perspectives and global discourses on human rights and justice. How can processes remain contextually grounded while maintaining solidarity with universal norms?

### ***Methodological aspects of “how we do” transitional justice***

Several methodological aspects were raised, meriting further reflection. While a lot of ground has been covered regarding principles and methods for victim participation, participants acknowledged that realising their meaningful engagement, agency and ownership in transitional processes remains largely aspirational in practice. In addition, the question of how to reach actors outside “our” value system and design methodologies that would allow a broader spectrum of actors to participate, including the security and private sector, was brought up. Yet, this raises complex issues on how to constructively deal with existing political and economic power dynamics and interests while protecting a safe space for those most vulnerable.

The need for more effective communications strategies was also raised, specifically with respect to reaching out to policy makers in a language they understand. This would require a certain dexterity, to remain authentic to core principles, whilst appealing to politicians in a world of competing nar-

tives. More emphasis could be placed on developing participatory communication methods, including community messengers.

### ***Strengthening the community of practice***

Valuing the enriching exchanges during the two days of the conference, participants expressed the wish to continue the conversation and stay connected. They identified the need for creating a permanent, sustainable and transnational community of practice on transformative transitional justice. Maintaining global platforms of exchange could enhance solidarity and transfer of experience and good practices both with view to “scaling down” to specific issues and contexts as well as promoting global comparative perspectives. It would also generate motivation for joint action and support continuing engagement over time. A concrete suggestion was to organise annual in-person meetings to maintain momentum and share experiences. Some participants also suggested thinking about formats to bring in other stakeholders less represented in the room, such as policy makers.

## Annex – Public evening event: „A beacon of hope – transitional justice in uncertain times“

The public evening event “A beacon of hope: Transitional justice in uncertain times” on 22 October 2025 in Berlin marked the finale of the two-day practitioners’ conference “Transformative Transitional Justice in Practice: Confronting Challenges, Recognising Successes”. It brought together conference participants with policy makers and interested public in Berlin and provided an opportunity to share conference insights and formulate recommendations.



### *Staying relevant in difficult times*

Chris Coulter, Executive Director of the Berghof Foundation, reminded participants that transitional justice is not only about dealing with the past but also about “dealing with the future” and as such relevant for conflict transformation and peace. Referring to today’s uncertain global environment, State Secretary Niels Annen from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development stressed that “transitional justice is more important than ever”. He emphasised that local approaches, grounded in the aspirations and voices of victims, are key to successful transitional justice and that there must be a shared responsibility of both civil society and governments, which requires trust and close collaboration.



In his [keynote address](#), Barney Afako, member of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, highlighted that at a time when the consensus around human rights and rules-based international order was eroding, it was crucial to strengthen linkages between transitional justice and other fields such as the Sustainable Development Goals and post-conflict reconstruction. He also called for the inclusion of non-traditional partners, including the private sector, in processes of dealing with the past.

In the following panel discussion, four conference participants shared insights into current challenges to transformative transitional justice and strategies to overcome them. Christine Alai (Utu Wetu Trust) reflected on the Kenyan experience of a stalled transitional justice process and civil society actors' strategies to sustain action and advocate for structural reforms. She argued that it is crucial to harness the disruptive potential of social movements to regain momentum in contexts of political blockage. To be transformative, Sheila Grace Formento (Alternative Law Groups) stressed that transitional justice needs to resonate with local communities, ensuring that processes are not imposed but genuinely understood and owned. To her, this requires "decolonising" the language and concepts of transitional justice.

Habib Nassar (Independent Institution of Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic) underlined the need to connect transitional justice with other policy fields, particularly development. "If you don't integrate a transitional justice perspective in reconstruction and economic development you risk perpetuating violence," he warned, pointing to the dangers of siloed approaches. Azadeh Khalili (Humanity in Action) highlighted the power of participatory planning process in achieving a joint transformative vision of the future. She also pointed to the need of engaging allies inside governmental structures by framing transitional justice issues in terms of broader social and economic benefits.



### ***Expanding frontiers***

In terms of recommendations the panel urged policymakers to ensure funding reaches local actors, noting that too much support from the global north remains in the global north. Panellists called for trust-based philanthropy to step up, with donors adapting their practices to empower rather than constrain local initiatives. Finally, they emphasised the importance of long-term commitment, arguing that adaptive public programming and enduring partnerships are crucial for sustaining transitional justice processes.

The evening concluded with closing words from Annah Moyo, Executive Director of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, who reminded the audience that transitional justice is a field that is constantly learning. She argued that now is the moment to expand its frontiers, moving decisively from transition to transformation.

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## ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The Global Learning Hub for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation is a network of organisations from Germany and across the world, initiated by the Berghof Foundation and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in early 2022. We want to facilitate an inspiring space for dialogue and learning that is driven by solidarity, inclusivity and innovation. By building bridges, generating knowledge and amplifying voices, the Hub seeks to advance the policy and practice of dealing with the past to strengthen peace and justice.

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