

# Youth, Peace and Security

## ISSAT Advisory Note

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*“Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.”<sup>i</sup>*

– Kofi Annan

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## List of Abbreviations

AU	African Union
DCAF	DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration
EU	European Union
GCYPS	Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ISSAT	DCAF’s International Security Sector Advisory Team
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSCE	Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe
PVE	Prevention of Violent Extremism
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSG/R	Security Sector Governance and Reform
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YNSS	Youth National Security Strategy (Australia)
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

# Introduction

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Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) has over the past decade become a prominent international policy focus area. Framed by UN Security Council Resolution 2250 in late 2015,<sup>ii</sup> YPS builds on the idea that youth play a key role in security governance, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. This role is neither just that of victim or perpetrator, but also as important political agent who contributes to shaping the communities and institutions they are part of in line with their priorities and aspirations. Youth are more likely to experience - both as victims and perpetrators - conflict and other aspects of insecurity such as criminality and sexual violence, but they are often neglected or legally excluded<sup>iii</sup> from processes driving change, peace, and reform.

The UN's *Our Common Agenda* notes that “*Many young people have a lack of trust in the ability of existing institutions and leadership to meet their concerns. (...) Any renewal of the social contract must include a profound deepening of solidarity between generations. Young people need to believe that they have a stake in society and a viable future.*”<sup>iv</sup> Around the world, youth are questioning the social contract and existing models of governance. Fragility, conflicts and the Covid pandemic exacerbate(d) challenges and hurdles for youth living in fragile and conflict-affected societies. International partners need to explore new areas of engagement and to look for ways to improve youth participation. Security Sector Reform and Governance (SSG/R) could be a space to create this positive dynamic and bridge generational differences in access to security and justice.

DCAF's Backgrounder on YPS and SSG/R has articulated the linkages between these two areas ([link to report](#)). This Advisory Note analyses the role of YPS in international partners' SSG/R efforts and partners' current YPS programming footprints. It helps close gaps between these policy areas and contributes to more effective and complete programming. The note strengthens the body of knowledge that supports the case for better embedding youth and their priorities into SSG/R. It builds on a literature review of policy frameworks and briefs, academic literature, project evaluations, and think tank publications. It also uses interviews with policymakers and data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) for further input. Several case studies are highlighted throughout the document to show examples of relevant policy and programming.

Most YPS-related programming aims at building peace and resilience, including political inclusion. SSG/R programming tends to focus less on this area. While many large ODA donors fund programming in YPS and SSG/R individually, more can be done to develop integrated programming approaches. There is, for instance, increasing momentum for developing Youth National Action Plans and youth-led national security strategies as means to improve security and justice actors' inclusion of youth. This note explores how to closer link SSG/R and YPS programming, including also topics such as digitalization, age-specific monitoring and evaluation data, and better positioning youth as agents of change instead of narratives based on victimhood.

## Connecting YPS and SSG/R

This note aims to simplify the connections between international policy commitments and peace and security programming efforts. For that, it is helpful to first sketch out how YPS and SSG/R are connected. The youth, peace and security frameworks build on the idea that a large group of people, in many fragile contexts even most of the population, often does not participate in decision-making processes to search for solutions and have a say in the future of peace and security matters. Just as participation is fundamental for YPS, it is also a foundational principle for SSG/R to ensure good governance of the security sector. Without this, existing forms and approaches of governance cannot be sustainable and representative.<sup>v</sup> This affects how security sectors can respond to and be held accountable by youth, and how the security sector contributes to sustainable peace and security for all citizens.

The participation of youth plays a central role in preventing and resolving conflict, and in striving for well-governed security and justice sectors that are inclusive and form bridges between various groups and communities. The other central YPS action pillars, *protection*, *partnerships*, *reintegration*, and *prevention* are equally interlinked with SSG/R as they are with other policy agendas, such as protection of civilians, prevention of violent extremism (PVE), women peace and security (WPS) disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), but also sectors such as health, education, and social- and economic development. Engaging and representing youth, an important group in society, is in line with other peace and security policy and programming that promotes a more inclusive approach and to promote a culture of peace and tolerance among all relevant actors, which sits at the heart of SSG/R. Well-functioning security sectors listen

to and respond to the needs of all members of society to ensure legitimacy and representativeness. This people-centred approach resonates in YPS and SSG/R.

The failure of societies and their security sectors to sufficiently include youth does not only lead to discrimination and exclusion but can also be a driver of conflict, violent extremism, criminality and weaken the social contract. The risk is that marginalized youth may turn to other groups or platforms, either formal or informal, violent or non-violent, to make their voice heard and feel included.<sup>vi</sup> Security and justice actors need to address youth-specific SSG/R challenges to sustain their trust in the governance system and to uphold its legitimacy. Some of these challenges include muted voices of youth and lack of representation and participation in decision-making, societal alienation of youth and violent extremism, and the role of youth and child soldiers and DDR.<sup>vii</sup> <sup>viii</sup> At the same time, youth are disproportionately likely to contribute to insecurity, especially when they feel unheard and excluded. The age-crime curve is one of the most consistent criminological findings.<sup>ix</sup> While the youth-bulge theory that draws a direct link between youthful demographics and violence in society has received significant criticism, it continues to draw a lot of attention alongside with the (similarly disputed) role of youth unemployment as driver of conflict and violent extremism.<sup>x</sup> Even then, weak governance and poor rule of law is one of the strongest social determinants of youth violence in the first place.<sup>xi</sup> Weak governance, lack of socioeconomic development and lack of hope are other factors that may provide explanations of why youth engage in criminal activities.<sup>xii</sup> The next sections show that youth insecurity, despite its evidence-based connections, rarely triggered structural reforms or attention for youth inclusion in SSG/R processes. Even with the rise of YPS and the acknowledgement of its linkages with SSG/R in UNSCR 2253,<sup>xiii</sup> SSG/R efforts with youth components and YPS efforts with SSG/R perspectives remain rare.

## YPS Frameworks

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The policy frameworks surrounding YPS are rapidly expanding at many different levels. Many of these policies and available programming tools are closely related to SSG/R and its core principles, but few of them draw this link explicitly. Each of the frameworks presents a different definition of youth. Whilst there is no standard definition that is agreed upon, the UN definition frames youth as being between the ages of 15 to 24 years old. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 and subsequent resolutions that set out the YPS agenda go by the age group 18 to 29 years old. The European Union (EU) goes by the age group 15 to 29, and the African Union's (AU) Youth Charter goes by the age group 15 to 35. The age factor goes to the heart of the debate around youth participation in decision-making processes, as it defines the legal limits to their formal participation in elections or other political offices. This aspect also plays out differently for men than it does for women, the gender roles associated to each could contribute or hinder their consideration as part of the public decision-making process.

### UN Frameworks

UNSCR 2250 in 2015 was the first concrete landmark resolution focusing on youth as agent in peace and security. This resolution was followed by UNSCRs 2419 and 2535. Each of these resolutions emphasize slightly different components of YPS. The timing of resolution 2250 in the context of the Islamic State conquests, for instance, helps explain its particular focus on youth in conflict and preventing violent extremism while avoiding a narrative of disproportionate victimization or stigmatization as perpetrators. The negotiations for each subsequent resolution often focused on this balance between empowerment and countering violent extremism as well.

A large Independent Progress Study on YPS was released in 2018,<sup>xiv</sup> which amongst others heavily warned against policy stigmatization associating youth with violence, migration, and terrorism. Resolution 2419, in turn, was closer related to the UN's own role with the establishment of the UN Youth Office, and set in motion efforts to develop two large progress reports (which came out in 2020 and 2022 respectively).<sup>xv</sup> Although many youth council at global (UN) and regional levels have been created, and these UN policies have been picked up by some bilateral and regional multilateral initiatives, in general the pick-up of UNSCR 2250 and 2419 was not as widespread as intended – including in UN peacekeeping missions and political missions.<sup>xvi</sup> This was addressed by UNSCR 2535, which is much more operationally focused than the

previous two and more binding, including by requiring biannual progress reports and more formal participation for youth in peace processes.

This increasingly formalized structure was also echoed by other broad UN policies such as *Our Common Agenda* in 2021, where youth more generally plays a prominent role as well. The platform *Global Coalition on youth, peace and security* (GCYPS) is an important coordination platform for UN YPS policy and has released several useful tools such as a *Guide for Public Officials*<sup>xvii</sup> and other thematic resources.

Thematically, the resolutions focus on five key pillars of actions: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. Their interconnectedness is well-illustrated by the Independent Progress Study of 2018, which for instance emphasizes the ineffectiveness and even counterproductive effect of hard security approaches, punitive justice, and youth incarceration in preventing violence. Decrying the “policy panic” and alienating approaches to youth, based on flawed assumptions about youth and violence, the report calls on governments to focus on taking youth views on injustices (and perceptions of corrupt governance) seriously, restoring faith in the rule of law, and protecting youth from human rights abuses while empowering them to have a say in the decisions that affect them and partner with them while doing so.

It is important to stress that these five key pillars are closely linked to the principles that underpin SSG/R. For more information about the UN’s Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and the linkages with SSG/R, please refer to DCAF’s SSR Backgrounder on the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and SSG/R.<sup>xviii</sup>

***The five pillars of action in UNSCR 2250: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration.***

## Regional Frameworks

The African Union, European Union, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have put forward their interpretation and views around YPS in several framework documents.

### African Union

The AU released the *Continental Framework for YPS* in 2020, alongside a 10-year implementation plan that came into force in 2020. The *Youth for Peace Africa Programme* has become an important AU policy since its launch in 2018, and there is an interdepartmental YPS task force in the Commission.<sup>xix</sup> These initiatives respond trace back to the mid-2000s with the adoption of the *African Youth Charter* in 2006 and the *Youth Division Programmes* in 2008. The Continental Framework, the cornerstone of the AU’s YPS work, uses the same five UN pillars as main priorities. Crucial context is that the African continent is the world’s youngest and is expected to have 830 million young people by 2050.<sup>xx</sup>

The document does not explicitly mention SSG/R, but there are clear links. Echoing other key policy reports, such as the UN’s Independent Progress Study, the Framework sees unmet needs as an underlying cause for young people to participate in armed conflict. Better governance, improved rule of law, democracy and human rights, justice and reconciliation, and better representation are examples of shared policy objectives between the AU’s SSG/R and YPS efforts.<sup>xxi</sup> The Framework requires that annual reports be submitted to the Peace and Security Council and sets three concrete objectives: better recognition and appreciation of efforts of young Africans in peace and security, more partnerships and collaboration with other youth stakeholders, and more youth-led and youth-focused strategies and national action plans in member states. In addition to several programmes, reports, and initiatives (such as the launch of a Model African Union and more Junior Professionals), the African Union has also implemented a youth quota of 35% of staff by 2025.

### European Union

The EU also has a long history on youth engagement, including efforts that predate the YPS policy agenda, although it has traditionally focused on topics such as education, employment and voluntarism. Only in recent years has youth started to be mainstreamed and included into other areas such as peace and security.<sup>xxii</sup> Preventing of violent extremism is one focus area related to peace and security. This differs the EU YPS action from, for example, the UN YPS agendas which embarked from a focus on peace and

security. Key documents and frameworks include the *EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027* and the *Youth Action Plan in EU External Action 2022-2027* which support the integration of youth in dialogues on SSG/R.<sup>xxiii</sup> Both documents focus on engaging, empowering, and connecting with youth, which are different but broadly in line with those pillars used by the UN and AU. The EU Youth Action Plan lists initiatives and plans ranging from youth advisory structures and mandatory consultations of youth organizations in programming to delegate programs and youth forums involving regional cooperation.

### Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The 1975 Helsinki Final Act committed the OSCE to engaging with youth with the aim of “strengthening confidence among peoples”, which made the OSCE one of the very first international organizations to explicitly link youth with the wider issue of peace and security. More recent OSCE declarations in 2014, 2015, and 2018 do emphasize youth and security issues, but they are all less than one page each and do not link to governance or youth participation in decision-making. Several member states explicitly called for more YPS-related work in an interpretative statement after the 2018 declaration.<sup>xxiv</sup> The OSCE sponsors several YPS related projects in the Western Balkans, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine. In addition, OSCE has Special Representatives on Youth and Security and they have launched the “Perspectives 20-30 initiative”, a platform for young professionals to discuss safety and security matters beyond 2030.<sup>xxv</sup>

### Other Organizations

Organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also have held workshops on youth, peace and security and are exploring further efforts.<sup>xxvi</sup> The Arab League and East African Community are in the process of developing a policy or strategy on the topic.<sup>xxvii</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has developed an institutionalized approach, through its *Science for Peace and Security Programme*, the annual Youth Summits, the 2021 advisory report and the role youth play in the NATO 2030 initiative.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### National Action Plans

There is a growing number of YPS National Action Plans (NAPs), much like the approach for UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. They are turning into one of the primary tools to transform international YPS goals into national policy. NAPs generally outline in detail what concrete actions will be taken at different levels of government, identifying lead agencies and organizations in areas where youth are or can be agents of change.<sup>xxix</sup> They are useful tools to understand how countries and organizations intend to apply YPS commitments. The strategy development process is also an opportunity to start a dialogue with (for instance) youth representatives and organizations. During the process, youth representatives in all their diversity can participate and co-decide in defining the challenges, solutions, and responsibilities together with all relevant stakeholders. In many ways, the NAP process is a mini-version of YPS at large.

While the YPS resolutions only encourage states to develop NAPs, the AU’s Continental Framework sets explicit targets for member states to develop NAPs on YPS (25% of member states in 2024, and 50% in 2029). The EU is also moving in this direction.<sup>xxx</sup> As of August 2023, three countries published their NAPs; the Democratic Republic of Congo, Finland, and Nigeria. The Philippines has launched but not yet published its NAP. Cameroon, Iraq, Jordan, South Sudan, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe are developing theirs,<sup>xxxi</sup> and several countries such as Burundi, Jordan, Kenya, Namibia, The Gambia, and Uganda have expressed an interest in following suit.<sup>xxxii</sup> What is remarkable is the relative absence of high-income countries in the list above, which are also expected to come up with National Action Plans. The only exception to this for now is Finland.

#### ***Finnish National Action Plan for Youth, Peace and Security (2021-2024)***

*In 2021 Finland became the world’s first country to launch an official NAP for YPS.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In that, the Finnish pioneering experience can be informative for policymaking as well as YPS programming. The document builds on existing strategies and legislation relevant to youth, with a consultation report by the Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi involving 300 young people as an additional important input. The Finnish NAP can be interpreted as having two layers of objectives: national policy and international assistance. These are mixed throughout the document, where Finnish domestic measures (e.g., increase efforts to combat school violence and bullying) are intermixed with international measures (e.g. support young people’s participation in peace and security abroad). The plan uses the same policy objectives that the UN uses (participation; prevention; protection; partnerships; and DDR). The monitoring and implementation of the action plan is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a specific 2250 National Monitoring Group with evaluation reports that are submitted to parliament and the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs.*

## National Frameworks

While NAPs are turning into one of the keystones of national implementation of YPS, there are other initiatives taking place as well. Moreover, it is important to remember that many youth programmes and policies consider youth and security, even if they take a wider perspective on the role of youth in society. Conversely, national security strategies, peace processes or more specific policies such as on preventing violent extremism or area-specific policing strategies do frequently already contain elements aimed at better engaging youth.

Examples of other national initiatives specific to YPS include national and subnational consultations, YPS coalitions and networks, or civil-society led ideas. In Libya and Myanmar, for instance, national consultations with a formal YPS label have taken place in parallel to local initiatives such as Youth Forums, the National Youth Congress or the Ethnic Youth Conference in Myanmar,<sup>xxxiv</sup> or youth-led peace talks on Utøya (Norway) and international support for youth activists in the case of Libya.<sup>xxxv</sup> In the information boxes below, you can read more about two other such initiatives: the Australian Youth National Security Strategy and the Fica Vivo programme in Brazil.

### **The Australian Youth National Security Strategy**

*A student initiative to create an alternative, youth-led national security strategy for Australia in 2021 was picked up by national and international funders, and became a significant project with an alternative vision on how to formulate Australia's core national security interests.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The initiative incorporated the views of 42 youth representatives from across Australian society, who in ten weeks of workshops on different themes worked in different working groups to formulate policy fresh policy proposals. A subsequent large symposium, production process, and launch was well-attended by Australian political and security leaders. Examples of new proposals include that of founding a National Integrity Commission, a Government Communications Agency including for disaster response, strengthening the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor, nominating a Special Envoy for De-Radicalization, cross-agency pandemic drills, stricter enforcement of illegal fishing and logging, procuring subsea cable repair ships, and strengthening cyber security agencies. Not only does a Youth National Security Strategy provide an entry point for policymakers looking for YPS programming ideas, but it is also an overview of potential entry points and ideas for (youth-led) SSR programming.*

### **Fica Vivo programme in Brazil**

*Belo Horizonte experienced a large increase in violent crime in the 1990s, which research showed mostly took place in certain hotspots and involved young people between 12 and 24 as both perpetrators and victims.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The state government, with initial support from the Ford Foundation, responded by setting up a large community project called Fica Vivo (Stay Alive) in 2002, together with partner institutions from the security sector, shopkeepers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and schools.<sup>xxxviii</sup> It also included a significant expansion of embedded, community-based policing, and a significant portion of the intervention was dedicated to sports and art. The project rapidly gained attention and was rapidly scaled up in many more communities in the state of Minas Gerais (21 million inhabitants) and is still ongoing today. This long running has lend itself to significant research, which has shown that it reduced homicide rates with up to 70% in certain communities,<sup>xxxix</sup> and an estimated 650 homicides avoided in Belo Horizonte alone.<sup>xi</sup> Evaluations also provide lessons in programming, with a particular example being the difficulty of getting community trust to the level where they are willing to meaningfully engage with police officers, and the need to navigate different layers of government.<sup>xii</sup>*

## Data on International YPS Programming

In the below section, we describe what the existing data can help tell us about internationally funded programmes for youth, peace and security. Using data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), we look at all entries on conflict, peace and security (CRS 152) since 2016 that include “young”, “youth”, “jeune”, and “YPS”.<sup>1</sup>

A first takeaway from looking at the 208 projects we identified, is that SSG/R and rule of law are few and far in between. While a broader understanding of SSG/R includes adjacent policy and programming areas such as political inclusion, or youth dialogues as part of peace and reconciliation processes, there are almost no projects that specifically focus on SSG/R or its main actors such as the police or military. The lack of structural programmes that aim to engage youth in improving how security and justice sectors are governed and strengthening the rule of law, suggest that this is a relatively untouched policy area.

A second pattern that stands out is the link between YPS and women, peace and security (WPS) as well as preventing violent extremism (PVE). The latter makes up approximately 10% of the current and past spending on youth-related projects. While YPS takes a broader approach to positive empowerment of youth in peace and security matters and youth participation in decision-making, there are many similarities with the objectives of WPS and PVE. PVE is an important area where SSG/R policy and YPS can find common ground and objectives. With regards to WPS, the role of gender in YPS deserves extra attention. Several of the identified projects group together “women and youth” as underserved groups, which risks overgeneralizing a group that, especially in fragile contexts, can make up a very large part of the population. More generally, WPS and YPS are indeed mutually reinforcing. Young women tend to be doubly excluded in decision-making, and disproportionately likely to be victims of SGBV or trafficking.

Another pattern to watch is the geographic distribution of aid recipients. While past spending predominantly focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa (at almost 100 million out of 272 million USD total), current spending is more balanced with Europe and Central Asia trading places with the Asia-Pacific region to jump from the back of the queue to second place. This appears largely driven by anti-radicalization investment in the Western Balkans, not by the war in Ukraine. The Middle East and Northern Africa region and Latin America stay in third and fourth place respectively as recipients in YPS spending in the identified projects.

### Advocating for SSR in Mali

*In Mali, the UN peacekeeping operation MINUSMA has supported the meaningful participation of youth in SSG/R. Through the establishment of a specific platform for the engagement of youth in SSR and DDR, hundreds of young people are involved and engaged to implement the peace agreement and to counter and prevent violent extremism. This platform is present in all regions in the country and part of the work is also to organize events and advocate for the importance of security sector governance and reform.<sup>xiii</sup>*

### Security and Justice Challenges for Youth in Jordan

*In 2020, ISSAT published a report on security and justice challenges for youth in Jordan, following a mandate to provide programming opportunities on community based SSG/R. This task included a rapid scoping of the safety, security and justice challenges, a description of the ways in which youth and the security sector can meet and engage, and an account of examples of youth-security sector engagement mechanisms. The publicly available report found that statistically, the greatest threats to the safety of youth are violence in the form of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and through bullying at school. Cyber bullying, drug abuse, mental health problems, access to justice challenges, violent extremism, irregular migration and public order events are threats to youth safety and security. The socioeconomic, healthcare and political ramifications of COVID-19 have, in different ways, exacerbated these challenges. Some fundamental drivers of youth insecurity include poor economic performance, barriers to youth political and civic engagement, the conflict in Syria and Iraq, and unequal access to education. The security and justice sector has an important role to play to meet these challenges together with youth.*

To continue looking at the geographic picture, there are several specific jurisdictions stand out in the project data. These are Bangladesh, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Palestine in terms of past projects which all have over five specific YPS projects. Burkina Faso, Colombia, and Palestine all have over four current

<sup>1</sup> Out of 216 projects, 8 were excluded because of mislabelled data.

projects. Colombia has 14 youth related projects and is by far the largest recipient of YPS related security assistance. It is the main recipient of assistance for Latin America with the partial exception of El Salvador, while other regions tend to be more diverse in the range of recipients.

The list of countries sponsoring YPS projects in the IATI data is largely similar to the list of countries by total development assistance spending, with some exceptions. It is led by the US, Germany, Canada, the UK, EU, UNDP, and several Nordic and northern European countries. Nearly all funding comes from developed countries. In terms of past spending, the top 5 is as follows in million USD: United States (67), Germany (51), Canada (35), UK (34), EU (28).

#### **Empowering Youth to Promote Security Sector Reform in Serbia**

*It may be useful to also consider examples of much smaller interventions, such as a project in Serbia that was co-funded by the OSCE mission and Sweden (2020-2021) for approximately €10'000 to empower youth to promote SSR.<sup>xvii</sup> Nine students from the University of Belgrade partook in thematic workshops on SSR, as well as training on writing and data visualization in combination with public policy research. They drafted 12 articles on topics that did not yet exist on the Serbian Wikipedia such as community policing or independent regulatory bodies. The Belgrade Centre for Security Policy also supported them in creating and developing several small infographics, blogs, and videos. Although at a different scale than some of the other example initiatives, such projects are useful examples of smaller-scale interventions that are available to donors looking to engage on YPS and SSR.*

#### **Tubiri Tuvurana Ubupfu: Strengthening Trust and Positive Relations Between Youth and Police in Burundi (2019-2022)**

Search for Common Ground implemented a German-funded project to strengthen trust between police and youth in Burundi to prevent a repeat of earlier electoral violence during the 2020 election cycle. It built on a previous pilot project (2017-2019) and combined capacity-building for both police and youth committees, dialogue facilitation, and fostering a more positive dialogue. An independent evaluation report confirmed the high potential of youth as agents for change (including within the wider theory of change), but at the same time noted that resistance from (local) authorities in further opening up the democratic space can lead to resistance.<sup>xviii</sup> Another main lesson learned is the role of media and journalists to cover sensitive issues but also that their capacity is often overestimated.

The project used the security committees established as part of previous SSR processes as entry point for youth empowerment. The case for youth empowerment in Burundi is built on the fact that political activism (including violence) is one of the few ways in which youth can influence society. This project used this drive for activism, which ended relatively successfully with youth attitudes towards police sharply increasing and more youth participation in the mixed security committees. Although the 2020 elections remained marred with political violence and irregularities, they were a relative improvement compared to 2015. At the same time, cooperation with the police was slow and the participation of women was low.<sup>xiv</sup> Broadly speaking, political violence committed by youth (notably the ruling party's youth wing, the Imbonerakure) continues to be a problem in Burundi.<sup>xiv</sup>

#### **Juvenile Justice in Albania**

*ISSAT carried out a baseline study in 2017 of the juvenile justice system in Albania. The objective was to support a newly launched programme funded by the Swedish Embassy in Tirana and jointly implemented by the Swedish Police, Swedish Prosecution Authority, the Swedish National Courts Administration and the Swedish Prison and Probation Services. ISSAT's baseline study analysed the existing strengths and weaknesses of the legal framework, structures, capacity, and coordination systems governing the juvenile justice system. It also provided a comprehensive overview of the existing national monitoring and evaluation system for juvenile justice and recommendations to enhance the indicators.*

## Linking YPS and SSG/R in Practice

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*“Typical peacebuilding priority areas, such as security sector reform and facilitating peace negotiations, frequently overlook youth and, in particular, young women because of their traditional focus on senior-level and state actors, who are very often exclusively male”.<sup>xlvii</sup>*

The YPS agenda in the context of SSG/R remains a relatively new policy domain with few concrete programming examples. While programs focusing on youth have increased significantly in number, especially in the context of peace, projects are only marginally linked to SSG/R. This provides opportunities, but also potential risks.

### Opportunities

#### Innovation and Long-term Sustainability

Putting youth participation and engagement much more actively at the centre of SSG/R programming is an investment in innovation and sustainability. This is a big opportunity at a time when several high profile SSG/R efforts have seen setbacks that stain its image. Improving the understanding of youth opinions towards and representation in core security sector actors can be an important indicator for the (lack of) sustainability of SSG/R processes. Conversely, **investment in long-term partnerships with young changemakers** can be a sustainable and bottom-up approach where successful reform is not linked to specific stakeholders but to an entire generation of leaders. In countries where youth represent half the population, their sense of representation in decision-making processes and opinion towards police and military can be vital indicators for long-term progress. As a new generation of youth, the largest the world has ever known, enters the political arena, SSG/R programs can harness their agency and energy as champions for reform in ways that may be different from previous efforts. That requires SSG/R programming to be responsive to youths' ideas and needs. Such opportunities can present themselves in new approaches to SSG/R advocacy and awareness raising, but also in partnering with fresh perspectives. The push for greater representation and participation of youth also addresses the fact that half of this group represents young women's voices.

#### Youth as Part of a Bigger Global Agenda

As acknowledged in the UNSCRs concerning YPS, youth is inherently interlinked with other major security policy agendas such as Women, Peace and Security; Digitalization; Countering disinformation; quality education, and preventing violent extremism.<sup>xlviii</sup> It is important that SSG/R and SDG16 are not seen independently from other SDGs and sectors such as education, economic development, and health. YPS is therefore a purely interdisciplinary approach. YPS programming and steps towards the improvement of youth representation in decision-making is often closely linked to improvements in these other agendas too. Existing examples of successful YPS projects show for instance the comparative importance of cybersecurity in Australia's YNSS, multi-sectoral approaches to reduce school violence and bullying in for instance the Republic of Korea and Uruguay in support of better education,<sup>xlix</sup> or involving the health sector using the Cardiff Model where police and hospital emergency wards work together to better track and predict youth violence hotspots.<sup>l</sup>

## Youth as Entry-point for Broader Discussions, Cooperation and Co-facilitation

The YPS agenda can provide an entry point for discussion and cooperation far beyond empowering youth. It can open doors towards engagements with other themes and actors. This is the case both in terms of coordination and on-the-ground programming. For instance, Finland worked closely with Qatar to advance the first YPS national action plans and conferences, and Egypt and Guyana co-facilitated the adoption of the UN general assembly resolution to establish a UN Youth Office. The High-Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Process was co-hosted by Qatar, Finland and Colombia. Global YPS efforts are often able to cross North-South boundaries or regional groupings, and this opens opportunities to other areas. Countries may be more receptive to discussing youth and the role of youth in security governance, for instance in the context of PVE, than they may be to discussing other aspects of SSG/R. As such, YPS can be an entry point for broader discussions about reform.

### YPS is for North and South

YPS, as a global initiative, calls on *all* member states to better integrate youth into peace and security policy efforts. It is not only for fragile contexts. International supporters of SSG/R efforts can and should pursue similar efforts to push for youth inclusion at home as well. Successful efforts abroad combining YPS and SSG/R can be replicated. Aid recipient countries are currently a main driver of YPS work, and there is room for developed countries to not only support them in these SSG/R efforts, but also to learn from their experiences and actively implement YPS in the Global North too.

### **Strengthening youth participation in Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher (Tunisia)**

*International Alert started working in 2014 in two poor neighbourhoods of Tunis, known for their economic problems, high crime rates, and political activism (both in terms of the 2011 revolution and later Salafism and departing jihadists). With funding from Canada, Switzerland and the UK, the project did research on the perception and needs of youth and worked with local civil society to create a youth coordination committee, support marginalized youth, and help youth express their needs and opinions. These projects aim more broadly at building trust between local authorities and youth, encouraging youth to exchange views with authorities, and support local solidarity enterprises.<sup>ii</sup>*

*Although International Alert has a significant operational footprint working with youth in Tunisia,<sup>iii</sup> their research publications and documentaries may be of even more value as tools for policymakers. Two large reports (2016 and 2023) for instance explain the dynamics between youth activism, marginalization, and radicalization.<sup>iii</sup> Feelings of marginalization and exclusion create a strong sense of disillusionment after initial hopes for change after the 2011 resolution. The reports, as well as an EU-funded documentary from 2021,<sup>iv</sup> can help visualize this as well. It is worth noting that police violence is one of the most common issues raised by youth: “The police (...) are more or less the only subject on which opinion in our focus groups was unanimous. Young people think of the security forces as an institution that does not carry out its intended role (...) In fact, they conceive of it as a tool of extrajudicial violence, a force that metes out illegal and illegitimate violence of various kinds to the young men of working-class neighbourhoods wherever and whenever they encounter them.”<sup>iv</sup>*

## Programming Pitfalls to Consider

### Resistance from Incumbent Decision-makers

In similar fashion to the challenges experienced by promoters of women’s voices and participation in decision-making, there can be considerable resistance from incumbent stakeholders. This resistance can also be rooted in cultural notions of seniority and age-based hierarchy. As with raising the profile of women in security institutions and decision-making, a necessary distinction is also between passive and active participation. Successful YPS programming in the context of SSG/R is not just setting up dialogue through organizing a “youth day” but it entails long-term, systematic and active representation of youth as political agents. That means representation in parliaments, policing is responsive to the security needs of youth, youth voices as opinion makers in media, and removing age-based barriers in security institutions. It also means that youth take on a role or act as an important constituency amongst informal security and justice settings, for example in informal security committees. Resistance can also come in the channels and means used by youth to engage in society. There may for instance be a digital and technical gap that further reinforces the cleavage between youth and adults – where international support can help cope.

### Wrongly Defining the Target Group

Youth is a different target group than children, and programming approaches need to differentiate between these two groups. Similarly, many programs combine “women-and-youth” as a single group which can be misleading if they may face many similar hurdles and barriers. While programming can combine these groups into a wider push for empowerment, gender sensitivity and youth sensitive analyses can have very different conclusions. On top of this, while labelling groups is understandable and to some extent a

prerequisite for programming and policy, it is important to recognize that “youth” as a concept is exceptionally broad and misses underlying drivers of marginalization such as income, ethnicity, and education. In the project data, it is already clear that there are dozens of projects that follow the “women-and-youth” template. In addition, not clearly defining at what level the impact of youth involvement is targeted at, risks lead to lack of results. Identifying if the aim is to impact youth at community, provincial, national or international level is important to clearly identify the target group too.

### **Failure to Mainstream Youth**

While programming can include specific projects on enhancing the representation and participation of youth specifically, the interdisciplinary nature of YPS requires an approach akin to that of WPS. Police reform programs should as a matter of habit include youth indicators, much as no respectable police reform program can ignore the need to have a proper gender analysis. A reform program in a country with a median age of 17 years that does not assess and include youth perceptions is per definition not people- and needs centred. The international community investing in people-centred security and mainstreaming youth into programming helps to achieve that goal.

### **Escaping Victimhood**

An earlier publication on youth in the context of SSG/R was aptly titled “Escaping Victimhood”.<sup>lv</sup> While projects can and should acknowledge that youth is disproportionately likely to fall victim to crime, violent extremism, or conflict, the red thread of the YPS agenda is empowerment. The narrative of victimhood mischaracterizes the agency that young people should have in societal decision-making. At the same time, SSG/R programming cannot afford to ignore the reality that youth are thus also overrepresented as crime and violent extremism perpetrators. This negative narrative is also harmful. SSG/R programming can perpetuate the stigmatization of young people into either direction and can also contribute to the structural underestimation of young people’s ability and right to have a say in the political direction of the societies they are part of.

### **Youth Opinions Can Be Unpopular and Challenging**

Programming should not make the assumption that youth opinions are necessarily receptive to democratization and a certain set of values. Youth can support military coups and political repression, while they can oppose liberal and inclusive values or involvement of the international community. “Youth” is no uniform group, nor do they have a monolithic political orientation both within and between countries. Youth-led protests in one country can bring down a junta while they are consolidating another elsewhere. Programming should recognize that empowering “youth” is not always a natural pathway to advancing all the values that such programmes strive for.

## **Programming Entry Points**

There are some concrete entry points where international partners and donors can support SSG/R work in the context of YPS.

**National Security Strategies and National Action Plans.** National security strategies are an important entry point where the international community can support youth inclusion. They can provide them a seat at the table, ensure that their perspectives are acknowledged and taken into account, and set youth specific indicators and targets. Examples from the Central African Republic, Liberia, Libya, Mali and Somalia show how UN missions established mechanisms that enables youth to take part in the development of national security strategies.<sup>lvii</sup>

The African Union has taken one step further and mandated all its member states to develop Youth national action plans, and similar efforts are underway on other places the world. These plans are a concrete entry point where partner countries can support and seize the opportunity to bring an entire generation of future leaders around the table to discuss security sector governance. The plans also provide insights in policy priorities and the direction of security sector governance, both from a domestic point of view and to assess how this relates to international assistance priorities. International partners may choose from supporting the entire national action plan process, focusing on strengthening certain themes or actors such security and justice actors’ inclusion of youth, or support regional initiatives to take on a driving role, as the AU has done.

**YPS is a Global Agenda.** This means that international partners, donors and others working on supporting SSG/R efforts abroad, should also reflect on how YPS is integrated in their own national efforts. Today, YPS is mostly tackled by the Global South. International partners need to acknowledge that YPS is a global agenda that also should be incorporated in domestic policy and not only foreign assistance. The Finnish NAP is a good example on how an action plan can be developed combining these perspectives. This advisory note has highlighted several practices and examples, and the further reading section provides further practical guidance.

**New and Old Youth Security Sector Governance Ideas.** A key benefit of working with youth is the power to innovate and raise new ideas. Newly emerging, different initiatives focused on youth participation provide entry points for support and expansion. The Australian Youth National Security Strategy is one such example. Youth security committees, youth political parties, youth parliaments, or youth advisory boards for institutions like the police are other examples on how to push for youth voices and perspectives in SSG/R. International partners, donors and others involved in support to SSG/R need to keep close tab on ideas that are proposed and can harness the energy and creativity of young people to help continuously reinvent SSG/R as a policy field as well and ensure that it speaks to everyone in society.

**Improve Security and Justice Actors' Approach to Youth.** The focus on issues such as PVE or curbing violence as part of YPS risks securitizing youth, and hard-fisted responses can be counterproductive with further marginalization and vulnerability. It risks narrowing the space available for youth and harm their rights and further questioning the social contract. There is a looming vicious cycle of harsh approaches leading to more detention and jail, fuelling further disenchantment, and increased enlistment to violent or criminal groups. External supporters of SSG/R processes need to ensure that security and justice actors respect youth's rights, and they can pay particular attention to youth-sensitive approaches, such as good juvenile justice systems. This can be done by training, capacity building approaches and support of equipment and hardware for example. Support should also focus on improving security and justice services' integration with other departments, such as social services, employment offices, and community centres.

**Project Cycle.** Youth need to be considered throughout the project cycle ensure that their needs and demands are met. Whether it is about building capacity or access to services, the youth perspective is too often missing in project planning, implementation, and monitoring. Support can take the shape of implementing youth-sensitive assessments and stakeholder mappings as a concrete action to address this, while acknowledging that youth is not a homogenic or coherent group, and that other perspectives such as ethnicity, sex or religion make some youth even more vulnerable or marginalized compared to other peers. Likewise, including youth and age as indicator in monitoring and evaluation of SSG/R programs supports youth inclusion and participation in issues that affect them and their societies. It contributes to increased accountability by recognizing their voice.

**Data.** There is no common reporting standard for internal assistance related to youth, peace and security or youth specifically. Data on age in programming (which is more frequent in gender reporting) is scarce. There is also little data on youth representation in security sectors, with some exceptions such as the Interparliamentary Union which gathers age-based data on parliamentarians that is mostly unavailable for most other security and justice actors. These are issues that should be addressed to help harmonize support efforts, clarify where reforms are needed, and to know how reforms affect and include youth. This also goes for the broader policy agenda where there is a need to develop clearer progress standards similar to the SDG indicators for gender equality. When it comes to implementation, security sectors also can cooperate more with other actors that they may not usually cooperate with for better data. An example is the "Cardiff model" whereby police work closely with hospital emergency departments for better insight in youth criminality. Other examples are increased collaboration between security and justice sectors and education or social services. These are entry points where international partners can bring support too.

**Youth Coalitions and Networks.** Many countries and regions have YPS coalitions and young peacebuilder networks. Yet, coverage is not complete, and this provides an entry point for support – especially considering how little attention YPS has so far received from donors and external supporting actors. These networks exist both in developed and developing countries and can benefit either as part of both technical and cultural exchanges. Young parliamentarians or policymakers can be supported in exchanging ideas, for instance.

**Regionalizing and Localizing YPS.** The important role that organizations like the AU, EU, and OSCE play in promoting YPS can be replicated elsewhere. Implementation progress in YPS is uneven, and some

regions and countries are much more active than others. Capacity building can help build and leverage the knowledge of specific organizations in this context. On the other end of the spectrum, the distance from national policy to local implementation is in many contexts very large. International SSG/R assistance actors can help governments bridge the gap and provide much-needed policy support to ensure that efforts to enhance youth participation actually reach all – and do not get stuck in capital cities or advantaged neighbourhoods and families.

**Sensitization, Awareness, and Training.** The YPS framework remains relatively new for many working in the field of SSG/R as well as for security actors themselves. The case for involving youth more and better in decision-making may have been successfully made at a policy level, but it also needs to be made in police stations, municipality buildings, and parliaments all across the planet. There is a need for more sensitization, awareness and training. This is an entry point for the international community, for instance to include training advisors to better understand the topic or providing youth-friendly services and facilities. This will help build an understanding as well as capacity within recipient governments and communities to help advance the YPS agenda in practice.

**Research.** While there has been a lot of research and there have been studies on the role of youth in peacebuilding covering topics like PVE, there is relatively little evidence-based policy available on SSG/R. More research can be done on youth in the context of topics like prisons, justice, defence, policing, but also ombuds institutions, parliaments, and other key themes and actors within SSG/R. This also goes for publicly available evaluations of projects that either specifically aim to enhance youth participation or have that as a major component of SSR processes.

**Policy Toolkits.** YPS advisors and program developers working on youth in SSG/R do not have the luxury of policy briefs and toolkits that are available to their counterparts in other policy fields. Although there are good documents such as the youth sensitivity analysis in FBA's handbook, there is not yet a systematic approach to youth sensitivity analyses, or systematic geographic and thematic analyses of youth as a vector for security sector reform.

**Digitalization.** SSG/R actors need to meet youth where they and their needs are. If this is on online platforms and with the support of new digital means, security sectors need to catch up. Youth are disproportionately likely to experience issues or crimes online. Cyberbullying, disinformation, online exploitation, and other cybercrimes are all areas where security and justice actor need to stay in tune with new types of crimes that first and foremost affect youth.

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## Further reading on YPS in an SSG/R Context

DCAF's SSR Backgrounder on the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and SSG/R (2023), available on the DCAF website, provides an excellent overview of the main linkages between YPS and SSG/R.

The GCYPS Report "Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level: A Guide for Public Officials" and the "We Are Here" report outlines an integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes, and a practice note about young people's participation in peacebuilding.<sup>lvii</sup>

UN Community-Engagement: Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace that come with seven concrete recommendations<sup>lvii</sup>.

The Youth, Peace and Security Adviser's Handbook by the Folke Bernadotte Academy<sup>lvii</sup> and the joint UN – FBA Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook<sup>lvii</sup> are excellent tools for advisors, targeted especially at those working in the context of UN, EU, or OSCE and making a distinction between coordination, programming, and policy and strategy roles. They introduce and give concrete tools and questions to help advisors implement youth-sensitive analyses and more effectively contribute towards the implementation of the YPS objectives, as well as providing concrete operational support.

The Institute for Security Studies released a policy brief about NAPs in Africa in 2020<sup>lvii</sup> and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies at Addis Ababa University released a policy brief on the same topic in 2023.<sup>lvii</sup>

A guide to kickstarting UNSCR 2250 locally and nationally was developed by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground in 2016.<sup>lvii</sup>

Lastly, a useful series of recent policy briefs was released by Interpeace called Outside the Box: Amplifying youth voices and views on YPS policy and practice<sup>lvii</sup>.