Peace and Security with and for Youth

GCSP Inclusive Security Policy Brief Series

Over the last six decades the UN has identified the value of young people and their participation in building and supporting peace and security and preventing violence – and more recently their ability to further the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UN defines 'youth' as individals between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age. With over 1.2 billion youth1 around the world, which equates to 16 per cent of the global population, this is the largest generation of young people in history.

Youth are often perceived as not only **victims** of conflict, but also **perpetrators** – a role that is more commonly associated with young men.[2] Because of this, most youth, peace and security (YPS) activities prioritise the inclusion of young men,[3] despite all youth being vulnerable to conflict and political violence. This reinforcement of gender stereotypes prevents youth from contributing to YPS activities at the national, regional and local levels.

Recognising the role youth play in maintaining peace and security

The valuable role that youth play in peace processes was acknowledged by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250,[4] which called for increasing the inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in peacebuilding and dispute resolution processes. It outlines the five key pillars of attempts to meaningfully and effectively include youth – **participation, prevention, protection, partnership, and disengagement and reintegration.**

UNSCR 2419[5] provides further underpinning of the progressive discourse to increase youth representation in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict. It emerged from an independent study on YPS.[6] UN Secretary-General António Guterres presented the UN Youth Strategy 2030[7] on 24 September 2018 as an "umbrella framework" designed with and for youth.

The strategy works across three pillars: **peace and security, upholding human rights, and sustainable development,** and includes all UN agencies, programmes, and funds at the international, regional and national levels.

The strategy is highly ambitious. To achieve it, new collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships that include the private sector and civil society are needed to empower youth around the world and ensure that "every young person is empowered to achieve [their] full potential".[8] UNSCR 2535[9] calls for **direct youth participation in the planning and implementation of all peace processes.** However, the unique contributions that youth can make to building sustainable peace are undervalued and unrecognised,[10] and tension between young and old people reflects intergenerational struggles for control over power, resources and people.[11]

Graphics Credit: https://www.youth4peace.info/UNSCR2250/Introduction

PARTICIPATION   **PROTECTION**   **PREVENTION**   **PARTNERSHIP**   **DISENGAGEMENT & REINTEGRATION**

> "We must build on the work that has been done with the support of Member States, the Youth Envoy and civil society. But this cannot be an initiative by old people discussing the younger generation. The United Nations must empower young people, increase their participation in society and their access to education, training and jobs." UN Secretary-General António Guterres, 2016

1 UNDESA (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs), International Youth Day: 10 Key Messages, 2019, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-coUntent/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP2019_10-Key-Messages_GZ_8AUG19.pdf>.

2 <https://www.youth4peace.info/>.

3 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/young-women-in-peace-and-security>.

4 UNSC (UN Security Council) Resolution 2250, 2015, <https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015)>.

5 UNSCR 2419, 2018, <https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419(2018)>.

6 UN, The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, 2018, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/news/missing-peace-independent-progress-study-youth-peace-and-security>.

7 <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>.

8 UN, 2018, p. 5.

9 UNSCR 2535, 2020, <https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2535(2020)>.

10 UN, World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/07/2020-World-Youth-Report-FULL-FINAL.pdf>.

11 A. Altiok and I. Grizelj, We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-inclusive Peace Processes, 2019, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Global-Policy-Paper-Youth-Participation-in-Peace-Processes.pdf>.

Challenging stereotypes

Turmoil and instability are often attributed to states having large youth populations, which perpetuates perceptions that young people are **perpetrators or victims** rather than **active individuals** who can aid peace processes. In particular, the surge in terrorism and violent extremism in the past 15 years has been linked to the role of young men and women[12] and their vulnerability to explotation. While more focus must be placed on how and why young people are becoming involved with extremist organisations and what can be done to prevent this, the positioning of youth in society more broadly should also be considered. **Youth's leadership potential** will not be unleashed if these stereotypes persist and young people are not fully empowered to meaningfully contribute to peacebuilding.

Youth-inclusive peacebuilding processes

All impacted members of society must be included in the design and implementation of peacebuilding processes, including the prevention and resolution of conflict. This principle applies equally to youth[13]. **Meaningful youth engagement should be integrated at all levels from the start, not just at a token level of involvement.** Case studies, country reports, and research have affirmed the capacity of youth[14] to successfully build bridges in post-conflict situations. Many youth have a lived experience of conflict and violence, and have peaceful aspirations for a sustainable future, which has been identified as an essential asset for the peace process. Like any population demographic, the youth are not a monolithic group, so the diversity in their backgrounds and experiences can aid peace processes by helping to avoid polarities through **their ability to shed light on non-mainstream and traditional security-related concerns.**

CASE STUDY

"We must preach peace in pieces. As young people we have been marginalized for so long. Now that we have YPS with us may we never discriminate against others. Let's draw lessons from our past experiences and intentionally refuse to discriminate against any major or minority groups in our peace building activities."

Rose Mbone, Nairobi, 2020

Kenyan peace builder Rose Mbone is the founder and programme coordinator of The Legend Kenya, a community-based organisation.[15] Since 2013 she has been working to implement UNSCR 2250 in Korogocho, one of the largest shantytowns in north-eastern Nairobi (Kenya's capital city).[16] She educates youth and facilitates meetings to build trust between the local police and youth, advance disarmament, and prevent gun crime and extra-judicial killings. She is also educating and empowering young girls and women to have a voice and to be listened to in their local communities, while tackling gender-based violence. In a recent interview Rose was asked about the impact of UNSCR 2250 on the young women she is supporting: "they are shocked, they don't believe we have such a document. When we go through it, they realise that it captures some of the things we are doing in the community. **This is a powerful document, but it needs to be translated."**

[12] <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/report/tackling-terrorists-exploitation-of-youth/Tackling-Terrorists-Exploitation-of-Youth.pdf>.
[13] Youth4Peace, About the Youth, Peace & Security Agenda, n.d., <https://www.youth4peace.info/About_YPS_Agenda>.
[14] UNGA (UN General Assembly). Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict, Report of the Secretary-General, A/67/499–S/2012/746, 2012, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/50f3fd382.html>.
[15] <https://www.linkedin.com/in/agala-rose-mbone-a482aa1a7/>.
[16] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackieabramian/2020/07/09/kenyan-peace-builder-rose-mbone-fights-against-gender-based-violence-during-covid-19/?sh=4d86537d5289>.
[17] <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/>.
[18] UN, World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2018, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/armed-conflict/>.
[19] Peace and Security Funding Index, 2015, <https://peaceandsecurityindex.org/year/2015/populations/children/>.
[20] USAID, Youth in Development: Realizing the Demographic Opportunity, 2012, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/Youth_in_Development_Policy_0.pdf>.
[21] DFID (Department for International Development), Putting Young People at the Heart of Development: The Department for International Development's Youth Agenda, 2016, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550229/DFIDyouthagendaapproach4.pdf>.
[22] AU (African Union), African Youth Charter, 2006, <https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf>.

FACTS AND STATS:

- By 2030 – the target date for the achievement of the SDGs that make up the 2030 Agenda – the number of youth globally is projected to have grown by 7 per cent, from 1.2 to nearly **1.3 billion.**[17]

- Over 600 million youth live in fragile and conflict-affected countries and territories.[18] Therefore, **one in four youth globally are affected in some way by armed conflict.**

- According to the Peace and Security Funding Index,[19] funding from grants with a focus on children and youth has been **reduced** from 12 per cent ($41.2 million) of the total funding available ($350.7 million) for peace and security activities in 2015 to **5 per cent** ($12.3 million) currently.

- Youth are often defined as those within a specific age range. The UN states that youth are those between 15 and 24 years of age. However, there are variations in such age ranges. For example, UNSCR 2419 defines youth as persons aged 18-29, while other organisations view the age range of youth differently: USAID[20] gives the age range of youth as 10-29 years, UK Aid[21] 10-24 years, and the African Union[22] 15-35 years.

Recommendations

1. Further research should be undertaken into the existing **knowledge gaps** on YPS at the local, national and international levels, including the **gendered dynamics** of the involvement of young women.

2. **Awareness** should be raised of the **YPS agenda and youth should be informed** of the framework that was established by UNSCR 2250.

3. **Funding that targets and supports grassroot YPS organisations** should be increased. In conflict situations a **long-term commitment** to funding at the local, national and international levels is a key element of **peace education, advocacy and policy development.** Such increased funding at the local level would support those working on the ground, such as the work of The Kenya Legend.

4. The **content of UNSCRs 2250 (2015), 2419 (2418) and 2535 (2020) should be communicated in an accessible manner to youth,** while progress made on the implementation, coordination and coherence of YPS activities across the UN system should be **tracked and published.**