



**EU Youth, Peace &  
Security Coalition**



**European Union  
EXTERNAL ACTION**

# **REPORT OF THE SECOND EU YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY CONFERENCE**

**BRUSSELS, 10-14 NOVEMBER 2025**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security, took place in Brussels on 23 and 24 May 2018 as a joint endeavour of the European Parliament and the European External Action Service in cooperation with the European Commission, the UN and civil society, in presence of the then President of the European Parliament, Mr Antonio Tajani, and the then High Representative/Vice-President, Ms Federica Mogherini.

After seven years, the Second EU Youth, Peace and Security Conference and the first YPS Week took place in Brussels from 10 to 14 November 2025. Organised by the EU YPS Coalition – co-chaired by the European External Action Service, Search for Common Ground, and the Finnish YPS Network-the conference and surrounding week brought together over 200 participants, including diverse young peacebuilders from more than 85 countries, representatives of the EU and its Member States, partner governments, multilateral and regional organisations, civil society actors, and other YPS partners.

The rich programme, made possible also thanks to the consistent contribution of the Foreign Policy Instrument and the EPLO/CSDN (European Peacebuilding Liaison Office/Civil Society Dialogue Network), comprised more than 50 interactive sessions, workshops, panels, roundtables and events, during which participants reflected on achievements and lessons learned, exchanged experiences, explored persistent challenges, and put forward concrete proposals and commitments to meaningfully advance the YPS agenda.

The core principle of the Conference and YPS Week was co-creation: attendees actively contributed to preparations and organisation in the preceding months and the programme privileged open-floor formats, offering a space for everyone to contribute on an equal basis. From facilitating sessions and coordinating with key speakers to handling invitations, interpretation, safeguarding, and partner outreach, the entire process was grounded in the collective ownership of participants, organisers, and Team Europe partners.

The two main deliverables of the Conference, which the follow up will be built upon, are the following:

- The Joint Declaration;
- The network

The Joint Declaration has been written by the young peacebuilders by following the consolidated method of tabling amendments and voting on them, in a transparent and inclusive process in which all the young activists, as well as the EU Member States, had the possibility to contribute directly to the text without intermediation. The final product is a rich, 65 article long but coherent document, that will serve as the basis for the continuation of the work on Youth, Peace and Security by the Team Europe actors, the young peacebuilders and the wider community of practitioners. The Joint Declaration is called “Joint”, because it is open to political support by the EU Member States and the support and endorsement by any organisation / association or even in an individual capacity. A rich exchange of views with the young peacebuilders in the CONUN working party (the Council of the EU working party for the relations with the United Nations), concomitant to the Conference, greatly contributed towards this objective.

The network is also crucial: the peacebuilders that attended the Conference are now connected with us and among them. Some have already formed national or regional YPS coalitions, while others may follow this path. As we transition from a global to a more local scale in the aftermath of the Conference, it will be important to nourish these connections to advance concrete projects and address tangible needs on the ground, with the support of EU Delegations and, potentially, the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy missions.

We will also advance on the YPS dimension of the UN Pact for the Future, as widely discussed during the Conference.

In conclusion, the Conference greatly contributed to the visibility of the YPS agenda and enabled young people from around the world to connect: this was especially precious when young people from areas that are in conflict sat at the same table and discussed possible solutions in a constructive and collaborative atmosphere.

*“Together, we can turn good intentions into real actions and commitment into lasting change. Every step we take brings us closer to a world where justice, dignity, and peace are not the exception, but the everyday reality.”* Benedikta von Seherr Toss, EEAS Managing Director for Peace, Security and Defence, at the opening Ceremony.

## FINAL PROGRAMME

### Second EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security & YPS Week

### “Celebrating 10 years of UN Security Council Resolution 2250: Towards a Team Europe Approach on YPS”

10 – 14 November 2025, Brussels

An initiative of the EU Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Coalition and Team Europe Partners, the Second EU YPS Conference and YPS Week will take place in Brussels, November 11-14, as a space for young practitioners, Team Europe decision-makers, and YPS partners to connect and co-shape the future of Team Europe collaboration on YPS. The programme includes discussions on the needs and opportunities in different geographies, the potential and practicalities of YPS National Action Plans, and the intersections with other agendas, including EU accession, Women, Peace & Security, Climate Security, and New Technologies.

## Programme

### Colour code:

|                   |  |                        |                    |   |
|-------------------|--|------------------------|--------------------|---|
| <i>Logistical</i> | <i>Preparation &amp; learning sessions</i> | <i>Conference Days</i> | <i>Side events</i> | <i>Special focus sessions (participation limited)</i> |
|-------------------|--|------------------------|--------------------|---|

#### Monday 10 November

*All day:* Participant arrivals to Brussels

*All day:* Training sessions for available participants

- **Not Without Us: Building Peace Together - Youth Reflections and Recommendations** (European Economic and Social Committee, Rue Belliard 99)
- **Gender Equality - Are we there yet?** (Borschette Conference Center)
- **Processus de localisation (domestication) de l'agenda Jeunesse, Paix et Sécurité**

- (Borschette Conference Center)
- **Localizing YPS - How can young people be meaningfully engaged?** (Borschette Conference Center)
- **Intro to Human Security Surveying: Practical Skills for Enumerators/Researchers in Post-Conflict Contexts** (European Economic and Social Committee, Rue Belliard 99)
- **Telling Stories that Move People: Storytelling for Advocacy** (European Economic and Social Committee, Rue Belliard 99)

### Special focus sessions

#### *Preparatory discussions for invited participants ahead of the main programme*

9:00-14:00

#### **Reframing YPS cooperation in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean**

*Venue: Sparks (Rue Ravenstein 60)*

Hosted by the Anna Lindh Foundation, this focus session will take stock of and develop policy recommendations for YPS implementation in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, with particular emphasis on the role of youth-led initiatives, international cultural relations and dialogue, and people-to-people connections.

11:30-12:30

#### **Focus discussion with EEAS Equality Ambassador**

*Venue: European External Action Service (Rond point Schuman 9)*

Hosted by the European External Action Service's Task Force for Equality, this small group discussion will gather youth perspectives on the current and future direction of YPS in EU external action, partnerships with young peacebuilders, and intersectional approaches to youth-sensitive action.

14:30-17:00 / for Team Europe officials: 16:00-17:00

#### **Connecting on YPS progress in West Africa**

*Venue: Borschette Centre (Rue Froissart 36): room 1B*

Hosted by the EU Support to ECOWAS in Peace, Security and Governance (EPSG) programme its implementing partners Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and Expertise France, and Search for Common Ground this focus session will be a first cross-border connection

among the diverse stakeholders of the Team Europe EPSG effort. Discussions will focus on finding a common vision to build on current YPS momentum in West Africa, including both ECOWAS and Sahel countries.

Officials from the EU institutions and EU Member States are invited to join from 16:00 for an exchange on potential future Team Europe collaboration.

### Tuesday 11 November

**8:00: Arrival and accreditation at Borschette Conference Centre** (*Rue Froissart 36*)

#### Preparation & learning sessions

*For all participants*

*Venue: Borschette Conference Centre*

**9:00 - 9:30: We are here! Setting the scene for our week together**

*Room: OD*

Held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network, welcome messages from the EU YPS Coalition, Peter Wagner, Director of the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) at the European Commission, and Cosmin Dobran, Director of the Peace, Partnerships and Crisis Management Directorate at the European External Action Service (EEAS).

**9:30-11:00: Investing in Young Women for Change: Lessons from Central Asia and South Eastern Europe**

*Room: OC*

Hosted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), this event will delve into the synergies of the YPS and Women, Peace & Security agendas, highlighting experiences and lessons from the OSCE's Young

**9:30-11:00: Regional bodies as partners in localising the YPS agenda: lessons from Africa**

*Room OD*

Hosted by Search for Common Ground and EPSG partners, this session will explore the role regional bodies can and do play in localising YPS action. In particular, the session will draw lessons from the experiences of African regional bodies,



Women for Peace (YW4P) programme in Central Asia as a model for investing in young women for regional cooperation on peace, as well as the cross regional learning between YW4P and OSCE-supported efforts in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. Zooming out, participants will explore the opportunities for enhanced cooperation between the EU, OSCE, and other stakeholders in advancing YPS in Central Asia, Europe's East, and globally.

*Held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network.*

from the African Union's Continental Framework to multilevel coordination with the Regional Economic Communities and networks like WiseYouth and Youth Ambassadors for Peace. This will kick start a discussion on what regional bodies like the EU can learn from African experiences and the potential and practicalities of cooperative actions among the EU, other regional bodies, and youth towards YPS localisation and institutionalisation.

*Held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network.*

#### 11:00-11:15: Break

11:15-16:00

#### **Preparation sessions for young participants: foresight on YPS**

*Room: OD*

With CMI - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, the European Commission, and young facilitators, this session will guide young participants through small group exchanges under a foresight methodology as final preparation for the Conference and Joint Declaration process. In the final stage, participants will have the chance for exchange on their conclusions with participating public officials.

13:00-16:00

#### **Learning session for public officials: exploring existing YPS tools**

*Room: OC*

With the United Nations System Staff College and the Global YPS Coalition, this session will provide an interactive space for public officials (from the EU, Member States, and participating partner countries - [please register here](#)) seeking to learn more about the YPS agenda and connect with peers on the topic. Participants will be guided through reflective group exercises and connected with existing resources. Public officials will then have a chance to join the youth participants to exchange on their respective parallel sessions.

#### 16:00-16:15: Break

16:15-18:00:

16:15-18:00:

**A “Year of Elections” Retrospective: what lessons for YPS & youth-inclusive governance?***Room: OD*

Hosted by the European Parliament, this session will explore the challenges and opportunities at the nexus of democratic governance, youth political participation, and the YPS agenda. Participating Members of the European Parliament, other EU representatives, young changemakers, and youth-supporting organisations will be invited to develop a shared understanding of the structural and social barriers to youth participation and risks of electoral violence and digital threats, including disinformation and voter manipulation. Participants will also explore opportunities to better partner with and support young changemakers in addressing these challenges and strengthening inclusive and resilient democratic governance.

**EU-UN and Youth Exchange on Security Sector Reform and the YPS agenda***Room: OC*

Hosted by UN partners, this session will explore how the EU and UN can jointly deliver on their shared priorities and commitments on YPS, as reflected in the recently published [Joint Priorities on Peace and Security for 2025–2028](#). Interventions from the United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security, EEAS, and youth partners will help set the scene, with a particular focus on the connection between the YPS agenda, security sector reform, and related topics. Participants will be guided through an exchange on lessons learned from previous efforts and explore promising avenues for collaboration and strategic action in effective partnership between the UN system, Team Europe, young peacebuilders, and other key YPS partners.

*19:00-21:30:***Side event: Culture of/for Peace: cultural performances and discussions on the role of youth-led/inclusive cultural activities in building a culture of peace***Venue: Géopolis – Centre du photojournalisme (Rue des Tanneurs 58)***Wednesday 12 November****Second EU YPS Conference: Towards a Team Europe Approach on YPS*****Day 1, for all participants****Venue: Borschette Conference Centre (Rue Froissart 36)*

**8:15: Arrival and accreditation at Borschette Conference Centre**

**8:45: Group photo**

**9:00-10:00:**

### Opening session

*Main Room: 1A — listening rooms with additional space: 3A and 3D*

Moderated by Katariina Leinonen and Faiza Shlon

Word of welcome by Ms Benedikta von Seherr-Thoß, Managing Director for Peace, Security and Defence, European External Action Service & the EU YPS Coalition

Keynote interventions: why are we here?

- Joseph Brighton Malekela, Co-Chair of the Youth4Peace Coalition of Tanzania
- Tiko Lagvilava, Network of Women and Youth Peace Ambassadors

Introduction to parallel sessions

**10:00-10:15: Break and transition to parallel sessions**

**10:15-12:30**

### Geographic breakouts

Divided into 9 geographic clusters, these sessions will be youth-led spaces for direct exchange between young YPS practitioners from the different countries represented, EU and Member State officials working on those countries, and relevant YPS partners. Under a facilitated roundtable format, participating youth and officials will answer three questions to take stock on YPS implementation: i) what have young practitioners and Team Europe partners done already on YPS, ii) what is working, and ii) what needs to change? The answers to these questions, as well as the relationship built through direct dialogue, will serve as a basis for the following discussions during the Conference.

The clusters, as defined by the participating youth, will be:

- Room 1A: Anglophone West Africa; Francophone West Africa; Central Africa; East & Southern Africa
- Room 3A: Eastern and Southeastern Europe (DG ENEST region); EU & Western Europe
- Room 3D: The Americas
- First floor open space: South West Asia & North Africa (DG MENA region)

- Ground floor cafeteria space: Southern & Southeastern Asia

### 12:30-14:00: Lunch & networking space

14:00-15:00

#### **How far we have come! Celebrating the achievements and momentum of YPS & identifying how to build on them**

*Main Room (with interpretation): 1A*

*Additional room (English only): 3A*

Elizeu de Oliveira Chaves Junior, Chief of Staff at the UN Youth Office, will launch the discussion with recent progress, lessons, and plans at the global and European levels. Under a youth-facilitated open floor format, young practitioners will then have the chance to share and respond to positive examples – notably from the geographic breakouts – of progress and impact on YPS.

15:00-16:00

#### **Dreams deferred: Young peacebuilders facing civic restrictions, discrimination, occupation and war**

*Main Room (with interpretation): 1A*

*Additional room (English only): 3A*

We recognise that progress on YPS has been extremely uneven and that the promise of meaningful, intergenerational partnerships for peace remains a distant dream for too many. Under a youth-facilitated open floor format and drawing from the geographic breakouts, notably war and occupation contexts, young practitioners will be invited to share negative examples, risks, and harms. Interventions will also take stock of the global trends from and since the [If I Disappear report](#) and an exchange with Laura Antón Montero, Gender and Protection Coordinator at UNOY Peacebuilders and member of the Protection Working Group of the Global YPS Coalition, will provide a starting point for proposals to address these harms.

14:00-16:00

#### **Special focus session**

*Room: 3D*

#### **Roundtable discussion on operationalising mini-concept on YPS in civilian Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)**

With Crisis Management Centre Finland, Folke Bernadotte Academy, and German Center for International Peace Operations, this hybrid session will allow civilian CSDP mission staff, planners, and advisors to explore existing good practices and potential actions for implementing the Mini-concept on civilian CSDP support to host States to tackle peace and security challenges in line with principles of the YPS agenda which was endorsed by Member States in 2024.

Introduction to parallel session by Laura Pistarini and Aws Anees Rasheed

**16:00-16:20: Break and transition to parallel sessions**

**16:20-18:00 Parallel thematic roundtables on key YPS intersections**

*Held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network.*

**YPS and EU Enlargement**

*Room 3.05 (English only)*

With young practitioners from the region, this session will first assess the local and national context of the YPS agenda in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. Participants will then explore the existing frameworks and challenges, as well as their connection to the EU enlargement process and its growing security dimension, and identify identify key synergies between YPS and Enlargement, including how YPS action can contribute to inclusivity, democratic participation, security, resilience, and social cohesion, and how EU integration can reinforce YPS efforts at the national level.

**YPS and the climate crisis**

*Room 3D (with interpretation)*

With the European Commission, Kofi Annan Foundation, Folke Bernadotte Academy, UN Development Programme and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and drawing on recent youth-led research and programmatic experience from regions most affected by conflict and climate change, the session will highlight how deeply climate and security challenges are intertwined in young people's lives and how young people are already taking innovative and integrated action to address climate-related security risks. Participants will co-create evidence-based ideas for actionable mechanisms that bridge the gap between grassroots youth work and the EU's ability to support policy, partnerships, and funding.

**YPS, Equality and Human Rights**

*Room 3A (with interpretation)*

With the European External Action Service's Task Force for Equality, this session will examine how persistent intersectional inequalities – linked to gender, race, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation and gender identity – continue to limit meaningful inclusion of youth and highlight youth-led peace initiatives and human rights. Participants will also explore how the EEAS and partners support inclusive peacebuilding through intersectionality-informed policies and partnerships, and develop actionable recommendations for greater impact.

| <b>YPS and New Technologies</b><br><i>Room 3.04 (English only)</i>  | <b>YPS in the Africa-Europe partnership</b><br><i>Room 1A (with interpretation)</i>  |
|---|--|
| <p>With CMI - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and DG INTPA, this interactive session explores how emerging digital tools can enhance youth-inclusive participation in peace and security. Drawing on the experiences of young peacebuilders and experts, it will examine both the opportunities and challenges that new technologies present for advancing youth out agency in conflict prevention and resolution. Combining expert interventions and interactive digital tools, the event will spotlight youth experiences from conflict-affected contexts on how technology is being used to strengthen participation and build trust across divides.</p> | <p>The Africa-Europe Foundation, Sustainable Cooperation for Peace and Security, and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding will build on the existing Africa-Europe framework. This focused roundtable dialogue will explore the potential of the Africa-Europe partnership as an accelerator of the YPS agenda in both continents and the potential of YPS as a solution to the priorities of the partnership. Participants will generate multi-level accountability through structured follow-up and integration into upcoming policy fora.</p> |
| <p><i>18:00-18:30</i></p> <p><b>Day 1 Closing session: Today's Reflections and Expectations for Tomorrow</b></p> <p><i>Main Room: 1A — listening rooms with additional space: 3A and 3D</i></p>   |  |
| <p>Returning to the plenary room, participants will be guided through an interactive reflection and expectation sharing exercise at the close of the first Conference Day, moderated by Laura Pistarini and Aws Anees Rasheed.</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Break</b></p>   |  |
| <p><i>19:00-21:30</i></p> <p><b>Side event (on invitation only)</b></p> <p><b><i>Reception and programme at the EEAS, with exposition on Women, Peace &amp; Security</i></b></p> <p><i>Venue: European External Action Service (Rond point Schuman 9)</i></p>   |  |

**Thursday 13 November**

**Second EU YPS Conference: Towards a Team Europe Approach on YPS**

***Day 2, for all participants***

*Main venue: Borschette Conference Centre (Rue Froissart 36)*

*External venues: Permanent Representation of Ireland (PermRep, [Rue Froissart 50](#)); UN Regional Information Office (UNRIC, [Rue de la Loi 155](#))*

**8:30: Arrival and accreditation at Borschette Conference Centre**

**9:00-9:20:**

**Welcome & brief presentation of key takeaways from Day 1**

*Main Room: 1A — listening room with additional space: 4B*

*With rapporteurs from the parallel thematic roundtables*

**9:20-10:40**

**Inheriting a world on fire? Intergenerational fairness & YPS amid the climate crisis**

*Main Room (with interpretation): 1A — additional room (English only): 4B*

With BOKU University, UNOY and the Anna Lindh Foundation, this interactive session will use the strategic Foresight method to look into the future. It will give participants space to share perspectives on the current state and imagine possible futures, impacts, and responses to the climate crisis and other ongoing shifts (such as militarisation, digitalisation, nationalism), and their intersections.

The session will serve as a practical and participatory platform for youth to discuss how different future scenarios could influence peace and security, how these might impact future generations, and expectations for Team Europe.

**10:40-11:00**

**Wrap up: towards a common vision of YPS impact and intro to next sessions**

*Main Room: 1A — listening room with additional space: 4B*

*With Saji Prelis, Search for Common Ground / Co-Chair, Global YPS Coalition*

**11:00-11:20 Break and transition to parallel sessions**

**11:20-13:00**

**Parallel roundtable sessions: What do we need to do?**

**Needs & Opportunities for Team Europe Action on five impact areas**

*Venues: Borschette Centre (Rue Froissart 36), rooms 1A & 4B; Permanent Representation of Ireland (PermRep, [Rue Froissart 50](#)); UN Regional Information Office (UNRIC, [Rue de la Loi 155](#))*

| <b>Violence</b> | <b>Polarisation</b>                 | <b>Institutional legitimacy</b>       | <b>Positive Agency</b>                | <b>Resourcing peace</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Room: 4B</i> | <i>Venue: <a href="#">UNRIC</a></i> | <i>Venue: <a href="#">PermRep</a></i> | <i>Venue: <a href="#">PermRep</a></i> | <i>Room: 1A</i>         |

Taking forward the common vision for positive impact via YPS actions, these youth-facilitated roundtable discussions will be a space for officials, young practitioners, and YPS partners to together identify impact-focused objectives for Team Europe action on YPS and the most relevant actions to achieve these. In parallel, each group will generate impact objectives and action proposals under one of five impact areas – provisionally, the five vital signs of the [Peace Impact Framework](#): reducing violence, reducing polarisation, increasing institutional legitimacy, increasing positive agency, and increasing resourcing for peace (to be refined as needed based on the morning discussions).

**13:00-14:30: Lunch & networking space**

**14:30-16:00**

**Parallel roundtable sessions: “How can we do it?” Concrete and crosscutting approaches to translate promises into effective implementation**

*Held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network.*

*Venues: Borschette Centre (Rue Froissart 36), rooms 1A & 4B; Permanent Representation of Ireland (PermRep, [Rue Froissart 50](#)); UN Regional Information Office (UNRIC, [Rue de la Loi 155](#))*

**Inclusive development of impact-focused YPS policy frameworks**

**Cross-border action on YPS in Europe**  
*Venue: [PermRep](#)*

**Support youth-inclusive peace processes**  
*Venue: [PermRep](#)*



*Room: 1A*

With the 2250 Network of Finland and global youth partners, this session will be a chance to explore the latest best practices for the youth-inclusive development of National Action Plans (NAPs) and other YPS policy frameworks that are tailored for real impact. Cross-continental experiences and peer-to-peer learning will help guide those developing and supporting NAPs or similar frameworks in Europe and the wider world.

With the 2250 Network of Finland and European youth partners, this session will explore the potential for Team Europe and partners to collaborate on YPS actions across borders in Europe, including among neighbouring Member States, cooperation with Enlargement countries and other European neighbours, and action in the online space (with input from the New Technologies and Enlargement sessions). It will explore both concrete actions and approaches for sustained reflection in this space.

With the Steering Committee for the 5 Year Global Strategy on Youth-inclusive peace processes and young partners, this session will explore progress on the Global 5 Year Strategy, as well as positive previous experiences of meaningful youth inclusion. Participants will then be guided to apply these good practices to current critical cases where Team Europe has a crucial role to play in supporting peace processes that include the (often majority) youth population, from the Middle East to the Great Lakes.

**Team Europe coordination on mainstreaming YPS**

*Room: 4B*

With young practitioners and Team Europe representatives, this youth-led session will guide participants in identifying effective approaches to ensure Team Europe actors have the needed space and knowledge to think together on YPS actions both on the political and operational tracks. Participants will also reflect on high potential mainstreaming interventions across the range of actual and potential Team Europe action, including in areas where the question of YPS integration is not currently on the table.

*Room 4B Borschette*

**Partnership with young peacebuilders on the ground: engage, empower, connect**

*Venue: [UNRIC](#)*

With the AU-EU Youth Voices Lab, the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund and youth partners, this session will explore best practices in fostering meaningful and responsible partnerships with youth, in particular in partner countries. Participants will reflect on how Team Europe can (jointly) better engage with young partners, including through intergenerational dialogue and youth-adapted funding modalities, with due regard for safeguarding and Doing No Harm, building on findings and recommendations from the [Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security](#).

**16:00-16:20: Break and transition**

**16:20-18:00**

### Collecting impact objectives, commitments on actions and approaches, and accountability and follow-up plans

*Rooms: 1A and 4B*

Before going our separate ways, this interactive and youth-led session, held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network, will serve to ensure important ideas, commitments, and plans for follow-up are captured and recorded. It will also serve as a space for sharing future opportunities for young peacebuilders and partners to collaborate and to solidify important learnings and relationships fostered during the Conference.

*18:00-18:30*

### Closing session: What Future for the Team Europe Approach?

*Main Room: 1A — listening room with additional space: 4B*

*Held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network, with interventions by youth participants, Team Europe representatives (Mr Martin Bille Herman, Deputy Political Director and Managing Director, EEAS POL.MULTILATERAL), and YPS partners*

### Break

#### Special focus session (by invitation)

#### *Towards an Italian National Action Plan on YPS*

*Venue: Square du Val de la Cambre 11*

#### Optional:

#### *Guided tour of Brussels (EN & FR)*

*Tour of the "EU" neighbourhood, ending at "Plux," a regular meeting place for young interns and staff from the*

*EU and other institutions*

**Meeting points at 19.00:  
in front of entrance Borschette Centre**

**Friday 14 November**

### Special focus sessions

*Venue: Borschette Conference Centre (Rue Froissart 36)*

*9:30-12:30*

### **Finalising the Joint Declaration**

*Main Room: 1A — listening room with additional space: 3B*

In camera session with young peacebuilder participants and Member State representatives, led by the working group of the EU YPS Week.

*From 12:30 Light lunch and departures*

*13:30-16:00*

### **Consultation session for the Second Progress Study on YPS**

*Venue: UN House - Boulevard du Régent 37-40*

*Led by the Independent Progress Study team and the UN Secretariat on YPS*

Adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2024, the [Pact for the Future](#) strengthens the UN's commitment to the YPS agenda. Action 20(c) of the Pact explicitly calls for a [second independent progress study on Youth, Peace and Security](#), to be completed by the end of the 80th session of the General Assembly.

This second progress study aims to further document and assess the positive contributions of young people to peace processes and conflict resolution, particularly given the rapidly evolving global context since 2018. It will also provide vital evidence of successful practices and lessons learned, assess the effectiveness of various funding mechanisms, and youth inclusion policies implemented since 2018.

This consultation is part of a series of regional consultations, the outputs and recommendations of which will feed directly into the progress study.

## JOINT DECLARATION



**EU Youth, Peace &  
Security Coalition**

### **Joint Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security**

*Outcome document of the Second European Union Conference on Youth, Peace and Security*

#### **Preamble**

We, young peacebuilders from around the world, gathered in Brussels from 10 to 14 November 2025 for the second European Union (EU) Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Conference and hereby adopt the following Joint Declaration.

We acknowledge our diverse realities-spanning from peaceful localities and rural areas to communities facing war, displacement, and occupation-and affirm that, notwithstanding these differences, the right to dignity, freedom, and peace is universal.

#### **Recitals**

- A. *Recognizing* the diverse and growing international challenges to peace, security and social cohesion around the world, including threats to the multilateral rules-based order, increasing polarization and recourse to aggression rather than peace, growing mistrust in institutions, a rise in violent conflict, situations of prolonged occupation, blockade, displacement and collective punishment, climate-related threats,

shrinking civic space, socio-cultural barriers that limit youth agency and meaningful participation, and the under-resourcing of youth-led peacebuilding efforts, particularly in conflict-affected and restricted contexts;

- B. *Applauding* the resilience and profound impact of youth-led peacebuilding efforts despite these challenges, including those undertaken by youth in occupied and besieged contexts and *underlining* the need to strengthen intergenerational, international and institutional partnerships to support young people in these efforts;
- C. *Noting* the unprecedented scale of attacks on healthcare and education, the weaponization of starvation, mass abductions and conflict-related sexual violence, all demanding immediate compliance with International Humanitarian Law;
- D. *Noting with concern* that 2024 recorded the highest-ever number of attacks on healthcare workers (more than 3600) and therefore *urging* for systematic protection of humanitarian personnel;
- E. *Highlighting* that millions of crisis-impacted children are out of school and in this context *supporting* the Safe Schools Declaration;
- F. *Recognizing* the importance of youth participation in peacebuilding processes and the need to support youth-led initiatives, particularly in rural areas, urban peripheries, and among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and LGBTIQ+ communities in contexts of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships where access to education, political participation, and sustainable funding remains limited, and reaffirming the commitment to create enabling environments that foster inclusive learning, leadership, and empowerment for all young people;
- G. *Recognizing* the specific risks and limitations faced by youth living under repressive or conflict-affected conditions, including restrictions on civic space, online surveillance, and threats to physical and digital security, and *affirming* the need for protective, flexible, and context-sensitive support mechanisms;

- H. *Recognizing the need* to actively collaborate and engage with youth workers, and youth work organisations as allies to support capacity building; *proposing* youth for the purpose of inclusive representation of marginalised young people in youth peace and security consultations and dialogue;
- I. *Recalling* the commitment of the EU to the multilateral rules-based order and the promotion and protection of human rights, and to its consistent application and accountability in all contexts, including under occupation; *condemning* all violations of the rules-based international order as enshrined in the UN Charter; *reaffirming* that the defense of the rules-based international order requires the protection of civic space and human rights for young people, including those engaging in peaceful activism within restrictive political contexts;
- J. *Recalling and reaffirming* existing European and global frameworks and commitments on Youth, Peace and Security, which in 2025 mark their tenth anniversary, including UN Security Council Resolutions 2250, 2419, and 2535, the Pact for the Future, the Youth Action Plan in EU external action and previous EU Council Conclusions on YPS;
- K. *Noting* the EU's commitment to support the implementation of the YPS Agenda as stressed in the EU's Youth Action Plan in External Action 2022-2027;
- L. *Reaffirming* the centrality and urgency of fully implementing these official documents and their outcomes at regional and national level.
- M. *Noting* the progress made by the EU and its Member States in advancing the YPS agenda, while recognizing the need for continued and more coordinated efforts to implement the YPS agenda in EU institutions, in EU domestic and external policy and across EU Member States; *recognizing* the progress made by youth living in conflict-affected and fragile regions across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America, and *calling* for strengthened international solidarity and cross-regional exchange between Team Europe and youth peacebuilders from partner countries.
- N. *Recognizing* that lasting peace depends on reformulating social contracts

and restoring trust between institutions and the populations they serve, including younger generations.

- O. *Reaffirming* the need for cross-institutional, inter-agency and international collaboration to tackle the interdisciplinary and interlinked nature of YPS policies.

### **International law, human rights, accountability and protection**

**Article 1.** We, young people from around the world, in all our diversity, condemn all violations of the rules-based international order as enshrined in the UN Charter and call for consistent accountability for breaches of international humanitarian and human-rights law, including in occupied and besieged territories.

**Article 2.** We call on all relevant actors, including governments, international organisations, and non-state actors, to ensure the physical and digital safety and protection of young peacebuilders, human rights defenders, and youth activists, especially those operating in conflict and post-conflict settings. This includes establishing clear mechanisms for reporting threats, providing psychosocial support, and ensuring accountability for attacks against them.

**Article 3.** We recognise that meaningful and effective participation of youth in political and peace processes must rest on a firm commitment to Do No Harm, including ensuring respect for young partners as experts, avoiding tokenistic participation and overburdening of youth partners, ensuring real space for youth to influence outcomes, and dedicated, holistic preventative and responsive protection support to address potential physical, psychosocial, or moral harms.

**Article 4.** We call for the integration of mental health and psychosocial support into Youth, Peace and Security strategies, recognizing that stigma around mental health undermines social cohesion. We urge governments and institutions to provide accessible, youth-friendly mental health services, including online support, especially in marginalized and conflict-affected areas.

**Article 5.** We reaffirm that open and inclusive civic spaces are essential for sustaining peace and democratic practices. Thus, we call on Team Europe, EU institutions, Member States, and international partners to safeguard and expand physical and digital civic spaces, ensuring the right of youth to organise, advocate and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes at all levels.

**Article 6.** We call on all relevant actors to embrace and translate into action the understanding that human security extends beyond the mere absence of violence or conflict. It must be grounded in access to quality education, the promotion of mental health, the creation of economic opportunities, and the assurance of social well-being for all.

**Article 7.** We acknowledge that lasting peace also requires confronting structural violence, colonial legacies, and all forms of domination that prevent communities from exercising their rights and freedoms.

**Article 8.** We call for urgent action to tackle the above challenges by integrating cultural, environmental, and social perspectives into every level of policy-ensuring that youth are not only protected but empowered to lead the solutions; we call on states and stakeholders to ensure the protection of youth from structural, cultural, gender-based, and state-violence in both online and offline spaces, and to include youth as equal partners in preventing said violence.

**Article 9.** We reaffirm that, by taking these measures, all relevant actors can prevent conflicts before they arise. This proactive approach to human security should be central to the implementation of this declaration and recognized as a key strategy for sustainable peace.

**Article 10.** We emphasize that the EU itself is a peace project, and the enlargement process shall be seen as an essential tool for postering lasting peace and stability in Europe, including the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership.

**Youth participation in conflict resolution and mediation, inclusion and intergenerational collaboration**

**Article 11.** We emphasize the role of young people in all their diversity as equal and essential partners in the pursuit of sustainable peace and security and commit to institutionalizing their participation through formal mechanisms in EU and national policymaking. We salute the efforts of young peacemakers in areas occupied by de facto movements who continue to prove to the world that where diplomacy fails, young people are able to create spaces where listening and tolerance are the foundations of determination and self-sacrifice, and where violence is replaced by non-violence.

**Article 12.** We affirm that peace is inseparable from justice, dignity, and equality, and that youth-led peacebuilding must address root causes such as occupation, displacement, discrimination, and the denial of rights. We highlight the existing



efforts of young people around the world to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace and security for all.

**Article 13.** We reaffirm that intergenerational collaboration and exchanges are central to sustaining positive peace and commit to establishing co-leadership models for trust-based collaboration between governments, civil society, and youth-led organisations, anchored in shared planning, co - creation of policy, joint leadership, transparent communication and accountability, supported by equitable access measures-safe mobility, digital protection, financial accessibility, and protection from reprisals - to enable meaningful participation of youth living under occupation or blockade. In this context, we underscore the pivotal role of the United Nations Youth Office and the Joint Youth, Peace and Security Secretariat in enhancing coordination among European and international stakeholders, including within the framework of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State building.

**Article 14.** We recognise that the causes and effects of conflicts in certain regions, particularly in the Great Lakes region of Africa and in Asia, are often cross-border and affect young people in particular. We call for inclusive national and regional dialogue mechanisms that actively involve young people, including in peace negotiations and talks.

**Article 15.** We encourage the creation of online cultural exchange programs and virtual dialogue sessions to connect youth from marginalized, occupied, and hard-to-reach areas with peers across regions. These initiatives will foster mutual understanding, broaden perspectives, and strengthen youth agency in peacebuilding.

**Article 16.** We call on EU Member States to promote meaningful opportunities for the political, social and economic participation of youth in conflict resolution and mediation mechanisms, including those belonging to marginalized groups, such as young women and girls, youth with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, youth living under occupation and blockade, and youth belonging to ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, as well as youth living in rural, remote, and conflict-affected areas, by ensuring safe mobility, legal protection, and equal access to civic and economic spaces, as well as any additional precautions required based on the specific conditions of each case. We also call on EU Member States to promote meaningful and accessible opportunities for the prevention of violence due to economic vulnerability,

including investing in economic projects to support youth led local enterprises for the purpose of independent self-sustaining, stable and functioning society.

**Article 17.** We call for the inclusion of Indigenous youth, local communities, and young activists from climate-vulnerable regions such as Baluchistan, the Sahel, and the Pacific Islands in decision-making processes. Their traditional knowledge and lived experiences are essential to shaping sustainable and culturally grounded peace-building solutions.

**Article 18.** We further underscore the significance of acknowledging and supporting Indigenous youth within peacebuilding initiatives. We call on all stakeholders to guarantee the comprehensive, voluntary, and efficacious participation of Indigenous youth, and to implement culturally sensitive protection mechanisms that specifically address the risks they encounter, such as racism, discrimination, and criminalization.

**Article 19.** We urge the European Union and its Member States to actively facilitate cross-regional youth connection and mobility by supporting collaborative peacebuilding projects and addressing systemic barriers, and address particularly complex and restrictive visa procedures, that hinder the participation of young peacebuilders from developing and conflict-affected countries in international forums and exchange programs.

**Article 20.** We recognise the potential of youth mobility and migration as spaces for dialogue, mutual learning, and peacebuilding across regions and cultures, while reaffirming the need to protect the safety, dignity, and rights of people on the move, in line with the International Organization for Migration's Strategic Plan 2024-2028.

**Article 21.** We call on EU institutions and candidate countries to fully support the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, ensure meaningful youth participation with all its diversity, strengthen protection mechanisms for young people, support youth-led peacebuilding efforts, recognize youth agency and demands, and expand access to existing and new EU opportunities for young people, in particular for conflict affected and marginalized groups.

**Institutionalization of YPS, Governance, National Action Plans, role of the EU and accountability**

**Article 22.** We call for the integration of youth perspectives and the YPS agenda into the EU Strategic Compass and operational plans of EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, other Common Foreign and Security Policy actions, as well as Member State-led initiatives, including through youth liaison officers, digital feedback tools, and partnerships with local youth organizations in conflict zones, ensuring that youth perspectives and participation are meaningfully incorporated into conflict prevention, protection, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector governance, and peacebuilding. We urge EU member states to ensure the youth-responsiveness of national security and defence policies by actively integrating the perspectives of young people into relevant policy processes.

**Article 23.** We call on the European External Action Service to establish Youth Advisory Mechanisms linked to EU Delegations and relevant CSDP missions in conflict-affected areas, including Palestine, and to designate YPS Focal Points responsible for integrating youth-generated analysis, protection priorities, and community perspectives into mission planning.

**Article 24.** Recognizing that sustained peace requires continuous engagement, we call for regular discussions and meaningful cooperation of YPS in honoring:

- Article 21 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, ensuring participation in government and public affairs;
- Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, with its right to participate in public affairs;

across all relevant EU fora and institutions, including the Council of the EU, the European Commission, European Parliament, EU agencies, in informal consultation spaces, in dialogues with partner countries, multilateral dialogues as well as for an overall mainstreaming of the YPS Agenda in the work of EU institutions across the board. We recognize the cross-cutting nature of YPS and call for integrating a youth lens across different EU policy sectors.

**Article 25.** We further call for regular discussions and cooperation on YPS in informal consultation spaces, and with partner countries and multilateral and regional organizations to enhance coherence, strategic alignment and mutual learning across policy domains, ensuring facilitated participation for youth from conflict-affected, occupied, and restricted contexts, including through visa facilitation and secure remote modalities.

**Article 26.** Furthermore, we call for the establishment of permanent, participatory mechanisms within EU institutions to ensure that YPS is integrated across EU policy-making structures, enabling structured, inclusive youth engagement, dedicated funding, and sustained institutional support. In this framework, we call for the establishment of a permanent Youth, Peace and Security Coordination Platform within EU structures to facilitate regular consultations, track implementation, and ensure continuity between conferences.

**Article 27.** We welcome the recent adoption of Finland's second National Action Plan on YPS, as well as Italy's first YPS National Action Plan. We also commend the past and present National Action Plans of Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, South Sudan Burundi, Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Jordan and Liberia and recognise the ongoing efforts of countries currently developing theirs. We further welcome the growing global consensus on the importance of such national frameworks, and call on EU Member States to develop and implement such frameworks in a youth-inclusive manner guided by clear, results-oriented commitments and indicators to ensure a regular follow-up and accountability of relevant stakeholders. We urge EU member states to accelerate efforts to develop National Action Plans or similar frameworks as well as a regional strategy to implement YPS.

**Article 28.** We encourage knowledge sharing and mutual exchange on lessons learned among different stakeholders and regions to inform further processes of YPS implementation across world regions.

**Article 29.** We call for the establishment of a coherent and durable implementation and accountability framework for the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, requiring the following but not limited to:

- the development and periodic revision of inclusive, impact-oriented and youth-co-created National Action Plans, as well as other relevant policies and concrete strategies on regional, national, and local levels;
- in addition to National Action Plans, supporting alternative pathways to advancing and implementing the YPS agenda, such as strengthening YPS coalitions on (sub-)national, regional and global levels, and integrating YPS objectives into projects;
- the creation of synergies with or expanding upon existing legal and accountability frameworks to ensure accountability and effective follow-up processes.

**Article 30.** We urge all the relevant actors to ensure that YPS actions are effectively incorporated into national and EU global and regional strategies and action plans as well as across the board of EU Institutions' work, including on youth, peace and security, participation, preparedness, fragility, and prevention, and to link these actions with climate adaptation, humanitarian and development strategies, by moving beyond mere rhetoric to tangible implementation, including minimum duty-of-care standards - mental-health and psychosocial support, digital and physical safety, as well as mechanisms to prevent and address technology-facilitated gender-based violence. YPS efforts should be included in existing and future strategies and policies covering foreign and domestic action on youth, peace and on security of the EU and its Member States, including the next EU Youth Strategy and other relevant EU internal and external policies.

**Article 31.** We commit to strengthening cooperation with the EU, its Member States, and other multilateral and regional partners to advance the implementation of YPS frameworks, prioritising direct engagement and flexible funding for youth and women-led organisations in conflict-affected, occupied, and blockaded contexts. We call for the establishment of a youth-inclusive Team Europe coordination and accountability mechanism to monitor YPS commitments, facilitate peer learning, and ensure transparent joint reporting. We further encourage the European External Action Service (EEAS), in coordination with the European Commission and Member States, to integrate Youth, Peace and Security principles across the EU's external action and to systematically include youth perspectives in peace and security dialogues, mediation processes, and programming cycles. We emphasize the need for these partnerships to meaningfully include young people in shaping, implementing, as well as monitoring and evaluating development and peacebuilding processes and to ensure mutual accountability for the commitments made-ensuring that our participation leads to tangible and lasting peace outcomes in our communities. We strongly oppose any form of tokenistic and performative youth engagement.

**Article 32.** We stress the need to establish, sustain, and support youth-led accountability and monitoring mechanisms which track the implementation of YPS commitments at EU, national, and local levels. At their core, these mechanisms should integrate participatory data-collection, periodic reviews, and structured dialogue between young people, institutions, and civil society.

**Article 33.** We invite the European Union to replicate and adapt successful national models of permanent youth mechanisms within its institutional framework,-with the example of the technical bi communal committee on youth

established in Cyprus-strengthening youth participation in promoting peace, democracy, and intercultural understanding across Europe and beyond.

**Article 34.** We urge that structured youth participation mechanisms be systematically embedded within the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the Common Security and Defence Policy Frameworks by ensuring meaningful involvement of youth in conflict prevention, mediation, peacebuilding, security and governance processes.

**Article 35.** We recommend that these mechanisms benefit from international and EU support to enable coordination between different EU Stakeholders and to find resources for youth-led engagement in peace, defence and in security.

**Article 36.** We acknowledge the effort by decision-makers to increasingly incorporate the voices of the youth into decision-making. We also must address the often-felt lack of follow-up and therefore call for greater transparency and accountability within the decision-making processes.

**Article 37.** We condemn the pressures exercised against youth empowerment efforts by non-authorized actors acting outside the scope of the rule of law and international law.

**Article 38.** We reaffirm our collective commitment to advancing a coordinated Team Europe approach to Youth, Peace and Security, linking EU institutions, Member States, and youth partners from Europe and around the world, to promote sustainable peace, inclusion, and intergenerational solidarity.

### **Funding, resources and economic empowerment**

**Article 39.** We recognize youth work as an essential contribution to peace and security and therefore call for adequate financial compensation to ensure the work is economically and psychologically sustainable for youth.

**Article 40.** We call for greater, direct, flexible, locally led, more accessible, gender-transformative, multi-year and sustainable funding and encourage the leverage of existing EU instruments, including micro-grants, to prioritise equitable access and co-governance with youth in funding youth organizations with an intersectional approach; in this framework, we call for funding for youth-led peace and security initiatives, including youth-friendly funding mechanisms at EU and national levels with procedures, eligibility, and reporting requirements appropriate for smaller youth-led organisations, including those in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas, that include smaller/informal youth groups,

women-led organisations and youth that face harsher environmental and political conditions. We urge for alternative disbursement channels or advance payments where banking restrictions impede transfers, so that access to resources never depends on geography or political status. Funding should be co-governed with youth to ensure equitable access for grassroots and Global South Actors.

**Article 41.** In this regard, we underline the importance of leveraging existing EU instruments to support youth participation in peace processes, conflict prevention, and inclusive governance. We encourage the EEAS and the European Commission to explore dedicated funding windows or sub-programmes that can channel flexible, accessible resources directly to youth-led organizations and initiatives.

**Article 42.** We encourage and support young people in engaging with conflict management processes and call to ensure youth have opportunities to participate in conflict resolution activities.

### **Digital safety, media literacy and information integrity**

**Article 43.** We commit to ensuring YPS actions and partnerships reflect the lived realities of youth and are implemented in genuine partnership with young people to renew the social contract and reinforce institutional legitimacy. We recognize that restoring trust requires tackling online misinformation, promoting media literacy, and creating digital spaces where youth can safely contribute to democratic dialogue.

**Article 44.** We call on Member States to foster youth political participation and advancing intergenerational efforts to build a healthy, inclusive and secure information ecosystem, both online and offline, including countering disinformation and ensuring digital safety for youth activists, to ensure continuous information exchange between generations and between policy makers and youth-focused civil society organisations and by safeguarding civic space and ending the criminalisation of youth human-rights defenders, journalists, and community organizers.

**Article 45.** We additionally call for increased investment in providing young citizens with innovative opportunities, particularly for digital spaces, to develop the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary to address the growing risks of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech; to critically analyse online content and safely navigate digital spaces, and use emerging technologies ethically and effectively, including media and information literacy, in line with and guided by relevant national, global and regional standards, including those of the United

Nations system, the EU Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship frameworks, and the safeguards established under the EU Artificial Intelligence Act.

**Article 46.** We also recognize the emergence of digital spaces as arenas where misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, harassment, and online violence can threaten young people's security and social cohesion, and affirm that addressing these threats is essential to sustaining peace.

**Article 47.** We emphasize the major influence of the digital information environment on physical security and peacebuilding efforts. The digital sphere has become central to human security, yet it remains a space where civilians and young peacebuilders are increasingly exposed to disinformation, hate speech, and digital repression. We therefore call for the integration of digital peacebuilding across EU and national YPS frameworks to strengthen digital resilience, protect civic space online, and ensure the safety and participation of young peacebuilders and human rights defenders.

#### **Education to peacebuilding, capacity building and knowledge sharing**

**Article 48.** We support the ongoing UN Second Independent Progress Study on the positive contributions of youth to peace processes and conflict resolution, as called for in the Pact for the Future, and will ensure follow-up on relevant findings and recommendations, including explicit examination of youth contributions and challenges in occupied and blockaded contexts, and meaningful inclusion of their voices. We further support youth-led global, regional, and national data gathering and analysis efforts on the status and progress of implementation of YPS, in order to facilitate evidence-based decisions regarding future steps.

**Article 49.** We emphasize the importance of age-disaggregated data gathering and gender-responsive indicators and encourage Team Europe to support a regional study on YPS implementation in Europe. We recognise the need to strengthen peace education in formal and non-formal education sectors across Europe.

**Article 50.** We encourage regional consultations and partnerships beyond Europe to ensure balanced representation and mutual learning.

**Article 51.** We recognize reading and education as core components of youth peacebuilding strategies.

**Article 52.** We support initiatives that make knowledge accessible to all youth, especially those in marginalized or conflict-affected communities.



**Article 53.** We affirm that youth are not only beneficiaries of peacebuilding but active architects of peace. We call for the implementation of more formal and informal education and capacity-building projects on media literacy, civil and political education, youth agency, and peace education targeting youth to empower them in their role as critical agents and peacebuilders, and promote dignity, justice and equality.

**Article 54.** We call on Team Europe and decision-makers to recognise formal, informal and non-formal education as key and complementary parts of life-long learning for building and sustaining peaceful societies and invest in them, as well as to create a dedicated funding window for education for peace, human rights and sustainable development in each of these spaces, and especially in youth-led initiatives; to create training opportunities for those working with and for youth, especially teachers and youth workers on transformative, conflict-sensitive and human-rights-based pedagogy; to integrate conflict-sensitive, human-rights-based, and civic learning components into all EU Delegation programming; and to embed measurable peace education targets and learning outcomes and budget lines into all Youth, Peace and Security Action Plans;

**Article 55.** We recognize the protection and promotion of cultural heritage as powerful tools for resilience, reconciliation, and community rebuilding in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, and call for greater support for youth-led initiatives that protect, document, and raise the visibility of culture as a foundation for sustainable peace.

#### **Women, Peace and Security, gender, intersectionality**

**Article 56.** Recognizing the critical intersection of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agendas, we further call for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and young women in all peace and security discussions, including at negotiation tables, mediation efforts, and post-conflict governance structures. In line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions, we urge the establishment of quotas and dedicated funding to ensure their presence and influence in conflict resolution processes, thereby strengthening the impact of the YPS agenda.

**Article 57.** We recognize that young people are central to the nexus between peace and security, development, and human rights. We recognize that their participation is critical for the achievement of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It is also vital and complementary to the advancement of wider peace

and security agendas, such as those on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).

**Article 58.** We underscore the urgency of implementing WPS and gender-responsive commitments as inseparable components of YPS action, in a context of increasing number of conflicts, widespread violations of women's rights and rollback of gender equality, and reduced funding for gender-responsive initiatives globally.

### **Climate, environment and resource justice**

**Article 59.** We recognize the impact of climate change on injustice, conflict, discrimination, gender – based violence, exclusion and its negative impact on young people, including those facing environmental restrictions, land confiscation and resource denial in occupied and blockaded territories, particularly in limiting their access to safe and inclusive spaces for learning, participation, and leadership. We acknowledge that ensuring such spaces is essential to advancing youth empowerment, social cohesion, and lasting peace. Furthermore, we commit to supporting youth-led eco-peacebuilding and resilient livelihood initiatives.

**Article 60.** We commit to conducting dedicated climate risk analysis evaluating the impact of climate change on present and future generations, involving indigenous, marginalized and underrepresented communities. We call on the EU and partners to recognize the impact of gender on climate injustice and we ensure accessible support through context-specific funding and gender-responsive planning and design.

**Article 61.** We commit to protecting communities most affected by climate change, including women, youth, Indigenous peoples, displaced groups, and those living in conflict-affected areas. Policies and peace processes must prioritize and address unequal climate impacts, ensuring access to resources, and upholding environmental rights. Young people must be supported to lead resilience, recovery, and eco-peacebuilding efforts financially and through the creation of cross-border youth climate-peace networks promoting dialogue, sharing local adaptation knowledge, and jointly addressing environmental degradation fueling instability and displacement.

**Article 62.** We emphasize the urgent need to integrate climate action into peacebuilding and security strategies, recognizing that the impacts of climate change such as floods, droughts, and displacement can fuel instability and deepen inequalities. We call for the European Union and its partners to strengthen

climate-peace linkages, support community-based resilience initiatives, and empower youth as leaders in climate adaptation and environmental peacebuilding.

### **Concluding remarks and follow-up**

**Article 63.** To ensure the continuity and accountability of this Declaration, we call for the creation of a joint follow-up framework under the coordination of the EEAS, in partnership with youth networks and civil society, to monitor progress on the integration of the YPS agenda into EU external policies and financial instruments. This mechanism should facilitate regular dialogue between policymakers and young peacebuilders, ensuring that YPS commitments translate into tangible policy and funding outcomes.

**Article 64.** We commit to:

- Disseminate the present Joint Declaration widely, and remain actively engaged to ensure its swift and concrete and coordinated follow up at regional, national and local level;
- Expand the geographic scope of the Declaration to explicitly reference youth experiences and peacebuilding efforts in underrepresented regions, including the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America;
- Establish a stable, long-term mechanism for periodic review and amendment of the Declaration, co-led by youth representatives from diverse regions;
- Create a mechanism that allows youth from anywhere in the world to propose amendments to the Declaration at any time, with submissions reviewed by selected youth representatives.

**Article 65.** We also invite the EEAS and the European Commission to present periodic progress updates on YPS implementation within the framework of EU external action, reinforcing transparency, accountability, and mutual learning between institutions and youth actors.

*Written in Brussels on 14 November 2025 by the young peacebuilders having participated to the Second Youth, Peace and Security Conference.*

*The Declaration is open to the recognition and political support by the EU Member States, the community of practitioners and all other relevant actors in their individual and / or organizational capacity.*

*Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union.*

## SESSION SUMMARIES

MONDAY, 10 NOVEMBER

### REFRAMING YPS COOPERATION IN THE SOUTHERN AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (BY ANNA LINDH FOUNDATION)

#### *Key Details*

The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) Policy Workshop “Reframing Youth, Peace and Security Cooperation in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean:

A Euro-Mediterranean Perspective” took place on 10 November 2025, in Brussels.

It was organised as a side event by the ALF to facilitate a dedicated policy-shaping space ahead of the 2nd EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security, and, as such, it formed part of ALF’s wider contribution to the consultations feeding into the Pact for the Mediterranean.

The event’s purpose was to generate a shared assessment of the YPS agenda in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and explore the implications of the YPS agenda for the Pact for the Mediterranean, thereby contributing to wider Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on peace and security. In particular the event was designed to: (1) assess the current state of YPS implementation in the region; (2) identify lessons learned, gaps, and enabling factors across the five YPS pillars; (3) explore the implications of the YPS agenda for the Pact for the Mediterranean; and, (4) develop actionable policy proposals rooted in youth leadership, intercultural dialogue, and collaborative governance.

Participants included ALF youth leaders from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, representatives from the European Commission (including DG MENA), the European External Action Service, the European Parliament, researchers, civil society practitioners, and other regional stakeholders. This multistakeholder configuration ensured that discussions captured perspectives from grassroots peacebuilding, national policy processes, intercultural dialogue ecosystems, and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. The workshop was conducted under the Chatham House Rule and relied on an expert-facilitated structure combining analytical restitution, thematic working groups, and policy-design tables.

### *Session Highlights*

#### *Session 1 – Setting the Stage: Mapping the Landscape*

Session 1 aimed to build a shared understanding of how the YPS agenda is being implemented across the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. The facilitator opened with a restitution of a situation analysis, outlining regional trends: growing political recognition of youth as peace actors, but persistent gaps in operationalisation; strong grassroots innovation alongside shrinking civic spaces; and major disparities across contexts due to conflict intensity, governance arrangements, and socioeconomic conditions.

Participants were then divided into three working groups, each focusing on one cluster of YPS pillars, namely: (1) Participation and partnerships, (2) prevention and protection, and (3) disengagement and reintegration. Guided by structured questions, groups examined where progress has occurred, where participation remains symbolic, which actors shape risk environments, and what kinds of reintegration mechanisms exist or are missing.

#### *Insights from Working Groups*

In the Participation and Partnership Working Group, participants emphasised that youth involvement in peace and security processes remains largely symbolic. Young people are frequently “invited” into formal spaces without genuine influence, often to validate pre-set agendas rather than shape them. Limited information flows, constrained civic space, and chronic underfunding leave many youth, especially women, rural and displaced young people, without meaningful alternatives for engagement. Several participants noted that freedoms of assembly and expression remain restricted in parts of the region, further reducing the possibility of authentic

participation. Although isolated examples of co-design and locally led cooperation exist, such as youth contributing to municipal agendas or community-based peace initiatives, these remain exceptions overshadowed by practices vulnerable to institutional co-optation. Partnerships were described as short-term, donor-driven, and disconnected from long-term political frameworks, with concerns raised about uneven standards between EU and MENA actors and the absence of clear mechanisms for integrating youth expertise into broader Euro-Mediterranean policy processes. Participants therefore underscored the need to move beyond consultative or imposed participation towards co-created, intergenerational, and structurally anchored processes that guarantee legitimacy, representativeness, and continuity. They stressed that meaningful partnership requires trust, transparency, and genuine power-sharing rather than episodic engagement or one-off consultations.

Second, in the Prevention and Protection Working Group, discussions underscored the complexity of insecurity affecting youth, noting that it cannot be understood solely through the lens of armed conflict. Participants highlighted intersecting forms of physical, psychological, digital, and structural insecurity shaping young people's daily realities and long-term prospects. The inability to envision a viable future generates deep frustration, which in turn can manifest as apathy, disengagement, or heightened vulnerability to exploitation and violent extremism. While youth-led initiatives in peace education, digital literacy, community cohesion, and counter-narratives were recognised as powerful and closely connected to local needs, their impact remains limited without scale, sustained resources, and institutional uptake. Participants emphasised that knowledge generated through these grassroots efforts must be translated into evidence-based policymaking. They also stressed the importance of integrating gender and social-inclusion considerations, as well as the potential of regional networks and national coalitions to drive peer learning and collective progress. In this regard, the group underscored the need to link prevention efforts to the Pact's conflict-sensitivity, early-warning, and anti-disinformation provisions, drawing on effective practices such as public-facing communication initiatives in the region.

Finally, in the Disengagement and Reintegration Working Group, participants noted that programmes remain scarce, uneven, and often fragmented across the region, with most efforts carried out informally at community level and without sustained institutional backing. Testimonies illustrated how young people affected by conflict, whether former combatants, internally displaced youth, asylum seekers or those returning from violence, face intersecting obstacles, including psychosocial trauma, media-driven stigma, social exclusion, unemployment, illiteracy, and limited state

support. Grassroots organisations are filling some of these gaps, offering psychological support, legal counselling, and online job-training programmes, but their reach remains limited.

Discussions further revealed the deep disillusionment generated by prolonged conflict and the lack of international investment, while also illustrating how youth-led initiatives, such as advocacy forums, podcasts, and awareness campaigns, can provide visibility and push for political inclusion despite restrictive environments. Participants stressed that reintegration cannot advance where basic socio-economic needs remain unmet, and where humanitarian and development assistance risks being instrumentalised by national authorities. They also emphasised key structural challenges, including the “reintegration paradox”, how to support education, skills development, or women’s empowerment in contexts where prevailing political or cultural norms restrict such freedoms. Across the region, differences between rural and urban settings, as well as between country of origin and host communities for diaspora youth, further complicate reintegration pathways. For these reasons, participants called for holistic, context-sensitive approaches that combine livelihoods, mental-health support, peace education, community reconciliation, and meaningful civic engagement, both within countries and across diaspora communities.

### *Key Takeaways*

1. Youth participation remains mostly symbolic, with limited influence, constrained civic space, and partnerships that are short-term and donor-driven.
2. Insecurity affecting youth is multidimensional (physical, psychological, digital, and structural, among others) fuelling frustration and vulnerability, while prevention strategies lack inclusion and scale.
3. Reintegration pathways are scarce and uneven, leaving conflict-affected youth facing trauma, stigma, unemployment, and weak institutional support.
4. Grassroots initiatives show strong potential, but they are under-resourced and insufficiently connected to national or regional policymaking.
5. Participants called for holistic, context-sensitive approaches that combine livelihoods, mental health, education, reconciliation, and meaningful civic engagement.

### *Session 2 — Thinking Forward: Policy Design Tables*

Session 2 invited participants to develop concrete, policy-relevant proposals for enhancing YPS implementation across the Pact for the Mediterranean's Pillars. Participants integrated four policy tables, each aligned with specific pillars of the Pact for the Mediterranean and the YPS agenda: (1) Youth civic agency and inclusive governance; (2) Resilience, security, and prevention through youth engagement; (3) Cultural dialogue, digital narratives, and trust-building, and (4) Youth, climate, and sustainable peace.

### *Highlights from the Policy Tables*

In the Youth Civic Agency and Inclusion Policy Table, participants called for structured mechanisms linking youth networks, local authorities, ALF networks, and future Euro-Med Youth Parliamentary initiatives, while avoiding past shortcomings and duplication. They stressed the need for clear follow-up processes, building on existing participation models, and clarifying how EU youth fit into Euro-Med structures. Debates around a Mediterranean Youth Assembly focused on legitimacy, representativeness, and ensuring real, not symbolic, influence. Participants suggested embedding the assembly within existing institutional frameworks, incorporating observer or shadow-monitoring roles, easing mobility barriers such as visa procedures, and ensuring diaspora inclusion. A cultural component was also proposed to foster arts-based dialogue and youth-led cultural diplomacy across the region.

Within the framework of the Resilience, Security and Prevention Policy Table, proposals centred on recognising youth as partners in early warning, P/CVE, digital-literacy programmes, counter-disinformation efforts, and strategic communications. Participants stressed that such engagement must reflect the wide diversity of realities across the region and avoid duplicating existing initiatives. Any new structures, including links with a future youth assembly, should follow a genuinely new model that ensures independence while maintaining constructive cooperation with institutions. They also highlighted the need for youth to learn from one another across contexts, noting that governments' varying attitudes toward youth shape the space available for engagement. Finally, participants recommended formal channels for youth to feed insights into crisis-response mechanisms and for reintegration and talent-partnership schemes under the Pact to support youth affected by conflict or displacement.

Under the Cultural Dialogue, Digital Narratives and Trust-building policy table, participants reaffirmed intercultural dialogue as essential to Euro-Med cooperation



and highlighted the role of creative industries, research, innovation, and digital platforms in countering polarisation and breaking stereotypes between youth in the region and their European peers. They noted that mobility barriers, ex. visas, costs, and limited opportunities, restrict the potential of cultural exchanges, even though tourism, residencies and hybrid-format assemblies could serve as powerful peace tools. Discussions also stressed the importance of legitimacy and real influence in any youth-led cultural or narrative platform, including ensuring inclusion of diaspora youth, who act as bridges across communities and are central to building solidarity between youth inside and outside conflict-affected regions. Recommendations included establishing youth-led media platforms, embedding storytelling exchanges within ALF programmes, and expanding culture-based initiatives to strengthen trust and shared understanding across the Mediterranean.

Finally, the Youth, Climate and Sustainable Peace policy table stressed that although youth climate action is not yet mainstream in the MENA region, it represents a powerful and underused entry point for peacebuilding. Participants noted that climate-related instability is creating new triggers for conflict, making early action and youth-led resilience efforts essential. They highlighted opportunities for cross-border environmental cooperation, adaptation-focused initiatives, and the development of “green skills” and green-economy pathways for youth. However, they cautioned that without addressing socio-economic barriers and social protection gaps, such transitions risk remaining exclusive and failing to benefit the communities they intend to support. Participants also emphasised that youth need a stronger understanding of political processes to influence climate policy meaningfully, and that local approaches must be complemented by regional frameworks and cooperation with EU counterparts. Proposals included youth climate councils, a Mediterranean Youth Climate & Peace Facility, and capacity-building partnerships that link local environmental action with intercultural cooperation, conflict prevention, and shared learning across borders.

### ***Key Takeaways***

1. Any Euro-Med Youth Assembly must be legitimate, representative, and influential, avoiding duplication, ensuring follow-up, easing mobility barriers, and embedding youth roles within existing institutional frameworks, including through observer or shadow-monitoring functions.
2. Youth engagement in resilience, security, and prevention must reflect diverse regional realities, remain independent yet cooperative with institutions, and

prioritise structured channels for youth contributions to early warning, P/CVE, crisis-response mechanisms, and reintegration pathways.

3. Intercultural dialogue and creative platforms are essential peace tools, with digital media, cultural exchanges, and hybrid assemblies helping counter polarisation and stereotypes. Inclusion of diaspora youth is crucial for building solidarity across communities and conflict-affected regions.
4. Climate action is an emerging entry point for peacebuilding, offering opportunities for youth-led cross-border cooperation, adaptation initiatives, and green-skills development. However, socio-economic barriers and social-protection gaps must be addressed to ensure equitable participation and impact.

### *Recommendations*

Drawing on both sessions, participants identified six core clusters of recommendations.

#### **1. Elevate and sustainably fund youth-led initiatives**

- Establish long-term, flexible funding windows adapted to youth-led structures, especially those operating with limited institutional support.
- Create a Mediterranean Youth Peace Fund to support cross-border pilots, hybrid exchanges, and initiatives that address multidimensional insecurity.
- Invest in capacity building, mentorship, safeguarding, and mental-health support to strengthen the sustainability and well-being of youth peace actors.

#### **2. Integrate YPS into all pillars of the Pact for the Mediterranean**

- Explicitly reference YPS across all Pact pillars, ensuring coherence with the realities of diverse regional contexts.
- Embed youth-sensitive indicators, early-warning inputs, and consultative mechanisms into Pact implementation.
- Align the Pact with EU external-action tools and national processes so that grassroots insights inform evidence-based policymaking.

#### **3. Institutionalise meaningful youth participation**

- Establish Youth Advisory Bodies linked to mediation, crisis-response, governance and climate architectures, ensuring channels for early warning, P/CVE, and reintegration insights.

- Mandate youth inclusion in Euro-Med dialogues, technical committees, and consultative councils, ensuring equal mobility opportunities by addressing visa and cost barriers.
- Ensure representativeness across gender, geography, diaspora communities and socio-economic groups, while embedding follow-up processes to avoid participation without impact.
- In developing a Euro-Med Youth Assembly, ensure it avoids duplication, is grounded in a new model of governance, and incorporates observer/shadow-monitoring roles to strengthen accountability.

#### **4. Scale intercultural dialogue and narrative change**

- Expand ALF dialogue programmes, storytelling residencies, artistic cooperation, research and innovation initiatives, and youth-led media platforms.
- Use Euro-Med cultural tools and digital platforms to counter disinformation, bridge divides between EU and MENA youth, and break stereotypes.
- Support mobility schemes, hybrid-format assemblies, tourism exchanges and people-to-people encounters, ensuring the inclusion of diaspora youth as bridges across communities.

#### **5. Address socio-economic and climate-related drivers of instability**

- Introduce youth climate–peace mechanisms, cross-border environmental diplomacy initiatives, green-skills pathways, and reintegration schemes.
- Expand youth employment, mental-health, education, and skills-development measures through Pact instruments, ensuring inclusion of rural, displaced and marginalised youth.
- Address socio-economic barriers and social-protection gaps so that climate transitions and peacebuilding initiatives benefit the communities they target.
- Strengthen youth understanding of political processes to support meaningful climate-policy engagement at local and regional levels.

#### **6. Mobilise under-mobilised actors**

- Engage municipalities, local authorities, universities, civil society platforms, creative industries and diaspora networks as active partners in peace, prevention, reconciliation and climate resilience.
- Encourage public-private partnerships aligned with conflict-sensitivity and inclusion standards, ensuring benefits reach the people they are meant to support.

- Improve coordination across institutions and governance levels to avoid duplication and ensure that youth contributions lead to concrete policy change.

### *Conclusion*

The workshop confirmed both the growing recognition of youth as key peace actors and the persistent gaps that hinder the full implementation of the YPS agenda across the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. Participants highlighted symbolic participation, uneven prevention and reintegration pathways, and socio-economic and mobility barriers that limit meaningful engagement. At the same time, they underscored the potential of youth-led innovation, intercultural dialogue, digital platforms, and climate action as practical entry points for cooperation and resilience.

The policy proposals developed across the four tables point to a shared priority: building legitimate, well-resourced, and accountable mechanisms that enable youth to influence governance, prevention, cultural exchange, and climate-related peace efforts. Taken together, these insights provide a concrete basis for strengthening the integration of YPS within the Pact for the Mediterranean and guiding ALF's continued contribution to youth-centred Euro-Med cooperation.

### *Disclaimer on AI-assisted editing and translation*

This report has used artificial intelligence tools solely to improve formatting and to facilitate a clearer, more polished translation into English. All substantive analysis, findings, and conclusions are the authors' own. The authors reviewed and approved all AI-assisted outputs, and no confidential or sensitive information was provided to the tools.

## **LOCALISATION OF THE YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA**

**Objectives:** This training aimed to strengthen understanding and teach best practices and lessons learned in the process of localising the YPS agenda at the local level.

Facilitator: JOSPIN AMANI

**Participants:** French-speaking young people, learning portfolio manager, Peace and Security HUB, UN Delegate - Youth and Society.

### *Summary of the session*

The session presented the JPS Agenda, recalling the context in which it was adopted by the United Nations Security Council, which underpins its importance for the inclusion of young people in peace.

The learning exchanges showed why localisation is essential to adapt this Agenda to the realities of communities and in conflict zones, using the practical case of the DRC in North Kivu province, which has already developed the Provincial Operational Plan 2250, which further contextualises the realities on the ground.

Key points to remember in localisation:

1. Analysing the specific local needs of young people and understanding the security and political context.
2. Mapping local actors (young people, CSOs, authorities and community leaders) was highlighted as a key step, as it has enabled and continues to enable the identification of allies at all levels for advocacy actions, given that generational conflicts can hinder effective implementation. Emphasis has been placed on intergenerational dialogue to strengthen social cohesion.

Active and inclusive participation by young women in all processes enables the mobilisation of all potential. To achieve this, the JPS coalition operates at the local level, enabling youth CSOs to participate in and take ownership of the process.

Challenges identified include a lack of funding, limited knowledge of the JPS Agenda among political and administrative authorities, and security and political instability in some areas. There was a strong emphasis on the need for coordinated and structured local advocacy. Discussions also highlighted the importance of strengthening young people's capacities. Finally, the session recommended ensuring sustainable coordination and dedicated resources to truly anchor the YPS Agenda at the local level.

## FOCUS DISCUSSION WITH EEAS EQUALITY AMBASSADOR

### *Summary*

**Aude Maio-Coliche** (EEAS Ambassador for Equality), opened the session by recognising the collective contributions of policymakers, practitioners, and youth representatives in advancing the YPS agenda over the past decade. She outlined the EEAS Task Force on Equality (TF.EQ)’s mandate to mainstream equality, diversity, and inclusion, including gender, LGBTIQ+, racial and ethnic diversity, religion or belief, disability, and age, across EU external action. Anchoring the discussion in the normative framework of UNSC Resolutions 2250, 2419, and 2535, she reaffirmed the EU’s commitment to intersectional and context-sensitive implementation, and highlighted that meaningful youth inclusion requires more than consultation: it must involve influence, representation, and accountability. **Aude** recalled the five pillars guiding YPS implementation (Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnerships, and Disengagement & Reintegration) setting the stage for an interactive, youth-driven discussion. The dialogue focused on: i. Youth priorities in peace and security; ii. How EU external action can better reflect youth realities; iii. Principles for meaningful youth engagement.

### **1. Youth Priorities in Peace and Security**

Participants highlighted a rapidly changing global context defined by increasing conflict, shrinking civic space, climate-related risks, and digital threats. Participants also stressed that peace and security must integrate social justice, human rights, and equality. Main concerns included:

- **Inclusion gaps:** Challenges in building cooperation between minority communities; limited reach into rural areas; criminalisation and marginalisation of Indigenous, rural, and minority youth; and restricted civic freedoms, for instance in relation to capacity to engage in public and civic life.
- **Justice gaps:** Exclusion of young people from transitional justice processes; lack of recognition for youth affected by conflict, including those forcibly mobilised; lack of access to basic human rights, in some cases insecure access to food and water, as well as WASH; and widespread mistrust in institutional justice systems, contributing to apathy and disengagement.

### **2. How EU External Action Can Better Reflect Youth Realities**

Participants proposed several ways to improve relevance and responsiveness:

- **Youth-sensitive conflict analysis**, building on established gender-sensitive approaches and incorporating methodologies already used by youth-led organisations.
- **Accessible and protective funding** for youth-led initiatives, which is flexible and time-sensitive, especially where youth work voluntarily or in insecure environments.
- **Recognition of grassroots contributions**, ensuring that youth are not confined to symbolic participation within formal institutional frameworks, but that are given opportunities to meaningfully contribute, and to be aware of the follow-up for processes in which they are included.
- **Greater contextual understanding**, with institutions acknowledging that youth are already active contributors on the ground, and valorising their input.

### 3. Principles for Meaningful Youth Engagement

Equality was consistently emphasised as the guiding principle. Youth called for engagement that ensures influence, diversity, resources, and accountability. Key reflections included:

- **Education and employment gaps:** Outdated curricula, skills mismatches vis-à-vis labour market, and high unemployment contributing to significant youth migration, and preventing educated youth from having the necessary skills to access qualified labour market
- **Mental health and disengagement:** Heightened stress, hopelessness, and exclusion—particularly affecting young women and youth in restrictive environments. Youth reflected that national policies should comprehensively address mental health in national health plans.
- **Disaggregated data:** Needed to understand the differentiated realities of youth in diverse contexts.
- **Non-tokenism:** Engagement must offer genuine decision-making power *rather than surface-level consultation*.

### Additional Reflections (Optional Questions)

Participants observed that implementation of YPS across EU external action—development, diplomacy, and security cooperation—remains uneven. Some YPS pillars, notably **Disengagement & Reintegration** and **Protection**, were flagged as underfunded and less operationalised. Gaps in these pillars have direct

consequences for conflict-affected youth, including former combatants and young people facing criminalisation or systemic marginalisation.

### *Conclusions and Way Forward*

Aude concluded by reaffirming the EU's commitment to strengthening the YPS agenda and ensuring that young people are recognised and resourced, as essential actors in peace and security. She summarised several key takeaways: i. **Youth leadership is indispensable** for credible, effective, and sustainable EU external action. ii. **Meaningful inclusion** demands shared influence, adequate resources, equality, and clear accountability-not symbolic participation. iii. EU action must remain **intersectional, context-sensitive, and reflective of diverse youth realities**, from rural communities to displaced populations and marginalised groups.

## CONNECTING ON YPS PROGRESS IN WEST AFRICA

### *Participants:*

- Officials from ECOWAS and its Member States
- West African Youth from ECOWAS and AES States
- Team Europe officials working on West Africa
- Partners supporting YPS implementation in West Africa

### *Session Objectives:*

1. **Assess Progress and Lessons Learned:** Evaluate the advancements and glean lessons from collaborative efforts aimed at localizing and institutionalizing the Youth, Peace & Security (YPS) agenda in West Africa.
2. **Foster Collaboration and Confidence:** Enhance understanding and align actions among West African government officials, youth, Team Europe officials, and YPS partners to facilitate cooperative action on YPS.

**Background:** West Africa, one of the world's youngest regions demographically, grapples with escalating insecurity and tensions. The region has pioneered the YPS agenda with the highest density of National Action Plans (NAPs). Structured intergenerational, multistakeholder, and cross-border partnerships have fostered this progress, supported by entities like ECOWAS and EPSG.

### *Session Plan:*



- **Initial Discussion:** Participants split into parallel group discussions led by resource partners (GIZ, Expertise France, and Search), followed by a joint discussion with Team Europe partners, culminating in a wrap-up session.

#### *Discussion Highlights:*

1. **Progress on Institutionalizing YPS:**
  - ECOWAS: Progress is slow; only two West African countries (Nigeria, Liberia) have NAPs. Innovative approaches are being developed, like regional consultations outside urban areas and establishing cross-ministerial task forces.
  - Ghana Youth Agency: Youth NAPs are progressing slowly, employing a multistakeholder approach.
  - BBP Nigerian Youth and other representatives: Youth engagement is growing, with strong coalitions forming in Sierra Leone and Ghana.
  - C d'I Youth: Training initiatives have led to impactful violence prevention actions, suggesting NAPs support these grassroots efforts.
2. **Challenges in Implementing the Agenda:**
  - Overall sentiment suggests a loss of faith in governments due to perceived insincerity regarding youth inclusion.
  - Low awareness among youth about NAP processes; efforts are underway to improve this.
  - Diversity among youth is often overlooked; effective localisation requires co-creation with grassroots youth.
  - Concerns about civil space protection and tribal tensions were raised by Ghana and C d'I representatives.
3. **Role of Governments in YPS:**
  - The need for transparency and truthful communication from governments was emphasized.
  - Youth involvement in decision-making roles must be genuine and sustained even if their views differ from those of the government.
  - Munira highlighted the lack of transparency and the risks in the digital space due to misinformation.
  - ECOWAS signaled the importance of supporting youth entrepreneurship and recognizing their potential.
4. **Good Partnership Models and Europe's Role:**

- Successful models include multistakeholder frameworks involving youth councils and diverse networks, with accountability mechanisms in place.
- Initiatives like EPSG have been effective, with calls for Europe to ensure implementation based on local priorities.
- ECOWAS cited Finland-supported communities of practice as promising models.

### Conclusions and Recommendations:

- **Localizing Efforts:** Tailor initiatives to fit local contexts and empower grassroots youth as leaders in the YPS agenda.
- **Strengthening Partnerships:** Enhance collaborations between governments and youth, focusing on transparency, involvement, and mutual objectives.
- **Europe's Involvement:** Leverage Europe's influence to ensure local priorities are recognized and effectively supported, promoting sustainable implementation of youth policies.
- **Intergenerational Dialogue:** Foster intergenerational and intergroup dialogues to boost understanding and trust, paving the way for actionable collaboration on YPS initiatives.

This session reinforced the significance of local context, transparency, and genuine youth engagement for advancing the YPS agenda in West Africa. Collective action and international support remain pivotal in overcoming existing challenges and fostering a peaceful, secure environment led by empowered youth.

TUESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER

## WE ARE HERE! SETTING THE SCENE FOR OUR WORK TOGETHER

Sonya Reines - Djivanides explained what EPLO is: an independent civil society platform of European Non - Governmental Organisations (NGOs), networks of NGOs and Think Tanks that are committed to peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict. It currently has 50 member organisations with headquarters in 17 different European countries. EPLO connects its members and the broader peacebuilding and

conflict prevention community with EU policymakers to promote peacebuilding policies and practices worldwide.

While they work very closely with the European Union institutions, they are an independent civil society organisation, not one of the EU's bodies.

Some of the sessions of the YPS Conference were held under the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN). The CSDN is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society experts and EU policymakers on issues relating to peace and conflict. It is funded by the service for Foreign Policy Instruments, and co-managed by Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI), the EEAS, and EPLO. Since its establishment, it has hosted more than 100 dialogues, creating spaces for genuine exchanges between experts, practitioners and EU policymakers. The input provided through these meetings has been critical in informing EU policies on peace and security, including the integration of YPS considerations in the EU's external action. It is thanks to the support of this mechanism that some of the conference participants could make it to Brussels, and thanks to the great work of the logistics team.

EPLO has been supporting the EU in its efforts to advance the YPS agenda for many years. One specific example – through the CSDN, in January 2022, EPLO organised a Policy Meeting to gather ideas and perspectives from young experts on priorities for the implementation of the YPS agenda, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

*“We do our best to integrate YPS perspectives in all discussions around peace and security, and we ensure these principles shape not only our discussions but also the way we design events and engagements.”* Peter Wagner started by saying that we are all here to listen, to learn and to build, together, a stronger, more united Team Europe approach to Youth, Peace and Security.

He addressed the young people telling them that they will be shaping regional visions, debating the hard questions, and drafting the Joint Declaration that will guide how we all move forward.

He continued by highlighting that at the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, they take this partnership seriously. On-going actions currently amount to over €50 million in projects that directly support young people in crisis and conflict settings. That includes:

- Training young journalists in Benin and Togo to counter polarisation with responsible storytelling,
- Providing mental health and psychosocial support to more than 11,000 Palestinian children and youth evacuated from Gaza,
- Supporting education, livelihoods and reintegration for youth in Northeast Syria,
- Strengthening youth-led peace organisations and empowering youth in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand and Tunisia, both online and offline,
- Enhancing the influence of young women change-makers in the development, mediation and other processes in Central Asia.

These are not isolated initiatives, Mr Wagner continued. They are part of a much broader EU commitment to make the YPS agenda real, not just in words, but in implementation, in funding, in partnership and at the highest political level.

Already in March this year, the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP), the EU's chief diplomat, met with 25 young people from all over the world to discuss how to strengthen alliances with youth in foreign policy including in the area of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Mr Wagner was glad to see some familiar faces from that discussion were there.

Too many young people still face barriers to participation, to funding, to safety. Too many feel unheard. And so this week is about listening and building the systems and partnerships that allow youth leadership to thrive. *“So, let’s set the tone here”, he concluded. “Let’s be open, honest, and ambitious. And let us remember that peace is built not by one generation alone, but by all of us working together, across institutions, across borders, across experiences.”*

Cosmin Dobran, the Peace, Partnerships and Crisis Management Director within the EEAS, greeted the audience by saying that *“this week, Brussels becomes the home of the global YPS community — a space where over 120 young people, EU and Member State representatives, and international partners come together to mark ten years since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 and to shape what comes next. This week is about building bridges — between generations, institutions, and regions. It’s about transforming networks into partnerships, and ideas into operational action.”*

*“For too long, YPS has been a principle”, Mr Dobran continued. “Now we are making it practice. We are here to make sure that youth participation is not symbolic, but strategic — embedded in how we plan, act, and evaluate our external engagement.*

*Just a few weeks ago, at the Paris Peace Forum, our Managing Director Benedikta von Seherr-Thoss moderated a powerful panel with three young peacebuilders — from Türkiye, Mexico, and Serbia. Their message was clear: peace is not sustainable without youth inclusion. And that message continues here, in Brussels, this week.”*

Mr Dobran also underlined the three main aims of the Conference:

1. To **adopt a Joint Declaration**, drafted by the young participants, setting out shared principles and priorities for YPS implementation under Team Europe.
2. To **operationalise the YPS agenda**, including by integrating youth inclusion into the planning of Common Security and Defence Policy missions and other EU external actions.
3. To **build a permanent youth network** — not as a symbolic gesture, but as a living structure that will connect practitioners, institutions, and partners long after this week ends.

*“Over the coming days, I encourage you to challenge yourself and to co-create. The energy, creativity and expertise you bring are essential to how the EU will implement YPS in the years ahead.”* Mr Dobran concluded that *“by Friday, we aim not just to end with declarations, but with a clear sense of direction and shared ownership”.*

As a transition into the rest of the programme, Eoin O’Leary of the EU YPS Coalition and coordinator of the programme team for the YPS Week, took the floor, highlighting the unique opportunity this week represented for the range of youth, institutional, and civil society participants gathered. He shared what an honour it had been to shepherd this process over two years from the hopeful dream of a few EU YPS Coalition members, a year of strategising and concept development, through many months of preparations by a huge set of partners, to the gathering itself.

Mr O’Leary emphasised the centrality of intergenerational and multistakeholder co-creation and meaningful, inclusive, respectful dialogue for the EU YPS Week and Conference, principles at the heart of the YPS agenda and a core commitment for the EU YPS Coalition. This is implemented, among other areas, in the co-creation of the YPS Week programme and the prioritisation of roundtable and open floor formats where participants, no matter who they are, can exchange on an equal basis.

He reminded participants of the shared responsibility to make sure these principles are realised in practice. He emphasised the importance of the safeguarding policy for this, highlighting the core commitments participants make to ensure everyone can express themselves freely and safely and feel heard and respected. Mr O’Leary also underscored the importance of active listening, summarised as listening to understand rather than listening to respond. He shared how this will allow for participants to learn from each other, recognising that we all know something others do not and others know things we do not, and transform the session discussions into powerful spaces for generating the new ideas that can guide the future of Team Europe action on YPS and partnerships with young peacebuilders.

## INVESTING IN YOUNG WOMEN FOR CHANGE: LESSONS FROM CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Panel
- **Number of Participants:** 35
- **Participant Profile:** youth, member state representatives, civil society

### *Session Objective*

Hosted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), this event delved into the synergies of the YPS and Women, Peace & Security agendas, highlighting experiences and lessons from the OSCE’s Young Women for Peace (YW4P) programme in Central Asia as a model for investing in young women for regional cooperation on peace, as well as the cross regional learning between YW4P and OSCE-supported efforts in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. Participants explored the opportunities for enhanced cooperation between the EU, OSCE, and other stakeholders in advancing YPS in Central Asia, Europe’s East, and globally.

### *Executive Summary*

The session underscored that dialogue is viewed as the foundation of peacebuilding, described as “the only right choice” and central to initiatives such as the Dialogue Academy, though participants noted the ongoing challenge of connecting dialogue to everyday realities to shift narratives and build trust. Examples such as the “feminist

antifascist net” illustrated how peace efforts can bridge divides without concealing identity, while experiences from Kosovo highlighted that peacebuilding is most effective when grounded in practical, lived experience.

**Youth perspectives emphasized the need for more intersectional and youth-inclusive spaces**, including proposals for youth quotas in government institutions, and framed leadership as a commitment to pursuing long-term change. Participants stressed that **essential political conditions are necessary for human security**, particularly for young women in Central Asia, and highlighted innovative approaches such as using AI tools in peacebuilding and continued advocacy for National Action Plans.

**Concerns were raised about the marginalization of young people due to political views and the heightened vulnerability of young women in conflict settings.** Systemically, the discussion focused on strengthening gender equality through legal frameworks, engaging men more actively in peace processes, and enhancing capacity building through continuous learning and shared best practices. The LGBTQI+ community’s exposure to violence, both online and offline, was also highlighted as a key issue requiring attention.

#### **Content Summary of Session on Investing in Young Women for Change: Lessons from Central Asia and South**

The session highlighted the strong synergies between the YPS and WPS agendas, emphasizing dialogue as the core tool for peace and the need to connect it to everyday realities to change narratives and reduce polarization.

The OSCE’s **Young Women for Peace (YW4P) programme was presented as a successful model** for empowering young women in Central Asia and fostering cross-regional learning with Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Participants stressed the importance of intersectional, youth-inclusive spaces, including proposals for youth quotas in government institutions, and reframed leadership as a commitment to tangible change.

Key issues discussed included political marginalization of young people, heightened risks faced by young women and LGBTQI+ communities, and the need for legal frameworks supporting gender equality. Innovative approaches such as the use of AI tools for peacebuilding were raised, alongside the need to engage men in peace processes. Commitments focused on strengthening NAP advocacy, enhancing capacity-building, and deepening cooperation between the EU, OSCE, and regional

stakeholders. Overall, participants underscored that meaningful participation requires co-creating peace through continuous learning, practical experience, and sustained support.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth perspectives shaped the discussion by consistently centering the need for meaningful inclusion, intersectionality, and practical pathways for young women to influence peace and security processes. Young participants highlighted political marginalization, safety concerns, and the importance of creating spaces where youth voices are not only heard but integrated into decision-making. Intergenerational collaboration appeared constructive, with older stakeholders acknowledging the value of youth-led experience and innovation, such as the use of AI in peacebuilding, while youth participants emphasized the need for continued mentorship and shared ownership of peace initiatives.

Several youth-led recommendations emerged, including calls for youth quotas in government institutions, stronger advocacy for NAP implementation, and expanded capacity-building opportunities. However, despite clear motivation to participate, youth participants were unable to ask questions or contribute more deeply due to limited session time, which constrained fuller engagement.

## **PREPARATION SESSIONS FOR YOUNG PARTICIPANTS: FORESIGHT ON YPS**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Foresight Session/workshop
- **Number of Participants:** Approx 70-80
- **Participant Profile:** A diverse range of participants, only group missing was public officials (these joined the session towards the end)

### *Session Objective*

This participatory foresight session, organized in partnership with CMI - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and the European Commission, brought together young participants of the EU Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Conference to explore long-term trajectories of the YPS agenda.

The session pursued three core objectives: First, to introduce participants to futures thinking and the application of foresight methodologies; second, to advance joint



analysis of emerging dynamics shaping the YPS agenda and consider its potential pathways to 2035; and third, to co-create youth-led insights that can inform EU policymaking and programming.

Using foresight tools, such as the Futures Triangle, participants reflected on historical legacies, assessed current trends, and developed joint visions for the YPS agenda in 2035.

The session concluded with an exchange between young participants and public officials from the EU institutions, Member States, and partner countries who had taken part in the *Learning session for public officials: exploring existing YPS tools* with the United Nations System Staff College and the Global YPS Coalition.

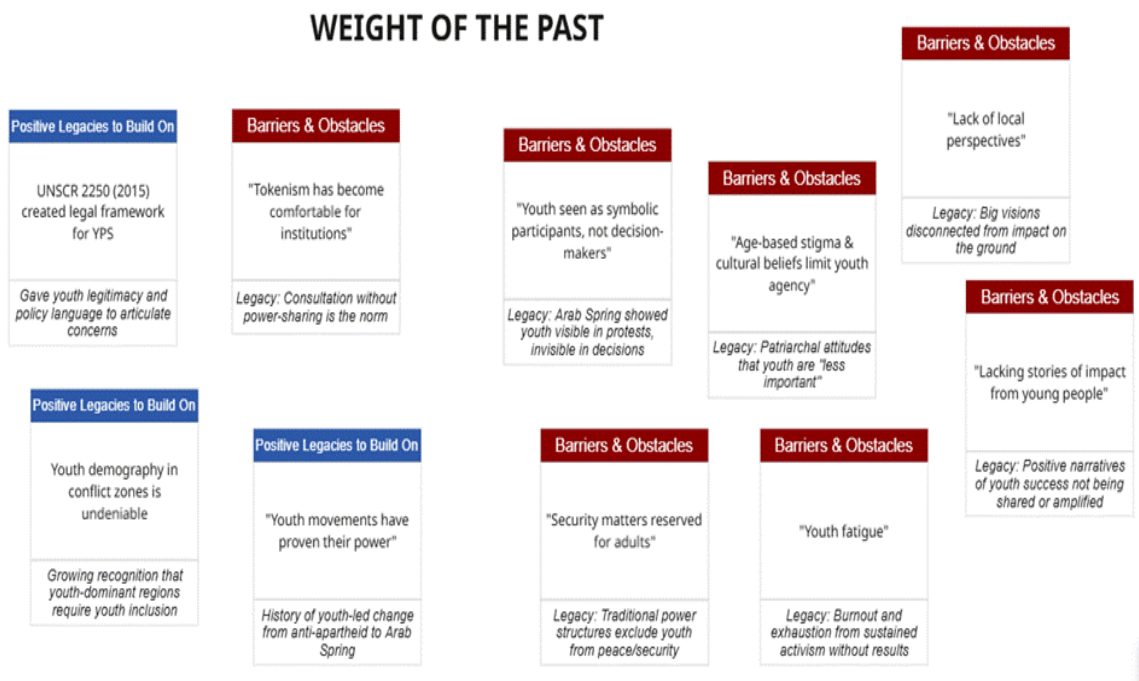
### ***Executive Summary***

The workshop started with the *Polak Game*, which served as both an icebreaker and a way for participants to explore their personal views on whether the world is becoming better or worse, and on their own agency in shaping the future. A short presentation followed, providing an overview of what is meant by futures and foresight and how, for example, CMI uses this approach as part of its dialogue work. Emphasis was placed on the added value of embedding forward-looking perspectives in dialogue processes and on blending transformative and strategic foresight while leveraging digital tools to enhance inclusivity and collective analysis.

*Futures Triangle* was used as the main analytical lens during the workshop, inviting participants to discuss factors and forces that shape the YPS agenda, focusing on the

weight of the past, the push of the present, and the pull of the future. A pre-workshop survey had asked participants to identify some of these factors and forces beforehand, which then served as a starting point for the session discussions.

Below *Image 1 - Weight of the past: positive legacies to build on and barriers*



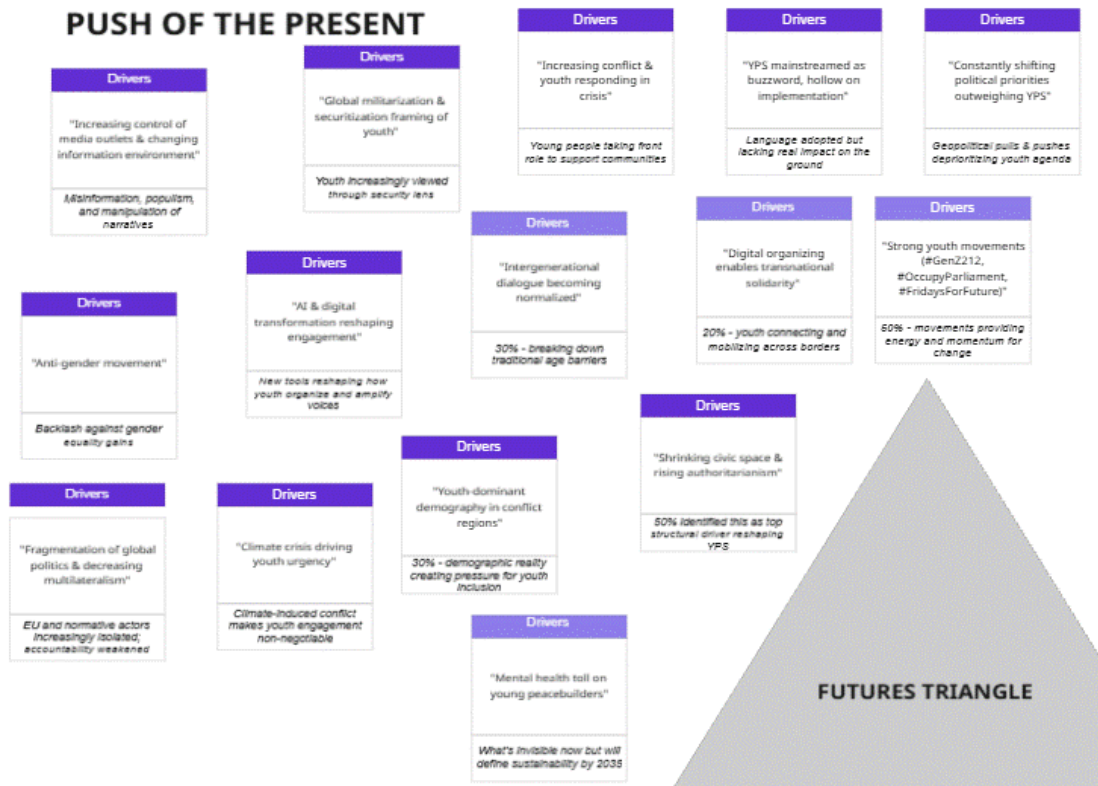


Image 2 – Push of the present: current global trends that shape the YPS agenda

**Push of the present:** Key trends shaping the YPS agenda included increasing conflict and militarization, shrinking civic space, and a growing disconnect between high-level YPS discourse and its tangible effects. Participants highlighted the central role of young people in supporting their communities, leading protest movements, and navigating a challenging information environment marked by disinformation and media control. They emphasized the need for genuine intergenerational dialogue, well-timed mediation to connect youth activism with policymaking, and the political skills required to translate mobilization into influence. At the global level, the erosion of multilateralism and normative accountability frameworks was seen as further complicating youth agency in peace and security.

## PULL OF THE FUTURE

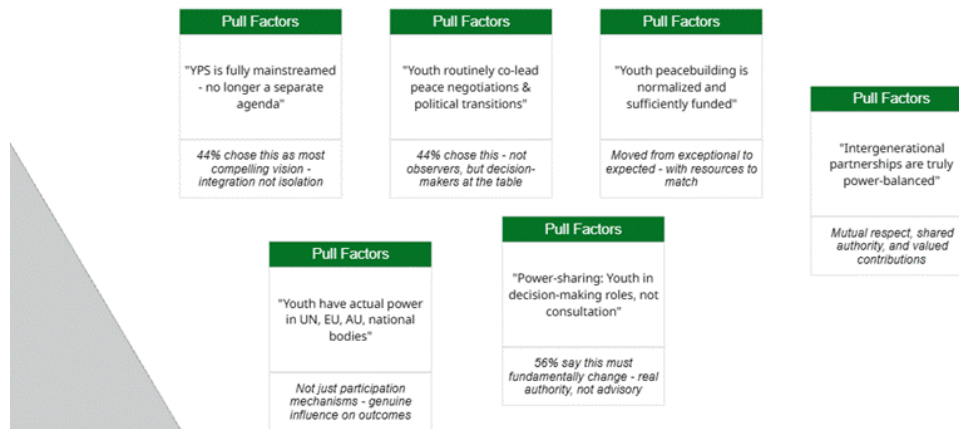


Image 3 – Pull of the future: critical issues or images of the future shaping YPS agenda

**Pull of the future:** In the pre-workshop survey, participants identified several critical issues for the development of the YPS agenda, including the importance of intergenerational partnerships based on mutual respect and balanced power. Future visions included a mainstreamed YPS agenda in which youth routinely co-lead processes and share power, rather than being merely consulted.

In the next phase, participants broke up into groups to develop future scenarios based on the discussions and the prompts given. The six scenarios were: *Institutionalized YPS*; *Movement-led Disruption*; *Localized & Context-Driven YPS*; *Tech-Enabled Transformation*, *Authoritarian Retrenchment*; and *Climate Chaos & Disorder*. After presenting their scenarios in plenary, participants formulated recommendations for policymakers, civil society actors, and youth - either to work toward a positive scenario or avoid heading toward a negative one.

Several common themes emerged across scenarios. Participants noted that no scenario is perfect and that youth play a critical role in all futures. Environmental challenges, opportunities presented by digital tools, and the continued importance of dialogue and locally grounded responses featured prominently. A recurring theme was the need for young people to fight for their rights, space, and agency, and the view that institutional change was consistent and necessary across all futures.

Participants raised also additional scenarios about the resilience of democracies, risks of deepening polarization and fragmentation, and the influence of fear in shaping future outlooks. It was further noted that the scenarios would have benefited from stronger intersectional analysis.

### **Key recommendations**

Participants put forward a range of recommendations aimed at strengthening youth agency and advancing the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. These included calls for proportional youth representation in governance structures, youth quotas at EU institutions, localized support through accessible and decentralized funding (including sub-granting mechanisms that would be accessible to smaller rural organisations), and greater cooperation between civil society organizations and local authorities. Participants also emphasized the need for more inclusive criteria in recruitment and partnership practices, moving beyond a focus on academic credentials to embrace diverse lived experiences.

To address risks of institutional inertia and the reproduction of power within the YPS agenda, recommendations stressed the importance of sustained mentoring, broader intergenerational alliances, and capacity-building to support meaningful civic engagement. Participants urged more strategic collaboration between youth-led movements, the private sector, and emerging youth entrepreneurs to bridge political and economic spheres of influence.

In the digital realm, participants recommended youth-led media literacy initiatives, mechanisms to label AI-generated content (such as watermarking), limiting the use of AI in critical decision-making and prioritizing human oversight. They also called for stronger protections for digital and civic spaces in the face of authoritarian retrenchment and misinformation. The importance of fostering narratives that recognize youth contributions to peace and the positive impacts of youth movements worldwide, was underscored.

Finally, in the context of climate and environmental instability, participants called for recognition of indigenous communities' leadership, considering that they face some of the greatest challenges despite having done the least to harm the planet. They also highlighted the importance of integrating environmental justice into peacebuilding initiatives and encouraged young actors to lead by example wherever possible.

While the limited time available only allowed the group to scratch the surface, the discussions highlighted several future priorities that young participants consider critical for the advancement of the YPS agenda.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth perspectives shaped the process from the pre-session survey through to the final recommendations. In the closing stage, participants further refined their scenario-based recommendations and presented them to public sector officials who joined the session, creating a brief but substantive space for intergenerational exchange.

## **LEARNING SESSION FOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS: EXPLORING EXISTING YPS TOOLS**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** workshop
- **Number of Participants:** 20-25 participants
- **Participant Profile:** member state representatives and international organisations

### *Session Objective*

- ☐ Facilitate peer learning on enabling youth participation in peace & security governance;
- ☐ Identify existing tools, mechanisms and communities of practice supporting YPS in public institutions;
- ☐ Identify gaps, dilemmas and knowledge needs among officials;
- ☐ Encourage problem-solving through case-based scenarios relating to YPS implementation;
- ☐ Promote a support network where participants feel they are not alone in implementing YPS;

### *Executive Summary*

The session brought together public officials and representatives of international and regional organizations to reflect on how existing tools, frameworks, and partnerships support the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, and what challenges and dilemmas persist. Participants **highlighted that a wide range of resources already exist at global, regional and national levels**, such as training courses, guidance materials, continental and regional frameworks, and national youth policies and NAPs, but that these are not always fully leveraged or coherently linked. YPS implementation was described as uneven, often dependent on individual champions, project-based funding, and fragmented initiatives that do not always connect to each other or to broader policy processes.

Through the group discussions, participants emphasized recurring challenges around political will, unclear institutional leadership, limited and shrinking resources, and difficulties in making YPS work truly evidence-based and youth-informed in practice. Youth perspectives in this session were not only informed by previous consultations, youth coalitions, and research, but were also integrated through direct engagement with youth, made possible by linking the session with the parallel youth foresight workshop.

Looking ahead, participants converged on the need for stronger coordination mechanisms, clearer roles and accountability, more structured pathways between youth initiatives and policymakers, and practical capacity-building - particularly on how to operationalize YPS across sectors and levels of governance.

### **Content Summary of Session on *Learning session for public officials: exploring existing YPS tools***

#### **Segment 1 – Line-up activity**

After the welcoming and overview of the session, participants were encouraged to stand up and participate in a “line up” activity that also served to understand their current level of knowledge/ familiarity of the YPS Agenda. The questions covered were the following:

- 1) How familiar are you with the YPS Agenda?
- 2) How central is it in your current job?
- 3) For how many years have you been working with the Agenda?
- 4) Are you currently working at the implementation of the YPS Agenda?

As a result of the exercise, it was clear that **most of the people in the room were very familiar with the YPS Agenda**, even though most of them started working on this agenda between 0 and 5 years ago.

### *Segment 2 – Resource mapping exercise*

Participants were divided into different groups and were asked to discuss and summarise their key points on different colored post-it notes in response to the following questions:

1. *What current tools, resources are helping you in your respective institutions to implement YPS?*
2. Do you have any best practices you would like to share?
3. What are some of the challenges/dilemmas you have faced / are facing in this?

***Responses to Q1: What current tools, resources are helping you in your respective institutions to implement YPS?***

#### **1. Global Level**

**Capacity-building tools:** United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC)–FBA training course on YPS (“Realizing the YPS Agenda”), YPS Guide for public officials, YPS Programming Handbook, research studies on YPS (e.g., Peace Impact Framework, *The Missing Peace*).

**Collaborative platforms & advocacy spaces:** multistakeholder networks (e.g., Global Coalition on YPS) and conferences and global forums on YPS.

**Financial resources:** accessible funding (e.g., UN Peacebuilding Fund, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

#### **2. Regional Level**

**Regional strategies & frameworks:** EU Youth Strategy, European Youth Action Plan, EU Strategy on Anti-Racism and Equality (includes youth references), AU Continental Framework on YPS, ECPF (ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework).

**Funding & implementation support:** EU-funded projects supporting national action plan’s development (including sub-granting).

**Knowledge-sharing networks :** EU YPS Network and EU Community of Practice.

#### **3. National / Local Level**

**Policy & structural mechanisms:** Existing NAPs and national youth policies, national youth councils and coalitions, national peace infrastructures (e.g.: peacebuilding agencies; ministries of youth), joint intergovernmental working groups on youth and political party buy-in and support.



**Localized operational tools:** Localizing the Guide for Public Officials, local/ToT training on YPS (e.g., DRC Coalition with FBA-UNFPA-UNSSC's Regional ToT on YPS) and national youth networks/coalitions .

**Research and cooperation :** Participatory action research, international cooperation partners (e.g., UNDP, COMESA, SADEL). In addition to that UNSSC shared also other existing global tools focused on YPS national implementation: UNSSC-FBA's Primer on In-Country Implementation (soon available in multiple languages), YPS NAPs CoP, UNSSC-FBA's YPS Primers: ENG, FR, SP, PT, AR, FBA's guide: YPS Agenda- Strengthening institutional capacity for implementation.

***Responses to Q2: Do you have any best practices you would like to share?***

**1. Youth Leadership & Participation**

Focus on youth-led action, inclusion, and frontline leadership in YPS: Intergenerational partnerships, but led by young people, youth at the forefront, recognition and acknowledgment of youth movements, personal motivation and efforts (focal points from civil society), increased quotas for youth within IOs and Strengthening grassroots.

**2. Institutionalization & Policy Mainstreaming**

Integrating YPS into policy frameworks, budgets, and governance structures: Mainstream YPS into normative frameworks, incorporate YPS into existing budgets especially in key ministries, parliamentary cooperation (ex: Finland), NAP's should clearly lay out responsibilities for ministries (shared accountability), at regional level, embedding/mainstreaming YPS into regional & continental policies, buy-in/commitment by government + political will, ensuring inter-institutionality (CSO's, political parties, MP's, Ministries, IOs).

**3. Capacity Building & Awareness**

Training, communication, and enhancing knowledge of YPS: Training on YPS for youth and public officials, YPS awareness / comms, free resources and timely and clear information.

**4. Platforms, Networks & Collaboration**

Creating spaces for dialogue, partnership, and experience-sharing: Youth networks, peer-to-peer platforms, create platforms for dialogues (Ex: consultations), learning forums (ex: FBA's UN YPS focal points learning forum), multistakeholder approach when implementing YPS.

**5. Strategic Positioning & Momentum Building**

Using key moments and symbolic opportunities to amplify YPS: Levering on the YPS momentum (e.g., 2025 as 10th anniversary), leveraging existing platforms/ NAP's.

**6. Cross-Sector Integration & Nexus Topics**

Connecting YPS to other policy areas and thematic domains: nexus with other topics: health, education, connecting YPS to other themes (WPS, mental health, reconciliation) Political Will, Legitimacy & Governance.

***Responses to Q3: What are some of the challenges/dilemmas you have faced / are facing in this?***

Political will / lack of political will, political buy-in is not a given, political instability / short lifespan of political roles / changes in ministers, failure of governance: lack of trust/inspiration among youth, politicization of the UN and securitization issues, erosion of multilateralism

*Key insight:* Political will and sustained commitment at leadership and institutional level are the most frequently cited barriers.

**2. Leadership, Ownership, and Coordination**

Unclear regarding which government/ministry should take the lead, silos in government / lack of coordination among actors, many initiatives exist, but they are disconnected, competing activities among stakeholders, missing spaces for facilitation.

*Key insight:* Unclear roles, fragmentation, and competition among actors hinder coherent YPS implementation.

**3. Funding and Resource Limitations**

Funding limitations / restrictions / cuts, resources are scarce due to budget cuts in peacebuilding, when funding is restricted, youth fall through the cracks.

*Key insight:* Consistent challenge around insufficient and unprotected funding for youth-centered work.

**4. Knowledge, Awareness & Evidence**

Lack of awareness on YPS, making YPS evidence-based is difficult (indicators, data scarcity), agreed language and keeping up with latest developments, youth do not recognize themselves in policy and politics, unclear how to include youth practically ("what is the voice of youth?")

*Key insight:* There is a major gap in knowledge, meaningful representation, and actionable evidence.

**5. Conceptual Dilemmas & Agenda Positioning**

YPS agenda limited to "youth issues" rather than cross-cutting, dilemma of linking YPS and WPS without merging or diluting them, competition among IOs language / "who wants to take the shine" .

*Key insight:* Conceptual clarity and positioning of YPS as a broader peace and governance agenda remains a challenge.

## 6. Youth Inclusion & Representation

Failure of governance: youth mistrust in institutions, youth do not recognize themselves in policy and politics, unclear practical methods of including youth in policy-making

*Key insight:* Representation challenges are not only structural but also emotional and identity-based - youth feel excluded or misrepresented.

### **Segment 3 – Scenarios exercise: Finding alternative solutions to current dilemmas**

With the objective of co-building responses to real challenges, participants were invited to find solutions to the following scenarios:

- 1) Having limited or non-existing funding;
- 2) Lacking political-buy in within your unit and/or institution;
- 3) Lacking an established coordination mechanism;
- 4) Lacking the mechanisms to reach out to and include remote/marginalized youth;
- 5) Struggling to transition from youth consultation to meaningful youth decision-making;
- 6) Struggling to measure the impact of youth participation.

Due to time limitations, no plenary reporting took place on the scenario-based group discussions.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Although young people were not directly present in the discussion, their perspectives were frequently referenced by participants, mainly through experiences working with youth coalitions, national youth councils, and participatory research processes. Public officials reflected on challenges in meaningfully integrating youth voices, particularly noting gaps in representation, unclear mechanisms for participation, and the recurring issue of youth not recognizing themselves in existing policies.

Intergenerational collaboration was discussed largely in conceptual terms, focusing on how institutions can create enabling environments where youth are not only consulted but share ownership in implementation. Participants noted that youth-led networks, focal points from civil society, and peer-to-peer learning spaces are emerging as influential bridges.

Several youth-informed recommendations were echoed, including the creation of structured and sustained dialogue platforms, clearer accountability frameworks for

ministries, and the importance of safeguarding resources dedicated to youth priorities.

It is worth mentioning that the session was originally planned to last for three hours, but was shortened to two hours as the facilitators suggested to bridge this session with public officials with the parallel foresight session that the youth were participating in. This allowed the public officials and youth to engage directly in facilitated group discussions, led by the CMI team.

### *Final suggestions*

Participants suggested that one of the main priorities moving forward is to build stronger bridges between policymakers and youth initiatives, ensuring that youth-led work at community level is recognized, supported, and meaningfully connected to policy processes. This includes mapping existing youth initiatives, making them visible to national institutions, and establishing structured platforms for ongoing dialogue.

There was broad interest in clarifying institutional roles and identifying allies across government, parliament, civil society, and international organizations to sustain political will beyond individual champions. Participants saw value in creating coordination mechanisms such as focal points or joint working groups on YPS to support information-sharing, reduce duplication, and help embed YPS into existing structures.

Participants recognized that a key challenge is moving from commitment to implementation. Several indicated that future efforts should focus on practical guidance, including clear responsibility frameworks, role mapping, and tailored support for national-level application. There was also interest in better connecting policy frameworks with lived realities, using participatory action research, consultations, and evidence from grassroots youth work.

Some also proposed that future sessions could explore peer-learning formats focused on how to operationalize YPS across sectors (peacebuilding, governance, education, social cohesion), and not only within youth-focused institutions.

Finally, participants indicated that targeted training or capacity-building support - especially on implementation, coordination models, and how to meaningfully engage youth in policy spaces - would be useful.

## A "YEAR OF ELECTIONS" RETROSPECTIVE: WHAT LESSONS FOR YPS & YOUTH-INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE?

### *Session Details*

The panel brought together European Parliament's Vice-President for Human Rights, Rule of Law and Democracy Support Nicolae Ștefănuță, Edita Velić and Andia Ulliri, Young Political Leaders programme alumni and Josep Ferré, Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Rich exchanges took place between the panellists and the youth practitioners.

Vice-President Ștefănuță recalled the importance of youth participation in politics. He stressed the importance of supporting Civil Society Organisations and of having young people politically engaged.

The Young Political Leaders shared their experiences as young politicians, discussed the challenges facing young people willing to take part in politics and expressed the importance of representing young people in institutions. They stressed the importance of the European Parliament's Young Political Leaders Programme to further become agents for change in their communities.

The director of the Anna Lindh Foundation presented their projects in the field of Youth Peace and Security and discussed with the audience the challenges of young people in the wider Mediterranean region.

## EU-UN YOUTH EXCHANGE ON SECURITY SECTOR REFORM AND THE YPS AGENDA

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** panel discussion
- **Number of Participants:** 25-30 people
- **Participant Profile:** youth, member state representatives, international organisations

### *Session Objective*

To deepen shared understanding of how the EU–UN partnership can advance the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda through Security Sector Reform (SSR). To identify practical entry points and tools within EU and UN frameworks to strengthen youth-inclusive, accountable and rights-based security institutions and to highlight existing practices and lessons learned from EU, UN, national and regional initiatives where youth are engaged in security governance, oversight or reform processes.

### *Executive Summary*

The session explored how the EU–UN partnership can advance the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda through Security Sector Reform (SSR), providing a platform for institutional representatives and youth experts from Somalia, Kosovo, South Sudan and Haiti to reflect on how young people experience and engage with security institutions.

The discussion aligned with the session's objective to identify practical entry points for youth-inclusive, accountable and rights-based security institutions, particularly in contexts where EU and UN missions operate.

Structured around a series of targeted questions, the dialogue brought together institutional insights and lived experience. The youth expert from Somalia opened the session by outlining why youth engagement is essential for effective SSR. EU and UN representatives followed with reflections on current approaches to SSR, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Rule of Law work, and highlighted opportunities for expanding meaningful youth participation. The other youth speakers then shared concrete examples from their contexts, discussing issues of trust, access, accountability, and safety. The session concluded with an open exchange, during which participants of the session offered reflections and recommendations for strengthening the youth-responsive security governance.

Across the discussion, participants underscored the importance of grounding SSR and DDR efforts in local realities and in the lived experience of young people. The conversation underscored a shared recognition that the security dimension of the YPS agenda offers important but still underutilized opportunities for collaboration. Participants highlighted that meaningful youth engagement enhances the legitimacy and long-term effectiveness of SSR processes. Within the EU-UN partnership and joint priorities, there is potential to develop more structured, youth-responsive approaches, particularly in relation to SSR and DDR. The discussion pointed to a clear

and shared entry point for future work: strengthening youth participation in security reform as a key component of advancing the broader YPS agenda.

### **Content Summary of Session on EU-UN and Youth Exchange on Security Sector Reform (SSR) and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda**

This session convened representatives of the European Union, the United Nations and youth leaders to explore how the EU-UN partnership can strengthen the operationalisation of the YPS agenda through the framework of Security Sector Reform (SSR). It links directly to the EU-UN Strategic Partnership on Peace and Security and the Joint Priorities for 2025-2028.

The Council conclusions underline the importance of “*the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and youth*” in peace and security efforts. The session examined how SSR processes open pathways for youth participation, protection, prevention, partnership and reintegration, aligning with the YPS pillars, and how the EU-UN partnership can support this agenda.

Speakers addressed targeted questions related to why youth engagement is essential in SSR, how youth perceive security institutions, what mechanisms exist to support participation and how lessons learnt from EU/UN mission contexts can inform future efforts. The discussion emphasised the importance of linking global frameworks with local realities, and incorporated multiple perspectives, including those voiced by participants in the room, both orally and through anonymous contributions through an online link, which enriched the dialogue with diverse and context-specific insights, and allowed people to engage in ways they felt most comfortable to them.

### **Institutional Perspectives**

Institutional representatives noted that the global environment has become increasingly difficult for multilateral action, marked by rising geopolitical tensions, higher defense spending, the re-emergence

of intergovernmental conflict and shrinking civic space. This context is further shaped by eroding trust in institutions and a rise in populism, including among young people, which adds complexity to peace and security efforts.

Against this backdrop, speakers highlighted a shift in SSR thinking from regime-centred security toward approaches grounded in human security, justice, rule of law, rights and governance. They observed that while DDR and SSR initiatives often engage youth through the lens of preventing violent extremism or demobilization,

there is a need to broaden this framing and recognize young people as equal partners in peacebuilding and security governance.

Representatives emphasized that discussions on the YPS agenda must engage more deeply with the security dimension. As security challenges grow more complex, youth cannot be viewed solely as peacebuilders but must also be included in shaping and reforming security institutions. Youth are increasingly present in demonstrations, civic movements and public debates demanding accountability and reform, and their direct engagement is essential for building security services that are inclusive, responsive, and trustworthy.

Speakers also acknowledged that geopolitical pressures, restricted civic space and heightened security priorities can create barriers to inclusive security governance. They stressed the importance of ensuring that existing policy frameworks translate into meaningful and sustained engagement with young people. Practical examples from mission contexts illustrated how youth-focused platforms and community initiatives have successfully fostered structured dialogue and trust-building between youth and security actors, demonstrating that inclusive approaches are both feasible and impactful.

### **Youth Perspectives across contexts**

The four youth experts shared perspectives from diverse conflict-affected and post-conflict settings, offering insights shaped by their lived realities. Their contributions highlighted both shared patterns and context-specific challenges shaped by lived realities on the ground. Several speakers described deep mistrust between young people and security institutions, noting that interactions with police and security forces are often marked by fear, intimidation and/or perceptions of bias.

One youth speaker shared *"We do not feel protected. Too often, our first experience with security forces is when something goes wrong."* Another speaker described a perception that institutions are *"present only to respond with force, not to listen."*

The youth experts emphasized a broad and holistic understanding of security that goes far beyond the absence of violence. They described security as the ability to move freely, access education and jobs, walk safely as young women, receive fair treatment from justice systems and live with dignity.

As one participant put it, *"Security is being able to stay in my country without having to leave to find opportunities."*

Another noted, *"Development is security for us. Without opportunities, we cannot feel safe."*

They also referred to long-standing structural drivers of insecurity, including corruption, limited economic opportunities, weak institutions, and a lack of trust.



Several participants described seeing institutions that “*serve those with influence, not ordinary young people*,” which reinforces feelings of exclusion.

The importance of civic education and political literacy was raised repeatedly. Speakers noted that meaningful participation requires knowledge and confidence to engage in institutions.

One participant shared “*We are asked to participate, but no one prepares us for how to do it or how to navigate complex institutions*.” The inequalities between urban and rural youth were also mentioned, noting that opportunities for engagement, dialogue, and public participation are often concentrated in capital cities. Rural youth face greater barriers in accessing resources, training, services, and decision-makers.

Despite these challenges, the speakers shared many examples of active engagement in peacebuilding, including volunteering, community-led safety initiatives, youth councils, intercommunity dialogues, and social mobilization.

Several emphasized that their work is often overlooked or underfunded. One participant observed, “*We are doing the work, but we need institutions to see us and work with us, not only call us when they need a youth voice*.”

A recurring theme was the need for structured, continuous, and institutionalized dialogue between youth and security actors. They expressed a clear desire for safe spaces where they can raise concerns and propose solutions.

One participant stated, “*We want to sit at the table before decisions are made, not after*.” Another cross-cutting issue was safeguarding. The speakers emphasized that participating in discussions related to security governance can carry risks, particularly in contexts where the civic space is shrinking. They highlighted the need for protective measures to ensure that youth who engage publicly with sensitive issues are not exposed to harm.

The youth experts also stressed the link between development, dignity and security, calling for a shift away from narratives focused solely on conflict, and toward cooperation, socioeconomic opportunity and inclusion.

As one participant summarized, “*Give us a chance. We know what our communities need, and we are ready to lead*.” Overall, the youth contributions illustrated the urgency and value of integrating youth perspectives in SSR and DDR efforts. Their insights pointed to both the challenges that young people face in engaging with security institutions and the significant potential for youth-led approaches to strengthen accountability, trust and sustainable peace.

### **Reflection on Youth Participation**

Youth participation was substantive and significantly shaped the direction and depth of the dialogue. It contributed to a broadening understanding of security beyond

military and institutional frameworks to include human dignity, access to education, trust in institutions, and the ability to remain in one's country. Youth speakers emphasized lived experiences from post-conflict and fragile contexts, highlighting resilience, exclusion from decision-making, and the need for partnerships rather than top-down support. Intergenerational collaboration was evident where institutional actors acknowledged the shift toward youth-responsive approaches and the need to include youth in security sector reform, but youth expressed that meaningful engagement is still limited in practice.

Youth-led recommendations focused on institutionalizing dialogue, investing in youth from both urban and rural areas, strengthening civic education, creating economic opportunities, and ensuring that international partners not only fund but actively listen to youth as equal stakeholders.

### **Final suggestions**

Both institutional actors and youth experts emphasized that advancing peace and security today requires going beyond symbolic inclusion toward meaningful, structured partnership with young people. While institutions highlighted policy frameworks, mandates and regional cooperation, young speakers brought attention to lived realities, trust, human dignity, localization, language accessibility, and the need to operationalize commitments.

Importantly, participants in the room also contributed, orally and anonymously, sharing their own reflections on the question: *"Looking ahead, what key issues should be covered as part of the continued discussion between the EU and UN?"*.

These contributions highlighted priorities such as youth representation in decision-making, localization (languages, context, mediation), financing for youth-led initiatives, improving mobility and visa policies, and protecting safety and dignity in both physical and digital spaces. All speakers converged that young people are not only recipients of peace and security initiatives but strategic partners in shaping them. In fragile contexts, youth are already engaged in peacebuilding, mediation, community security, DDR support, and civic engagement - but still face systemic exclusion from institutional decision-making, resources, and political access.

The EU and UN acknowledged the need to strengthen their cooperation through joint programming, funding, and knowledge-sharing from local mission contexts.

### **Cross-cutting suggestions to strengthen EU-UN-Youth cooperation in SSR efforts:**

#### **1. Institutionalize youth participation**

- Establish formal youth advisory roles within missions, SSR processes and EU-UN peace and security architecture.
- Move from one-off consultations to structured, continuous engagement.
- Ensure youth representation in UN and EU decision-making bodies, both centrally and in delegations

## **2. Invest directly in youth-led peacebuilding**

- Allocate funding and technical support to grassroots youth initiatives, including those in marginalized and rural areas.
- Finance youth-led peacebuilding programs
- Promote civil-military-youth collaboration.

## **3. Strengthen youth capacities for peace leadership**

- Build competencies in mediation, civic education, dialogue, research, digital peacebuilding, and advocacy.
- Leverage on researchers and local context expertise, involving youth and academic centers.

## **4. Create joint spaces for dialogue between youth and institutions**

- Establish platforms such as youth councils, mediation bodies, and town-hall style dialogue spaces with security forces, peacekeepers and local authorities.
- Create mediation bodies composed of youth within UN and EU delegations.

## **5. Recognize development and human dignity as core to security**

- Promote a broader concept of security that includes education, employment, mobility, justice, mental health, and gender equality.
- Translate UN resolutions (nos. 1325, 2250) into local languages, integrating them into school curricula, and increasing accessibility.
- Protect dignity and safety of youth, including online security and harmful digital behaviours.

# **SIDE EVENT: CULTURE OF/FOR PEACE: CULTURAL PERFORMANCES AND DISCUSSIONS ON THE ROLE OF YOUTH-LED/INCLUSIVE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Performances and discussions
- **Participant Profile:** This event was open to all participants of the YPS Conference and Week

### *Session Objective*

The participants of the EU YPS Week convened at Géopolis for the special side event Culture of/for Peace. The idea for this gathering emerged from two motivations: recognising the profound role that youth-led/inclusive cultural activities play in building and sustaining peace worldwide, and embracing the unique opportunity to bring together young people from more than 85 countries to share and learn about each other's cultures.

### *Executive Summary*

Designed to complement the week's more formal, outcome-oriented discussions, the evening aimed to offer space for cultural exchange, reflection, and connection.

The programme opened with a reception and light dinner, enriched by food contributed by youth participants from their home countries. The formal part of the evening began with opening remarks from Ilgin Pasli-Brombach and Anthony Fedorov, key organisers of the EU YPS Conference and Week.

They spoke to the vital role of cultural activities in peacebuilding before inviting participants to the stage. Performances ranged from solo and communal dances to spoken-word poetry and a jewellery exhibition, taking the audience on a journey across a variety of cultures and continents. Through these pieces, participants shared stories of pain, resilience, hope, and joy. After the scheduled programme, the floor was opened for spontaneous contributions.

The evening concluded with an invitation for attendees to reflect on and discuss three guiding questions:

- Has art or culture ever helped you understand a place or person differently?
- How have you seen arts or culture help build trust or understanding in your community or work?
- Do you think cultural and artistic activities – especially youth-led ones – are taken seriously enough in the peace and security space? Why or why not?

In sum, the Culture of/for Peace evening offered a powerful reminder that peace is cultivated in many – sometimes unexpected – ways. It also provided a meaningful space for connection, enabling participants to learn about one another and their cultural backgrounds, and fostering curiosity, community, and empathy for the days of work that followed.

WEDNESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER

## THE OPENING SESSION

Ms Benedikta von Seherr Toss greeted everyone, especially those participants who could not attend the Conference, and thanked the volunteers, the staff and the partner organizations.

She auspicated the following outcomes from the Conference:

- Lasting connections – creating a vibrant and enduring network, where the peacebuilders can organise, expand, and keep the momentum alive. And where the Institutions listen to them, walk alongside them, and share the same purpose: to build peace, together.
- Joint Declaration – that will define priorities, shaping a shared vision that guides activists' action and gives them a strong, unified voice to inspire and urge institutions such as the EU ones to act, deliver, and transform words into results.
- To raise awareness and drive change – among EU Member States and beyond – highlighting the vital need to adopt National Action Plans on Youth, Peace and Security, and to ensure this agenda takes root in the real world. We will also promote the integration of the Youth, Peace and Security perspective into EU civilian and military missions in partner countries.

Ms Tiko Lagvilava urged to create more safe spaces for young people, raising the awareness of the YPS agenda through educational programmes, grant youngsters with opportunities to realize their potential for contributing to the positive changes peacefully, recognize the needs of different communities, lead the peacebuilding process and since this room is full of current policy makers we call on to recognize us as your equal partners and create peace process more inclusive.

She had a challenging 4 months where she had to moderate a dialogue among her peers from Armenia and Azerbaijan. At first, they did not interact at all, even more, they hated each other. Later they became friends, who just loved the personality of their enemy but could not accept the possible future of peace among them. Referring to the afore-mentioned lived reality, as a grand summary of the story, one of them is getting married next summer and Tiko is her bridesmaid together with her “so-called” enemy. They built peace together in their local reality.

Mr Joseph Brighton Malekela said that in Tanzania, they have been running the #Youth4PeaceAgenda program mobilizing youth participation in peacebuilding and Decision-making processes: growing aspirations of young people manifest the commitment to building a peaceful future with sustainable development of the country, echoed by civil societies and international development partners, and are collectively calling for the dire need of reconciliation through inclusive dialogue that can foster institutional accountability, reforms, peace and justice for all, especially after unprecedented incidents of lives and properties lost amid 2025 general election violences. Across the Great Lakes Region of Africa, young mediators are preventing local conflicts from turning violent. In Ukraine, youth networks are helping rebuild social trust amid war. In Sudan and Gaza, young activists risk their lives to deliver aid and keep hope alive. In Serbia, young peacebuilders and students' movements promote accountability against corruption and justice for all.

*"For most of us", Joseph continued, "success this week means three things":*

- Elevating grassroots and Gen-Z realities by ensuring that the policies championed here reflect the lived experiences of youth from crisis and conflict zones, informal settlements, and on-line communities worldwide. *"Let us move from consultation to co-creation, where our ideas shape outcomes, not just opening sessions."*
- Securing sustainable partnerships and funding, not as charity, but as a strategic investment in peace infrastructure. Emphasized the need for youth-friendly funding, simplified access, and long-term partnerships that trust us to lead, fail, learn, and grow.
- Leaving with commitments, not just inspiration. He stressed that they must leave Brussels with clear steps, shared accountability, and mechanisms to track implementation, because declarations without delivery risk becoming history's footnotes.

Annie Binja, who could not attend the Conference, suggested four concrete actions:

- Invest in meaningful and inclusive participation. This requires the creation of dedicated spaces for young people, with adequate resources, real decision-making capacity, and consideration of their proposals.
- Strengthen the protection and support for young peace activists in conflict zones, because committing to peace in these areas is a heroic act that can cost a life. Faced with threats and stigmatization, a safe framework, psychosocial support, and recognition of youth work are crucial.



- Ensure direct, flexible, and long-term funding for youth-led initiatives. Too often, funds do not reach young people on the ground. The mechanisms for accessing funds are complex, the amounts insufficient, and the duration of projects too short. We demand simplified access to funds, direct funding to youth organizations, and flexibility that takes into account the reality of our contexts.
- Systematically integrate the YPS agenda into all strategies of the European Union and its partners. The Youth, Peace and Security agenda must be a central pillar of all development, humanitarian aid, security, and diplomacy policies. It is a channel through which all actions must be evaluated for their impact on young people and peace.



## GEOGRAPHIC BREAKOUT: ANGLOPHONE WEST AFRICA, FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICA, EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

The joint regional breakout session brought together participants from **West, Central, Southern/COMESA** members in a shared space designed to surface authentic experiences, practical lessons, and collective priorities for advancing the YPS Agenda.

The session opened with a brief welcome from the shapers and facilitators, who framed the dialogue as an opportunity to “move beyond frameworks and speak from lived realities.”

The session began with opening context-setting remarks by the co- shapers — Ruth Kay Kangwa (Southern Africa/COMESA), Abdoulie O. Bah & Munira Yerima (West Africa)

Askira, and Lydie Mungala (Central Africa), Mariama D — who each highlighted the diversity and interconnectedness of peace and security challenges across the four regions.

The next segment was a short, focused presentation and video on YPS Agenda in Africa was delivered by Ruth (Zambia), highlighting regional efforts coordinated through the COMESA Governance, Peace & Security (GPS) Unit.

This included: the Guidelines for Establishing National Youth Councils, intergenerational Dialogue Forums, regional Mediation and Conflict Prevention Training, and emerging youth-led civic and peacebuilding practices from Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Eswatini, Kenya, Ethiopia and Seychelles.

The presentation set the tone for understanding how **regional policy frameworks can support local actors**, while also exposing the gaps where local realities still outpace institutional responses.

### ***Regional Perspectives: West, Central, Southern and East Africa***

Following the COMESA overview, the facilitators invited brief interventions from each regional cluster and participants into a plenary.

- ❖ **West African participants** spoke about countering misinformation and digital online violence, peacebuilding through local languages, and youth participation in electoral security frameworks, drawing particularly on Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Liberia.



- ❖ **Central African participants** shared experiences from DRC, CAR, Cameroon and Chad, reflecting on how youth peacebuilders work amid protracted conflict, displacement, trauma, and fragmented governance structures.
- ❖ **Central Africa participants** emphasized the need to evaluate YPS efforts, nationally, regionally and globally. Here, the DRC was used as a case in point given that it's conducting a national study using the 5 vital signs of the peace impact framework, this will allow the DRC to evaluate the 5 pillars based on the PIF.
- ❖ **East African voices** highlighted examples from Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda, focusing on youth participation in county-level peace structures, digital peacebuilding tools, and community mediation.

Across all regions, young people affirmed their commitment but highlighted that **efforts remain largely disconnected**, with limited resources and limited policy traction.

Co-Facilitators **Amen Frew Messele** (Ethiopia – East Africa / COMESA), **Yvette Ruth Ariwo** (Kenya – East Africa / COMESA) then opened the floor using **five guiding questions** centred on guiding questions:

1. **How are current conflict and insecurity trends in the regions affecting young people differently** — across gender, displacement, urban–rural divides, and the changing climate–security landscape?
2. **Where are young people already preventing violence, mediating disputes, or countering online and offline hate speech — and what conditions helped them succeed?**
3. **What continues to block youth from doing more for peace and governance?** (Consider barriers such as funding access, legal or civic space, recognition, safety, or language.)
4. **What 3–5 key messages should we send to the EU, AU, Respective RECs, Member States—** especially around localisation, digital harms, political inclusion, and climate–security linkages?
5. **Which of these messages must be reflected in the Joint Declaration for it to be meaningful and actionable for the Joint region?**

Participants engaged in open, cross-regional dialogue identifying shared challenges such as online harassment, exclusion from political spaces, inadequate safety mechanisms, and the absence of sustainable financing for youth-led peacebuilding.

Youth repeatedly emphasised that although they are recognised rhetorically as “peace actors,” they **lack formal roles, institutional access or funding to sustain local efforts, and protection**. Despite this, they showcased resilience through peace clubs, digital campaigns, community dialogues, early-warning systems, and youth-led policy advocacy.

In the final discussion round, the session moved from reflection to **prioritization**. Participants collectively agreed that the most urgent actions across regions include:

1. Begin the Conversations to Invest , Champion for Development and financing of **National Action Plans on Youth, Peace and Security in respective countries**.
2. Stronger **inter-institutional partnerships** between AU, EU, RECs and youth-led organizations.
3. Protection of young peacebuilders in **online and offline civic spaces**.
4. Recognition of youth-led preventive diplomacy, mediation, and peace education as **formal contributions** to security systems.
5. Integration of **climate-security considerations** into YPS programming.

These emerging priorities formed the core messages to be fed into the Joint Declaration.

### ***KEY FINDINGS FROM THE JOINT AFRICA REGIONAL BREAKOUT SESSION***

#### **(West, Central, Southern and East Africa)**

#### **1. Youth-Led Peacebuilding Is Active but Severely Under-Resourced and Undocumented**

Across all four regions, participants demonstrated that youth are already driving preventive diplomacy, mediation, early-warning systems, social cohesion dialogues, civic education, and climate-security responses. However, these initiatives rely almost entirely on voluntary

action, short-term project support, and informal community structures. A sustained, predictable financing mechanism for youth-led peacebuilding remains absent.

#### **2. Localisation of the YPS Agenda Is the Critical Missing Link**

Regional frameworks from COMESA, ECOWAS, ECCAS and the AU exist, but they rarely translate into district-level programming or national policy reform. Youth emphasised that without local platforms (peace clubs, youth councils, decentralised peace committees, school-based civic education), the YPS Agenda will remain aspirational.

### 3. Digital Harms Are Rapidly Escalating and Threatening Youth Activism

Participants reported increasing online harassment, misinformation, political disinformation campaigns, doxing of youth activists, and targeted cyber-attacks against young women. Digital insecurity was flagged as a **regional risk multiplier that** directly affects peace, elections, and civic participation.

### 4. Civic Space and Political Participation Are Shrinking

Youth across the regions described limited access to decision-making, tokenistic consultations, arrests or intimidation of activists, and high barriers to political entry. Young women face systemic exclusion and safety risks. Participants stressed that genuine political inclusion requires legal, financial, and institutional reform—not symbolic youth engagement.

### 5. Climate and Environmental Stressors Are Driving Insecurity

The climate–security nexus emerged as a shared regional challenge. Flooding in Mozambique and Malawi, drought in Kenya and Ethiopia, coastal erosion and food insecurity across Central and West Africa, and resource tensions in pastoral regions are deepening fragility. Youth-led climate resilience efforts remain disconnected from formal peace and security structures.

### 6. Youth Want Institutional Partnerships, Not Parallel Platforms

Young people consistently asked for **stronger, formalised cooperation** between AU, EU, RECs (COMESA, ECOWAS, ECCAS), national governments, and youth networks. They called for mechanisms that allow youth to co-design, co-implement, and co-monitor YPS commitments, not only participate in events or consultations.

### 7. National Action Plans on YPS Are Urgently Needed

Participants widely agreed that NAPs are necessary to anchor commitments at national level, ensure cross-ministerial coordination, and allocate budgets. Countries with NAPs or advanced processes (e.g., Nigeria, Kenya, South Sudan, Liberia) show more structured youth engagement. Other regions highlighted delays and the need for technical and financial support.

### 8. Youth Are Still at High Personal and Professional Risk

Reports from Central and West Africa, in particular, showed that young peacebuilders face threats, surveillance, intimidation, and emotional exhaustion. The session emphasised that without protection mechanisms, the cost of youth participation continues to be borne personally by young people.

## GEOGRAPHIC BREAKOUT: VOICES OF CHANGE: YOUTH SHAPING THE FUTURE OF PEACE IN THE AMERICAS

### *Session Details*

**Session Format:** Small Group Discussions

- Number of Participants: 15 participants.
- Participant Profile: 25 participants, including youth delegates, civil society experts, and international organisations representatives.

**Speakers:** Iván Zuleta (Young Peacebuilder, Colombia) – community peacebuilding lessons.

- Iván Ovando-Lacroux (DG INTPA – European Commission) – EU priorities for youth inclusion.
- Anja Tresse (Kofi Annan Foundation) – youth leadership and democratic participation.
- Pauline Deneufbourg (UNDP) – institutional pathways for embedding youth in governance.

### *Session Objective*

Following these general scheme: *i) what have young practitioners and Team Europe partners done already on YPS, ii) what is working, and ii) what needs to change?*, this session aimed to:

1. **Exchange good practices** and lessons learned from youth-led initiatives that have effectively fostered inclusive participation, dialogue, and sustainable peacebuilding.
2. **Identify existing barriers** that continue to hinder meaningful youth participation and influence in peace and security processes.
3. **Co-create forward-looking recommendations** to enhance coordination, funding mechanisms, and sustainable institutional support for YPS implementation in the Americas from both national authorities and Team Europe.

4. **Contribute actionable inputs** to strengthen the role of youth within Team Europe's cooperation framework and ensure that peacebuilding efforts are inclusive, sustainable, and youth-driven.

### *Executive Summary*

Divided into 9 geographic clusters, the geographic breakout sessions will be youth-led spaces for direct exchange between young YPS practitioners from the different countries represented, EU and Member State officials working on those countries, and relevant YPS partners.

Across the Americas, young people have been at the forefront of movements advancing peacebuilding, democratic governance, and social justice. However, persistent inequalities, insecurity, and limited access to decision-making spaces continue to affect them disproportionately. These challenges are intensified for Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and LGBTIQ+ youth, who face structural discrimination and historical exclusion.

At the same time, the region has witnessed innovative youth-led initiatives that challenge violence, promote reconciliation, and advocate for inclusion. From Indigenous youth movements defending territory and climate justice to Afro-descendant networks advancing racial equity and young LGBTIQ+ activists pushing for rights-based governance, these efforts reflect the transformative potential of youth when adequately supported and included in governance processes.

This session will provide a platform for meaningful dialogue between young peacebuilders, EU and Member State representatives, and institutional partners to take stock of achievements, share lessons, and identify key steps to strengthen the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda in the Americas.

### *Key takeaways/lessons learned:*

Peace is sustainable with the involvement of all communities. The Colombian Youth Agenda has worked to give visibility to young Indigenous women and the LGBTG community.

Iván Zuleta (Young Peacebuilder, Colombia) The Prototype and Tangible Action Methodology: promotes territorial participation, moving from ideas to tangible actions. The Colombian Youth Agenda has a presence in 12 territories, supporting the talent of all its members.

Iván Ovando-Lacroux (DG INTPA – European Commission): With all the experience gained, they have been able to collaborate and connect with young people and strategies for the future.

It is important to mention the creation of boards of directors in all countries to ensure the participation of all young people. Spaces have been opened for young people in different parts of the world. Youth have been promoted through initiatives such as Erasmus.

Pauline Deneufbourg (UNDP): Young people have been promoted through policies, the creation of coalitions, investment in innovation, the creation of youth policies, and the creation of digital and technological spaces for young people in different parts of Latin America (especially for women).

Honduras is developing a national youth plan, involving local communities, young people, and institutions.

Anja Tresse (Kofi Annan Foundation): The organization uses innovative methodologies for the most challenging contexts, seeking to identify platforms for youth advocacy at the national and international levels.

In Latin America: a region with a wealth of knowledge, yet it goes unrecognized when discussing peace or conflict.

We, the young people representing the Americas, spoke about the realities of our countries: the resurgence of the right wing, militarization, the realities of violence, dictatorships, exile, and all the other realities we face.

We need to take action on the decisions we make, so that the plans are effective.

***Actionable follow-up recommendations:***

- More accessible mechanisms for funding for young people in Latin America are needed.

- There is a need to promote more leadership among young indigenous and Afro-descendant people so that they can influence regional politics and make transformations in favor of peace and democracy.
- A permanent dialogue table needs to be established in the Americas with the European Union and young peacebuilders, regardless of the political context of each country, to promote peace and prevent escalations of violence.
- Attention needs to be paid to the closing of civic space in the Americas, the rise of authoritarianism, and the polarization of societies; investing in these aspects would be fundamental.
- International organizations need to engage more closely with youth and young peacebuilders to understand the realities of each country.
- It is important to integrate the LGBT community into peace processes in the Americas given the decline in human rights and the denial of political participation to these groups.

## GEOGRAPHIC BREAKOUT: EUROPE

### *Session Details*

**Session Format:** Roundtable and small group discussion.

- **Number of Participants:** 43
- **Participant Profile:** Youth, member state representatives and civil society organizations.

### *Session Objective*

Under a facilitated roundtable format, participating youth and officials will answer three questions to take stock on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) implementation:

- What have young practitioners and Team Europe partners done already on YPS,
- What is working,
- What needs to change?

The answers to these questions, as well as the relationship built through direct dialogue, will serve as a basis for the following discussions during the Conference.

### *Executive Summary*

Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) implementation across Europe reveals both regional strengths and shared challenges. Italy and Finland stand out as leading examples, demonstrating effective institutional collaboration and active civil society engagement. In contrast, the Western Balkans face interconnected barriers, including funding shortages, youth marginalization, or centralized opportunities. Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus present diverse contexts (from democratic backsliding and conflict to restricted civic space), yet civil society involvement remains crucial for promoting youth participation and dialogue.

Key lessons highlight the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration, context-specific strategies, and leveraging existing structures to embed YPS within broader policy frameworks. Regional and transnational cooperation strengthens networks, improves resource efficiency, and amplifies youth voices in decision-making.

Actionable follow up recommendations:

- Develop or update national and regional YPS action plans with youth and civil society participation.
- Strengthen networks and alliances, including EU-level advocacy (e.g., “Group of Friends on YPS”), to share knowledge and best practices.
- Invest in youth empowerment initiatives, such as peace education, media literacy, and enhancing the visibility of youth contributions.
- Collect disaggregated youth data and create safe spaces for dialogue.
- Support regional hubs like RYCO and implement capacity-building programs across ministries and youth organizations.
- Leverage existing structures, such as WPS initiatives, to accelerate YPS implementation, as well as knowledge-sharing platforms like the European Youth Portal.

### *Content Summary of Session on YPS implementation in Europe*

After a reflection phase on YPS implementation in Europe, participants were divided into geographical groups. The main insights from each group are summarized below.

#### **Southern Europe (Cyprus, Italy and Spain):**

Situation and Challenges:

- Italy is seen as a leading example in the region, developing a National Action Plan on YPS through a participatory process with government and civil society.



- In other countries, there is not a clearly defined YPS agenda or dedicated civil society structures, but organizations are working on related areas such as climate action, social support, or youth participation.

**Proposals:**

- Strengthen cross-sectoral events tailored to each country's priorities (e.g., Youth–Peace–Climate nexus).
- Reinforce international partnerships to improve access to European and international funding through collaboration.

**Northern and Western Europe (Netherlands, Germany, France, and Nordic countries):**

Situation and Challenges:

- Finland stands out as a model, with its National Action Plan developed through close collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and youth stakeholders.
- Common regional challenges include protection of civic space, freedom of expression, militarization, and youth exclusion from decision-making. However, context-specific approaches are needed for each country.

**Proposals:**

- Develop regional strategies: Create an “EU Regional Action Plan” or establish common YPS strategies. Integrate YPS into current security debates and bridge the gap between “hard” and “soft” security.
- Strengthen networks and alliances: Support the creation of regional and national YPS networks. Engage allies within ministries and parliaments, promote an EU-level “Group of Friends on YPS,” and reach out directly to politicians, including via social media.
- Optimize resources and communication: Demonstrate the efficiency of YPS approaches to policymakers, leverage existing structures (e.g., WPS implementation), and use knowledge-sharing platforms like the European Youth Portal.
- Support Civil Society: Strengthen peacebuilding communities that reinforce national and bilateral processes, following examples like Finland, which provides bilateral support globally.

**Western Balkans**

Situation and Challenges:

- Countries face interconnected challenges: funding shortages, centralized opportunities, misinformation, corruption, euroscepticism, intersectional youth marginalization, and a stronger focus on WPS than YPS.
- However, YPS implementation varies by country:

- o Albania: Youth and Children Ministry merged with Culture and Tourism, reflecting low priority; National Youth Agency focuses on implementation rather than policy.
- o Serbia: National Youth Council advocates for youth participation; interest in shifting traditional and negative narratives about youth.
- o Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ministry of Civil Affairs not dedicated exclusively to youth; focus remains on WPS.
- o North Macedonia: Integrating YPS across ministries; there are trainings for ministers, teams, and young parliamentarians, with efforts to expand YPS engagement with diverse youth groups and ministries.
- o Croatia: National Youth Program focused on WPS; recommended to update to include YPS.
- o Slovenia: There is no YPS National Action Plan, but a WPS plan. However, the implementation is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, limiting broader collaboration.

#### **Proposals:**

- Invest in peace education, media literacy, and visibility of youth work.
- Collect disaggregated data and create spaces for dialogue.
- Support regional initiatives like RYCO as a hub for youth, civil society, and institutional collaboration.

#### **Eastern Europe & South Caucasus**

##### **Situation and Challenges:**

- Armenia and Azerbaijan: The civil society is engaged alongside institutions. Additionally, Azerbaijan is recently more open to dialogue on peace.
- Ukraine: The ongoing Russian aggression makes peace a “sensitive” topic and put the focus right now on physical security.
- Moldova/Transnistria: The government processes facilitate cross-border youth dialogue and collaboration.
- Georgia: Democratic backsliding, protracted conflict, restrictive foreign agent law.
- Turkey: The current challenges include oppressive government policies and censorship.

#### **Proposals:**

- Establish a regional YPS coalition for Eastern Europe and South Caucasus.
- Focus on capacity development and empowerment of young people in the region.

#### ***Reflection on Youth Participation***

Youth perspectives played a central role in shaping discussions across all regions. Several youth participants highlighted the need for meaningful engagement in decision-making, emphasizing that youth are not only beneficiaries but also drivers of peace and security initiatives.

Observations from the sessions noted that intergenerational collaboration can be strengthened when youth voices are formally included in policy design, planning, and implementation processes. Youth-led recommendations included calls to increase transparency, create safe spaces for dialogue, invest in media literacy and peace education, and expand participation beyond formal youth structures to include informal networks and diverse youth groups.

The discussions reinforced the importance of context-specific approaches and cross-sectoral collaboration.

## **GEOGRAPHIC BREAKOUT: SOUTHWEST ASIA & NORTH AFRICA (MENA REGION)**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Roundtable
- **Number of Participants:** 20
- **Participant Profile:** youth peacebuilders/researchers, institutional representatives

### *Session Objective*

Under a facilitated roundtable format, participating youth and officials will answer three questions to take stock on YPS implementation: i) what have young practitioners and Team Europe partners done already on YPS, ii) what is working, and ii) what needs to change? The answers to these questions, as well as the relationship built through direct dialogue, will serve as a basis for the following discussions during the Conference.

### *Executive Summary*

Efforts to advance Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) in the Mediterranean region should focus on strengthening meaningful, representative youth participation in

policy and decision-making, particularly in peace, security, and socio-economic development.

Key follow-up actions include integrating youth priorities into the EU's Pact for the Mediterranean, expanding long-term and sustainable funding mechanisms, and embedding strong MEAL systems to improve accountability and impact. Improving data collection and analysis - supported by initiatives like MENA4YPS—is essential for informing policy, shaping programming, and enabling evidence-based regional cooperation. Ensuring representation of rural, marginalized, and less formally educated youth must be central to all engagement efforts.

Coordination across organisations and institutions needs to be significantly improved. Priorities include reducing fragmentation among civil society actors, strengthening peer-to-peer learning, and building cross-regional partnerships that leverage diverse experiences and resources. Follow-up should also address structural drivers of conflict, with economic empowerment positioned as a core peacebuilding tool. Institutional actors such as ALF, and national and EU-level bodies should reinforce co-creation with youth, ensure regional capacity building, and promote long-term strategies rather than short-term project cycles. Together, these steps can translate political recognition of YPS into concrete, sustained impact on the ground.

### **Content Summary of Session on Geographic Breakout MENA**

Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) is widely acknowledged as a strategic priority in the Mediterranean region, yet practical implementation continues to lag behind political recognition. In contrast, youth-led and youth-based organisations are driving effective grassroots initiatives, demonstrating the pivotal role young people play in advancing peace, development, and social cohesion.

Across stakeholders, there is broad agreement that youth participation is the foundation for impactful peacebuilding. Strengthening meaningful, representative, and multisectoral engagement of young people in policy and decision-making, particularly in peace, security, and socio-economic development—is essential. The EU's implementation of the Pact for the Mediterranean should integrate this priority, with institutions such as the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) playing a significant role in advancing youth empowerment, intergenerational dialogue, and civic engagement.

Stakeholders noted the importance of shifting perceptions of youth so they are viewed as knowledgeable actors and drivers of change. Addressing structural constraints—including the prevalence of short-term project-based funding—remains

critical. YPS initiatives need to evolve into sustainable, long-term programmes supported by strong Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) mechanisms.

Improved data collection, analysis, and dissemination on YPS activities and local conditions is necessary for informed policymaking. Regional initiatives such as MENA4YPS, with its research hub, illustrate how evidence generation can support better planning and coordination. Strengthening collaboration and peer learning across organisations and regions is also essential to overcome fragmentation and build lasting impact.

Discussions highlighted the wide variation in contexts across the MENA region, shaped by differing stages of conflict and insecurity. Addressing the underlying drivers of conflict, including through economic empowerment, is a key component of youth empowerment and peacebuilding. Ensuring that youth engagement is genuinely representative—reaching rural, marginalized, and less formally educated groups—remains a priority.

Institutional contributions underscored these themes. The EEAS Youth Focal Point in Tunisia described operational challenges amid evolving political conditions. The Folke Bernadotte Academy emphasized the relevance of YPS in conflict-affected areas and acknowledged ongoing grassroots efforts. ALF highlighted regional youth participation and capacity development. UNDP MENA emphasized the importance of data-driven approaches and stronger regional partnerships, noting that many civil society actors work independently from one another. The Africa-Europe Foundation called for a longer-term strategic approach to YPS, moving beyond short-term political commitments.

Overall, the discussions point to clear priorities: elevating youth as full partners in peace and security; building sustainable and evidence-based YPS systems; ensuring inclusive and representative engagement; and aligning political commitments with long-term, coordinated action across the Mediterranean and MENA regions.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth participants actively took the floor to this discussion, bringing to the fore their general and specialised knowledge and experience. As most were affiliated with specialised research centres, or peacebuilding organisations, their contributions really took the conversation further. At the same time, interactions with institutional representatives were smooth, allowing for space for everyone to contribute actively.

## HOW FAR WE HAVE COME! CELEBRATING THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND MOMENTUM OF YPS & IDENTIFYING HOW TO BUILD ON THEM

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Roundtable discussion
- **Number of Participants:** 80 (estimated)
- **Participant Profile:** Youth participants, UN representatives, civil society actors, and international organizations

### *Session Objective*

To reflect on how much progress has been made in putting the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda into action, to recognize and appreciate the successes so far, and to figure out ways to keep moving forward and build on this progress both around the world and in different regions.

### *Executive Summary*

This session explored the historical and current impact of conflict on youth, emphasizing the urgency of youth inclusion in peacebuilding. The speakers discussed the importance of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 and its role in legitimizing youth voices. It also highlighted progress in advocacy, national planning, and coalition building and identified gaps in capacity, cultural barriers, and funding access.

#### **Key Takeaways:**

- ☑ National Action Plans and youth-led initiatives are expanding across regions.
- ☑ Youth are affected by conflict but are also powerful agents of peace.
- ☑ Resolution 2250 has helped institutionalize youth participation in peace processes.
- ☑ Awareness of YPS is growing, but gaps remain in knowledge and implementation.
- ☑ Stronger grassroots connections and simplified funding mechanisms are needed.

#### **Actionable Recommendations:**

- ☑ Strengthen tools to accelerate YPS implementation globally.
- ☑ Promote inter-ministerial understanding of YPS as a cross-cutting agenda.
- ☑ Foster collaboration between grassroots organizations.

- ☐ Mobilize broader institutional and governmental commitments.

### **Concrete Commitments Expressed:**

- ☐ Continued advocacy at the UN through youth-led delegations.
- ☐ Expansion of National Action Plans in Africa and Asia.
- ☐ Ongoing coalition-building in European countries.

### **Content Summary of Session on YPS Progress and Momentum**

#### **Main Arguments and Perspectives:**

The session started by looking at history and how conflict has always had a deep and lasting impact on young people. Right now, millions of children are living in areas affected by war and violence, and youth are often the ones who suffer most or are left out of decisions. While conflicts are increasing, peace efforts are moving too slowly, and young people need to be at the heart of the solutions.

Resolution 2250, which was shaped by youth themselves, gives a clear structure for including young people in peacebuilding and makes it harder for institutions to overlook them.

Even though a lot of people still don't know about the resolution, awareness and recognition have grown steadily over the past ten years.

#### **Guiding Questions Addressed:**

- ☐ What progress has been made in YPS implementation?
- ☐ How can youth better advocate for peace at institutional levels?
- ☐ What tools and structures are needed to sustain and expand YPS efforts?

#### **Emerging Insights and Approaches:**

- ☐ Advocacy with member states has become more accessible.
- ☐ National Action Plans are being adopted in countries like Niger and the Philippines.
- ☐ Youth-led peace processes and new partnerships are emerging.
- ☐ Institutional infrastructure and coalitions are forming to support YPS.

#### **Commitments and Outcomes:**

Youth participants shared regional progress, including initiatives in Germany, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. African and Asian countries are adopting National Action Plans. Youth-led advocacy at the UN includes manifestos and direct engagement with decision-makers.

**Suggestions for Future Work:** To build tools to accelerate YPS implementation. To streamline funding access for youth-led initiatives. To ensure ministries integrate YPS into their agendas.

To strengthen grassroots collaboration and global connectivity.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Young people really set the tone for the session, their energy, urgency, and fresh ideas shaped the whole conversation. It was clear that different generations were working together, with young people speaking directly and confidently with UN representatives. The young participants need to be recognized, they need better access to funding, and they are asking for real systems that support their role in building peace

## **MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING PARTY (CONUN)**

CONUN is one of the preparatory working parties of the Council of the EU. Its remit is to coordinate EU positions with respect to the United Nations, i.e. EU-UN cooperation, UN-related multilateral issues, relations between the EU and the UN system.

Two young peacebuilders, Noerine Basa Muhindo and Bukar Atiyaye, were invited to attend the CONUN 12 November meeting, give a speech and then debate with the 27 Member States of the European Union.

### **Noerine Basa Muhindo:**

*"I am a young peace builder from Kasese District, Uganda working with the Rwenzori Peace Bridge of Reconciliation (RPBR). RPBR is a local peace organisation initiated in 1998 during the Allied Democratic forces (ADF) insurgency in the Rwenzori region that is composed of local community groups, individuals and school peace clubs.*

*I'm also part of the cross-border youth empowerment program supported by Interpeace, Swiss Development Cooperation and EU which aims to find solutions to peace in the Great Lakes region by the Youth.*

*Young people make up most of the population in the Great Lakes region, have been exposed to direct violence, including displacement, forced recruitment in armed groups, sexual and gender-based violence. They also face the consequences of indirect violence such as intergenerational transmission of trauma, lack of schooling opportunities as*



*well as lack of jobs and livelihood options. Nonetheless, young people are often overlooked as critical actors in peacebuilding at the National and regional levels especially young women who face more barriers*

*Kasese district has a complex and protracted history of conflict. The causes are historical and re-emerge due to contemporary political and socio-economic factors. Kasese is an ethnically diverse area that borders DRC with tension and structural challenges that threaten social cohesion.*

*A major peak in violence occurred in November 2016, when Ugandan security forces raided the Rwenzururu royal palace leading to the deaths of over 100 people and the arrest of King Charles Mumbere.*

*The other drivers of conflict in Kasese District include land.*

*About 63 % of Kasese's land is occupied by nature and wildlife conservation schemes and other government projects, such as national parks and prison farms, displacing local communities and creating conflicts over access to ancestral lands and resources. Furthermore, there is no equal distribution among individuals and ethnic groups especially between the pastoralist Basongora and the agriculturalist communities where the land was distributed on a ratio of 3:1, pastoralists getting three acres and farmers getting one acre. Ultimately, disputes arise from incompatible land use practices crops versus cattle and accusations of encroachment, leading to damaged crops, killed livestock and physical altercations.*

*Other drivers include ethnic and cultural tensions, youth exposure to toxic drugs, unemployment leading to violent extremism, political tensions, cross border insecurity and climate change pressures like floods and landslides.*

*As a result, I have engaged with youth in and out of school through school peace clubs and community groups through debates, training them to be community peace monitors and the making of reusable sanitary pads. I have further involved the youth in the monitoring and documentation of human rights abuses and violations, carried out advocacy campaign meetings on ending child marriage and teenage pregnancies in Kasese District.*

*I have also carried out intergenerational dialogues with leaders and cross border dialogues with fishermen to increase social cohesion.*

*I have carried public awareness meetings on the legal framework governing cultural institutions, public awareness meetings on the legal framework governing land ownership in Kasese District.*

*I have learned that:*

*Dialogue works best when it is inclusive and continuous. Peacebuilding must address root causes not just symptoms e.g. Kasese conflict has been protracted for so long without any clear solution. The government has a transitional justice policy that is not operational. People are bitter due to unresolved conflicts. Informed documentation and research help in finding solutions to conflict. Radio talk shows, youth forums, community theatre give human face to peace efforts and promote shared understanding in the community. Considering young people as partners increases ownership of the peace building processes.*

**Message to policy makers:**

*Short project-based interventions that end when funding stops often fail to address deep- rooted issues at the grassroots. There should be a sustainable fund to strengthen community peace building structures and systems for the youth. Peacebuilding must address root causes not just symptoms. Ensuring the operationalization of transitional justice and strengthening alternative ways of dispute resolution at the grassroots.*

*Young people should be involved as partners in the peacebuilding process by giving them real decision-making roles. Increasing capacity building of the youth.*

*Political approaches to conflict resolution reinforce ethnic divisions or marginalize certain groups. There should therefore be support for permanent structures of mental health and psychosocial support towards victims and peacebuilders. There should be a deliberate investment in research and local knowledge creation towards peace education.*

*There should be increased involvement of security agencies in the peace building processes as they are the linkage between the state and the youth."*

**Bukar Atiyaye:**

*"It is an honour to speak before you today on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 2250. I stand here not only as a delegate, but as a young*

*peacebuilder from Yobe State in Northeast Nigeria—one of the regions where the urgency and promise of the YPS agenda are felt most deeply.*

*I work with the Youth Initiative Against Terrorism (YIAT), the Humanitarian Network for Northern Nigeria, and the African Youth Advocacy Team under the United Network of Young Peacebuilders. My work is rooted in rural communities affected by violent extremism and climate-driven insecurity, where trust in institutions is fragile, yet the resilience of young people remains extraordinary.*

*Allow me to share three stories that illustrate the human meaning of this agenda:*

*First is Usman, whose father was a member of Boko Haram and was killed in the conflict. Today, Usman lives with his mother and is enrolled in Senior Secondary School Two through our Students Transition Enhancement Project. He often tells me, <<I now have a future—and I will never follow my father's path.>> His transformation is living proof that education remains one of the most effective tools of prevention.*

*Second is Aisha, a widow and mother of orphans, who joined our Skill-up Young Women (SKY) Project to learn soap and detergent production. She has since built a small business that sustains her family. She reinvests part of her profits, and whatever she cannot sell becomes soap she uses to wash and bathe her children. Her dignity and resilience show how economic empowerment builds household stability—strengthening peace at the most local level.*

*Third is Sani from Mafa, a community that recently suffered a violent attack with multiple casualties. During my pre-conference engagements in rural Yobe, Sani spoke of the deep suffering of his people and their declining trust in leadership. His testimony reflects why governance, trust-building, and accountability must be central pillars of YPS implementation.*

*These stories show that young people are not only beneficiaries—they are architects of prevention, recovery, and long-term stability. And today, many of us are speaking a new language: the language of investment. YPS is not just a peace agenda; it is an economic growth and stability strategy. Every dollar invested in prevention saves up to sixteen dollars in crisis response. When youth are educated, empowered, and economically active, recruitment declines, livelihoods improve, and communities stabilize.*

*As Africa holds the world's largest youth population, the return on investment is immense—for both our continent and Europe. The security of Africa is the security of Europe.*

*I propose three practical pathways for strengthening Action 20 of the Pact for the Future:*

- 1. Localisation of the YPS Agenda: invest in youth-led structures at state and community levels, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas. This is where prevention yields the highest return.*
- 2. Accessible, Youth-Friendly Funding: existing micro-funding windows are promising, but they remain difficult to access for grassroots youth organisations. Simplified and flexible modalities will unlock faster peace dividends.*
- 3. Youth Representation through Local Sounding Boards: mMany EU Delegations already have Youth Sounding Boards. Strengthening them by drawing members from deeply local communities—and giving them a clear mandate—will create meaningful co-ownership.*

*Finally, I commit to continuing community engagement upon my return, including sharing outcomes from this conference and preparing inputs for the upcoming UN Civil Society Dialogue in Geneva. I also look forward to continued collaboration with EEAS colleagues as we sustain momentum beyond this anniversary year.*

*Young people across Africa are ready to partner with you—not only as peacebuilders, but as co-investors in a more stable, prosperous, and peaceful future.*

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Following the framing of the Second YPS Conference, provided by the EEAS, and Noerine's and Bukar's presentations, a lively and constructive debate with the Member States and the European Commission took place.

Expressions of support were accompanied by suggestions for enhanced cooperation and synergies with them.

In general, there was wide support for the Second Youth, Peace and Security Conference and Week, and positive curiosity about the Joint Declaration.

## **SPECIAL FOCUS SESSION. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON OPERATIONALISING MINI CONCEPT ON YPS IN CIVILIAN COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY (CSDP)**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Roundtable
- **Number of Participants:** Around 43 (35 in person, 8 online)
- **Participant Profile:** Mainly EEAS officials and civilian CSDP staff, some youth and civil society

### *Session Objective*

The objective was to highlight concrete actions from the YPS agenda within civilian CSDP missions and explore how to enhance the implementation of the mini concept on YPS in civilian CSDP. The aim was to strengthen links between different entities working with CSDP: PCM, CivOpsHQ, other EEAS entities, and mission members, to create connections and consider how YPS can be better integrated. In addition, a goal was to raise awareness, as YPS integration is a new development within the EU system, especially in civilian CSDP.

### *Executive Summary*

There is ongoing work to mainstream YPS in civilian CSDP.

While some missions have begun integrating YPS into their work without guidelines, standardized guidance in mission planning documents is needed to more systematically mainstream the concept.

To improve situational awareness, missions should collect age-disaggregated data more systematically and explicit references to YPS in reporting would help highlight what is already being done. Improve youth-sensitivity of data collection to allow for youth-sensitive monitoring, reporting and evidence-based decision making

In missions, strengthen the expertise of mission staff through training and/or visiting experts to allow for inclusion of a youth-perspective in mission activities and situational awareness.

As some missions are already implementing a variety of actions, information-sharing between civilian CSDP missions and between various EU in-country presences is important to allow for exchange on good practices and lessons learned.

Making the work already being done more visible and the sharing of good practices, the next step proposed was to include a specific section on YPS mainstreaming for example in the annex on human rights and gender equality in the OPLAN template.

In planning, integrate standard language on YPS in mission planning documents to allow inclusion as a cross-cutting issue.

### **Content Summary of Session on operationalizing mini concept on YPS in civilian Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)**

#### **Youth Perspectives**

A youth participant explained that the YPS agenda represents policy orientation and a set of values, and that this must be shaped into an operational plan and strategy for concrete actions. The agenda is about empowerment and responsibility for youth, as well as for other interlocutors such as governments and local authorities. In the EU, the YPS agenda has been endorsed by a Council decision to incorporate youth, but it still lacks inclusion in regional political documents, which is much needed. Another issue in regard to peace and security is mediation support, but there remains a siloed approach among different EU institutions. It is noteworthy that no one is working full time on the YPS agenda in EEAS. One key point raised was the need to move beyond just peace and security and address general youth empowerment.

#### **CSDP Mandate**

CSDP missions have specific tools and mandates. In setting the scene, it was noted that this year marks the 10th anniversary of the UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, emphasising meaningful youth participation. The first EU Youth Action Plan (YAP) was adopted in 2022 with three pillars: partnership to engage, increasing youth voices at various levels and within EU policymaking, secondly partnership to empower, combating inequality in education and economic opportunities. The third pillar is fostering youth mobility and networking, a key EU priority. The Youth Action Plan is included in the Civilian CSDP Compact (2023), which gives strategic guidelines and deliverables for civilian CSDP missions. The Compact mentions promoting the YPS resolution, with EEAS tasked to implement the YAP. The mini-concept aims to take a step forward in the implementation of the YAP outlining planning actions both internally (mainstreaming and capacity building) and externally (support for the YPS action plans and frameworks in host countries,

strengthening capacity through training and advisory support, focusing on youth-led processes, and monitoring in a youth-sensitive way).

### **Mission Discussions**

*Missions from Mali, CAR, Georgia, Ukraine and others were invited to share experiences.*

In Mali and CAR, quantitative data shows a young population, with issues in education, employment, and poverty; 33% don't complete basic education. In CAR, many schools were damaged, and teachers weren't paid. There's only one university which is in the capital.

Employment is critical, as lack of opportunities makes youth vulnerable to armed group recruitment, and political exclusion is common, though many young people wish to be change agents. EUAM RCA's mandate focuses on SSR and advising internal security forces, but there is no explicit youth focus in the OPLAN. Informal YPS-related activities are happening, such as raising awareness and combating human trafficking, but missions are understaffed and don't work systematically on YPS.

In Mali, which has a large youth population, the fertility rate among young women is high. There is nothing in EUCAP Sahel Mali's OPLAN about youth. The mission works with young security trainees and supports local security committees involving police and, among others, youth organisations, who provide insights about security issues like drugs and violence. Reaching younger audiences and tackling Gender Based Violence (GBV) remains a challenge.

In the South Caucasus, the youth population is shrinking due to emigration. Georgia has a strong civil society, but it is under pressure. YPS is important for the monitoring mission EUMM Georgia; they work with conflict-affected areas, facilitate confidence-building, and have youth listed in their OPLAN. The adoption of the YPS mini-concept in 2024 helped structure work better, including youth-sensitive guidelines and using age-disaggregated data. Youth engagement is rising, and the first youth report is planned for 2026. There are efforts to provide more training and outreach with local CSOs.

In Ukraine, young people aged 14 to 35 previously constituted about 24% of the population, but numbers have decreased since Russia's full-scale invasion. Volunteering is rising, and young people wish to be part of recovery activities. There's a risk of disengagement without youth involvement. EUAM promoted standing community mechanisms led by youth, with regular consultations with police and other sectors. Their youth council includes over 130 CSOs. Child-friendly justice

system, public order work, and youth law/action plans are emphasised. Information access is however uneven, and further expertise is needed.

### **Operational Planning and Strategy**

In OPLAN design, the lack of explicit YPS references triggers the need for standardisation. Planners discussed whether YPS is a core mandate or a cross-cutting issue but are tied to member state decisions and strategic plans.

If YPS agenda is mainstreamed, it should be explicit in crisis management concepts and other planning documents. Topics like gender, WPS, or cultural heritage have been mainstreamed as cross-cutting issues; how these fields of work have been implemented provide some guidance also on how YPS agenda could be better integrated in planning documents. Mandates are set by member states by unanimity, and including cross-cutting issues may require annexes to explicate the details of the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues.

OPLAN sets broad objectives that missions then specify thus providing them also flexibility in regard to field level implementation. Coordination with other actors (MS, EU actors and other international organisations) is critical to avoid duplication, and mandates are reviewed every two years to stay context appropriate.

### **Wrap-up**

There is ongoing work to mainstream YPS in civilian CSDP. Staff seconded by individual MS already receive YPS training as part of pre-deployment training and there are standby capabilities for YPS training with national seconding agencies. While some missions have begun integrating YPS into their work without guidelines, standardised guidance in mission planning documents is needed to more systematically mainstream the concept. To improve situational awareness, missions should collect age-disaggregated data more systematically and explicit references to YPS in reporting would help highlight what is already being done. As some missions are already implementing a variety of actions, information-sharing between civilian CSDP missions and between various EU in-country presences is important to allow for exchange on good practices and lessons learned. In addition to making the work already being done more visible and the sharing of good practices, the next step proposed during the discussion was to include a specific section on YPS mainstreaming for example in the annex on human rights and gender equality in the OPLAN template.

### ***Reflection on Youth Participation***



A youth participant provided opening remarks on what the YPS agenda means to them. Youth participants raised questions to EEAS officials and the session organisers. The national agencies as session organisers were asked how they ensure that the seconded experts are aware about the YPS agenda.

## **DREAMS DEFERRED: YOUNG PEACEBUILDERS FACING CIVIC RESTRICTIONS, DISCRIMINATION, OCCUPATION AND WAR**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Roundtable
- **Number of Participants:** Full meeting room
- **Participant Profile:** Mostly Youth

### *Session Objective*

Under a youth-facilitated open floor format and drawing from the geographic breakouts, notably war and occupation contexts, young practitioners were invited to share negative examples, risks, and harms. Interventions also took stock of the global trends from and since the [If I Disappear report](#).

An exchange with Laura Antón Montero, Gender and Protection Coordinator at UNOY Peacebuilders and member of the Protection Working Group of the Global YPS Coalition provided a starting point for proposals to address these harms.

### *Executive Summary*

The session explored the safety and security challenges faced by youth peacebuilders in diverse contexts, highlighting both the personal and systemic threats that shape their advocacy work. Participants shared experiences from Syria, Kenya, Somalia, Nigeria, Ukraine, and Sudan, emphasizing the interplay of political, social, and cultural barriers to youth-led peacebuilding. Key themes included digital security, gender-specific risks, the consequences of advocacy abroad, and the importance of adaptive, context-sensitive approaches to safety.

### **Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned:**

- Youth peacebuilders often operate in high-risk environments, facing threats ranging from physical violence, arrest, and harassment to digital surveillance and online intimidation.
- Gender plays a significant role in safety risks: young women peacebuilders frequently experience discrimination, community resistance, and targeted threats, particularly in Somalia, Nigeria, and Syria.
- Digital spaces, while enabling advocacy, also pose serious security risks. Activists in Kenya and Syria reported harassment, hacking, and targeted tracking.
- Advocacy abroad can carry repercussions upon return, including restricted mobility, risk of arrest, or denial of passports (noted in Sudan).
- Peacebuilding activities are sometimes undervalued in conflict or occupied areas (Ukraine) or within traditional communities (Somalia), limiting youth engagement opportunities.
- Intergenerational collaboration can provide support but may also introduce additional challenges in balancing visibility, impact, and safety.

### Main Themes and Perspectives:

- **Syria:** Youth activists faced life-threatening risks during the war and under the Assad regime; speaking about women's rights could endanger them and their families. Ongoing surveillance and arrests continue to threaten activists.
- **Kenya:** Peacebuilders addressing social issues, including menstrual poverty, encountered violent repression by authorities; digital advocacy posed safety risks, with activists being tracked and targeted.
- **Somalia:** Traditional norms limit the participation of young women in peacebuilding; threats from extremist groups (e.g., Al Shabab) exacerbate insecurity.
- **Nigeria:** Advocating for religious freedom exposes women peacebuilders to interrogation and gendered discrimination from officials.
- **Ukraine:** Youth peacebuilders navigate challenges related to occupied territories, limited utilities, and perceptions that peacebuilding is irrelevant; advocacy must often be conducted quietly.
- **Sudan:** Advocacy abroad can lead to consequences such as restricted passports or detention; safety concerns are compounded by bureaucratic limitations.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth perspectives highlighted the intersection of digital, physical, and socio-cultural risks in peacebuilding. Youth-led input focused on practical observations about

safety; participants were encouraged to send any formal recommendations via WhatsApp.

## PARALLEL THEMATIC ROUNDTABLE ON YPS AND EU ENLARGEMENT

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Fishbowl discussion
- **Number of Participants:** 13
- **Participant Profile:** youth, member state representatives, candidate countries, civil society and international organisations.

### *Session Objective*

By the end of the session, participants were able to: assess the local and national context of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, explore existing frameworks and challenges related to YPS in the region, analyze the links between the YPS agenda and the EU enlargement process, including its evolving security dimension, identify key synergies between YPS and EU Enlargement, highlighting how YPS initiatives can promote inclusivity, democratic participation, security, resilience, and social cohesion and discuss how EU integration processes can strengthen and support YPS efforts at the national level.

### *Executive Summary*

The session brought together representatives from the European Commission, civil society organizations, and young peacebuilders from across the Western Balkans and EU Member States. Discussions focused on the intersection between the EU enlargement process and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, emphasizing the central role of youth in advancing reconciliation, regional cooperation, and democratic reform.

Speakers reaffirmed that youth are among the strongest supporters of the EU enlargement process but remain underrepresented in decision-making. Participants underlined the need for meaningful and structured youth participation, better access to funding for youth-led organizations, and stronger intergenerational cooperation.

Key instruments such as RYCO, Erasmus+, the EU Youth Dialogue and the efforts made by the National Youth Councils were cited as effective, but participants called for their greater use and expansion. Persistent challenges such as brain drain, limited institutional mechanisms for YPS implementation, and bureaucratic barriers in EU funding were also highlighted.

The discussions underscored a shared commitment to empowering young people as agents of peace and positive change. Both institutional and youth representatives agreed on the importance of local ownership, sustained political will, and ensuring that youth perspectives are integrated into EU progress reports and national reform agendas.

#### **Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned:**

- Youth remain key drivers of EU integration, peacebuilding, and reconciliation in the Western Balkans.
- Existing youth participation mechanisms are valuable but underutilized.
- Institutional mechanisms to embed the YPS agenda remain limited and uneven across the region.
- Nationalism and political polarization continue to challenge peacebuilding efforts.
- Greater focus is needed on intergenerational dialogue, education for critical thinking, and youth access to resources.
- CSOs face difficulties accessing EU funds due to administrative and capacity constraints.

#### **Actionable Follow-Up Recommendations**

- Integrate a “youth impact assessment” into national and EU-level policymaking to evaluate how legislation affects young people - youth test.
- Simplify EU funding procedures and strengthen capacity-building support for local CSOs and youth organizations.
- Institutionalize YPS structures within national governments and ensure sustainable funding and coordination mechanisms.
- Promote exchange of good practices across enlargement and Member States through RYCO, Erasmus+, the EU Youth Dialogue and work of National Youth Councils.

#### **Concrete Commitments Expressed**

European Commission (DG NEAR): Reaffirmed youth engagement as a strategic priority in the EU enlargement process and announced plans to establish youth boards in EU Delegations under the External Action Youth Plan.

UN Association of Albania: Committed to supporting the regional YPS Coalition and promoting youth inclusion through a bottom-up approach.

Youth Representatives: Expressed dedication to advancing reconciliation and peacebuilding, advocating for stronger partnerships and long-term engagement between youth and institutions.

### **Content Summary of Session on YPS and EU Enlargement**

#### **Opening Remarks by Simone Rave – Directorate-General for Enlargement and Neighbourhood (DG ENEST)**

Ms. Simone Rave opened the session with an overview of the European Commission's priorities in the field of security, peacebuilding, and reconciliation.

She underlined the EU's commitment to supporting regional initiatives aimed at combating disinformation and promoting dialogue, emphasizing that EU enlargement remains a key strategic priority of the Commission.

She highlighted several youth-oriented mechanisms and programmes, including the Youth Dialogue initiated by President von der Leyen, EU–Western Balkans (WB) and European Parliament youth programmes, the EU Youth Dialogue, the Young European Ambassadors (YEA) initiative, and the Berlin Process.

Ms Rave emphasized the importance of normalization among Western Balkan neighbours and commended the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) as a leading actor in fostering youth cooperation, noting its 77 school partnerships and contribution to regional reform agendas.

She also referred to ongoing “Youth Labs” across the Western Balkans and the Youth Guarantee scheme as key instruments for empowering young people.

Regarding the EU's Eastern Partnership, Ms Rave mentioned the “EU for You” programme, particularly focused on Ukraine. Among the challenges, she pointed to demographic decline and brain drain, stressing that numerous mechanisms already exist for youth participation but should be better utilized. She also underlined the need for stronger intergenerational cooperation and the continued evolution of programmes such as Erasmus+.

#### **Remarks by Alba Brojka – United Nations Association of Albania**

Ms Alba Brojka reflected on the diverse national perspectives regarding both the YPS agenda and the EU Reform Agenda. She noted that, despite varying contexts, there is a strong and consistent will among young people to be part of the EU enlargement process.

She emphasized that “security” today encompasses not only political but also economic and socio-economic dimensions. A bottom-up approach, she argued, has proven particularly effective in engaging youth. Ms Brojka called for more structured mechanisms for youth participation, including a stronger role for the EU Youth Dialogue, and recommended that youth perspectives be more visibly featured in EU progress reports, including through data collection from the field.

She highlighted that young people remain among the strongest supporters of EU enlargement and that their energy should be better harnessed in this process. Empowering local actors to build synergies and ensuring local ownership were presented as key conditions for success. Ms. Brojka pointed out the absence of institutional mechanisms for integrating the YPS agenda across the region—mentioning Albania’s YPS Coalition and Serbia’s National Youth Council as examples of emerging good practices. However, she noted that a lack of resources continues to limit structural approaches.

Disappointment among youth regarding the slow pace of national reforms and EU integration efforts was also noted. Ms Brojka urged sustained political will and continuity in supporting youth engagement.

### Youth Peacebuilders’ Interventions

Ms Alisa Kockar from Dialogue Academy for Young Women Alumnae Network (DANA), and Ms Sara Češko, a young activist from Kosovo, shared personal reflections on their journeys as peacebuilders. They highlighted the support received from international organizations but **noted that youth are too often included only symbolically (“as decoration”) rather than as genuine partners and values based during local processes.**

They identified critical needs for enhanced education in critical thinking and social cohesion, greater access to funding and resources, and the establishment of long-term partnerships. Both emphasized the importance of focusing on commonalities rather than divisions and acknowledged the risks faced by young people engaging in political and civic processes.

### Interactive Discussion with Participants

A participant from an EU Member State asked how EU youth could contribute to advancing the YPS agenda in enlargement countries. The response encouraged Member State youth to be vocal advocates, integrate enlargement-related youth issues into the EU Youth Dialogue, and foster solidarity across borders.

A representative of an Italian humanitarian civil society organization (CSO) expressed challenges in identifying entry points for international organizations in the enlargement process. The response underscored the value of partnership-building and alignment around relevant thematic priorities.

A youth participant from Albania, formerly the youngest member of the Albanian Parliament (2021), shared insights from the EU Parliament's youth programmes as good practices to be replicated in candidate countries. He highlighted progress in youth participation during the recent EU elections and commended RYCO as a strong regional actor. However, he noted persistent challenges, including low youth representation in national political processes, reduced consultation rights of national youth councils following legislative changes, and insufficient youth budgeting. Despite these challenges, he emphasized the continued presence of young changemakers driving positive transformation.

When asked about good practices in the region, examples were cited, including the YPS Coalition, RYCO initiatives, youth-led capacity-building projects, and the leadership role of national youth councils in promoting peer learning and exchange of best practices.

Ms. Brojka concluded that **there is a need to strengthen EU monitoring mechanisms regarding funding in enlargement countries** and to simplify EU budgetary and administrative procedures for CSOs, given that smaller organizations often lack the necessary capacities to meet current requirements.

A youth representative from Serbia highlighted nationalism as a major obstacle to peacebuilding, particularly in the Western Balkans. They emphasized the need to transform divisive narratives, with Ms Ceško adding that learning from the past is essential for moving forward.

### Closing Remarks

In her final remarks, Ms Rave commended the commitment and inspiration demonstrated by youth participants. She expressed the European Commission's anticipation for progress on the Reform Agenda and announced that the forthcoming External Action Youth Plan envisions the establishment of youth boards within EU delegations to enhance structured participation.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

**How youth perspectives shaped the discussion:** Youth viewpoints were actively included in the discussion, and participants contributed relevant data and first-hand experiences.

**Observations on intergenerational collaboration:** The importance of intergenerational dialogue and partnership was highlighted as a recurring theme.

**Any youth-led recommendations or calls to action:** Participants called for stronger mechanisms ensuring meaningful youth participation and proposed the introduction of a “youth impact screening” in policymaking—assessing how laws and policies affect young people (mechanism known as youth test).

## **PARALLEL THEMATIC ROUNDTABLE ON YPS AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** (panel / roundtable / workshop, etc.) Workshop
- **Number of Participants:** 31
- **Participant Profile:** youth participants, representatives of DG INTPA, Member of European Parliament, the EUSR of the Sahel, international organisations.
- **Partners organizing the session:** KRIS for Peace, CERCLE DEV, FBA (Folke Bernadotte Academy), SIPRI, Skillistan, SCPS, Prospect Initiative, and UNDP.

### *Session Objective*

The event provides a space for young leaders, EU institutions and partners, and civil society to co-create something together: practical, grounded, and replicable approaches and mechanisms that offer strong starting points for close collaboration between youth and partners to jointly advance climate, peace and resilience in fragile and conflict affected contexts. Drawing on recent youth-led research and programmatic experience from regions most affected by conflict and climate change, the session brings forward evidence-based ideas from youth to be further co-created with partners. The aim is to translate these into actionable mechanisms that bridge the gap between youth initiatives and institutions support, which ultimately, will connect grassroots youth work with the EU’s ability to support policy, partnerships, and funding.

### *Executive Summary*



The workshop “YPS and the Climate Crisis” (12 November, 16:20–18:00) brought together 31 participants, including youth leaders, EU representatives (DG INTPA, Member of European Parliament, EU Special Representative for the Sahel) and international organisations, to identify practical ways for youth and institutions to work together on climate, peace and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Discussions showed how climate change is already reshaping daily life, security, livelihoods and mobility for young people, with young women, Indigenous Peoples and rural communities carrying a disproportionate share of risks and burdens. Participants underlined that youth are already leading concrete initiatives (cooperatives, local governance structures, community education and support) but remain under-recognised and under-resourced.

### **Key themes and lessons**

Climate change is driving school drop-out, early marriage, forced migration and increased care and work burdens for girls and young women. Youth are already active in governance and peacebuilding (youth councils, community initiatives, rebuilding of services, intergenerational dialogue, climate and peace education).

Indigenous and rural communities face severe environmental harm while holding essential knowledge for adaptation and conflict resolution. Existing funding models are often inaccessible to youth-led and community-based organisations because of complex procedures, late disbursement and limited flexibility.

Context-specific, conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches are essential, especially in regions such as the Sahel where climate impacts interact with livelihood tensions and identity-based fault lines.

### **Actionable follow-up recommendations**

- Create direct, flexible and protected funding for women- and youth-led climate and peace initiatives (including micro-grants, Gender - Based Violence safeguards, childcare and mobility support, and basic training).
- Make gender-responsive planning and budgeting standards in climate, peace and development policies, and ensure meaningful participation of young women, including those who are migrants or displaced.
- Localise and simplify EU youth finance (including the Youth Empowerment Fund) through outreach in local languages, community-based application support and mentorship for youth groups.

- Establish dedicated funding and meaningful consultation mechanisms for Indigenous organisations across EU-supported programmes.
- Support context- and conflict-responsive policies in regions such as the Sahel by deepening dialogue with local authorities and community actors and by linking climate, peace and security agendas with youth participation and protection. Very limited resources and current funding models are still too distant, complex and slow for many youth-led organisations. More direct, accessible, flexible and locally adaptive funding, coupled with mentorship, is essential.

### **Main points raised : Youth leadership, governance and peacebuilding**

Existing youth governance structures, such as barangay youth councils with control over local funds, show that youth can manage resources and lead change when trusted.

Youth-led groups link environmental protection and peace efforts, for example by rebuilding schools, offering psychosocial support and organising intergenerational dialogues.

Fisheries, farming and pastoralist communities are all sites where youth are already working on sustainability and conflict prevention, often without formal recognition. Young people are leading awareness raising and climate- and peace education efforts, providing local communities and peers with training, education and capacity-building. It is crucial to support and scale climate- and peace education and capacity building for young people and their communities.

### **Gendered and youth-specific impacts of climate change and climate-related security risks**

- Climate change increases workloads and stress on young women, reduces resilience and deepens inequalities.
- Climate shocks contribute to school drop-out, early marriage, sexual exploitation and forced migration for girls and young women.
- Women often head of household and lead local solutions, such as cooperatives and community initiatives on water management and local production, yet remain under-recognised in policy and funding.

### **Intersectionality, localization and protection**

- Context-sensitivity and -specificity is crucial. Approaches should be informed by the lived realities in the local context and community knowledge and expertise, directly including local communities and youth in decision-making.
- Indigenous and rural communities, especially Indigenous women, are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, resource extraction and exploitation and climate change. The environmental knowledge of Indigenous Peoples does not only contribute to climate adaptation, but also to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. There is a need to recognize and support rural and indigenous people's rights to land, build on their knowledge and expertise and ensure their inclusion in decision-making and efforts to address the nexus of climate, peace and security.
- Protection is paramount. Young environmental defenders and climate activists face intimidation, threats and discrimination. Better protection and safeguarding is needed.

#### **Funding barriers and the need for accessible finance**

- Community-based organisations face heavy administrative burdens, long registration processes and complex applications that exclude smaller groups.
- Funding often arrives late, after the most acute crisis phase, and is not adapted to early, rapid action when consequences are greatest.
- Participants called for direct, flexible and transparent funding, with clear information in local communities and support for sub-granting to youth groups.

#### **Climate, conflict and the Sahel in EU policy**

- The Sahel was highlighted as one of the regions where climate impacts will be most severe, with strong effects on livelihoods, tensions between farmers and herders, and risks of conflicts taking on ethnic dimensions.
- EU representatives stressed the importance of understanding these dynamics better and using the impact on women as an entry point for solutions that are favorable for social cohesion. It is essential to include women, incl. young women, in decision-making processes.
- There is an ongoing process to renew the EU approach to the Sahel, with attention to women, peace and security (WPS), deepened dialogue with local authorities and cross-country synergies.

#### ***Reflection on Youth Participation***

In the session, young experts and co-hosts working at the intersection of climate, peace and security framed the discussion by highlighting opportunities to support youth-led climate and peacebuilding solutions. Together with institutional actors from the EU and international organizations, young participants co-developed recommendations.

Youth recommendations from the session:

- Direct, protected finance for women-led climate action. Create flexible micro-grants for women's groups and co-ops (incl. Sahel/Niger/Burkina/Senegal) with GBV safeguards, childcare/mobility support, and training (climate literacy, basic meteorology, early warning, enterprise skills) so they can deliver water, land and livelihood solutions.
- Make gender justice standard practice. Require gender-responsive planning and budgets across climate/SD policies, set parity targets in decision bodies (urban and rural), include migrant/displaced women, and fund enabling infrastructure and incomes—tracking time burden, school dropout and safety outcomes.
- Open and localise EU youth finance. Proactively publicise the Youth Empowerment Fund in local languages, run outreach and capacity-building clinics with community partners, and simplify applications so individuals and youth groups can actually apply. Provide mentorship along with funding opportunities.
- Fund and meaningfully include Indigenous leadership for climate-peace action. Create dedicated, direct funding windows for Indigenous organisations and require meaningful consultation in EU-supported programmes from design to delivery.
- Support context- and conflict-responsive policy. Help governments and local actors develop policies tailored to regional climate risks and climate-induced conflict; where climate is deprioritised, channel support via independent local structures and regional networks.
- Back community knowledge and civic education for youth. Invest in knowledge-sharing through existing community structures and link climate education to democratic participation so young people can organise, advocate, and act.

## PARALLEL THEMATIC ROUNDTABLE ON YPS AND EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### *Summary*

The session, co-moderated by Maja Bogojevic and Miguel Chambel, Policy Officers within the EEAS Task Force for Equality, brought together four YPS experts — Laura Pistarini Teixeira Nunes (UNOY), Tamar Lobjanidze (UN WOMEN), Abdel Albaghadadi (WE Organization NL), Yairy Vega Muenala (Kofi Annan Changemaker '24) — to explore the intersections between YPS and equality. The session examined how equality can enhance YPS, and conversely, how YPS initiatives can advance equality, with an intersectional lens.

### *Key Themes from the Discussion*

The discussion emphasised the importance of human rights-based approaches as the foundation for sustainable peace and emphasized refraining from treating youth as a homogeneous group. Conversely, youth experiences conflict and security differently based on gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and geographic location.

Panellists highlighted that meaningful youth inclusion requires recognising and utilizing intersectionality as a framework for identifying compounded disadvantages and designing inclusive programs. Participants emphasized centering marginalized voices, including Indigenous youth and women, youth with disabilities, LGBTIQ youth, and migrant youth, and creating spaces that accommodate linguistic, geographical, and socio-economic diversity.

### *Recommendations*

Panellists highlighted that YPS actions must include key reflections: effective youth engagement in peace and security, notably by requiring the systematic application of an intersectional lens capable of identifying structural barriers and the compounded disadvantages faced by diverse youth groups. Participants stressed the need to shift from mere participation toward meaningful influence, ensuring that youth engage not only as beneficiaries but as actors shaping decisions, policies, and programmatic priorities. The discussion highlighted that exclusion can be both structural – exclusion of specific groups from discussions – and silent—arising from the dominance of some languages, passport privilege, geographic isolation, socio-economic constraints, and care responsibilities—requiring policies that address overt barriers as well as the less visible practices that marginalise specific groups. Power and privilege were recognised as central considerations; institutions and youth actors with greater access to resources and decision-making spaces carry an increased responsibility to promote equity and amplify marginalised voices.

Participants also underscored the importance of robust disaggregated data (across gender, disability, ethnicity, Indigenous identity, sexual orientation and gender identity, and socio-economic status) to support evidence-based policymaking and equitable resource allocation.

Recommendations to institutions and donors included providing flexible and youth-appropriate funding, measuring and monitoring youth participation (and how diverse it is), promoting diversity in youth advisory boards, strengthening the Protection pillar of YPS, recognising Indigenous youth as peacebuilders, communicating directly with youth and CSOs, supporting durable solutions in protracted contexts, and endorsing existing networks and representatives advocating for vulnerable groups, rather than creating new structures. Recommendations to youth included fostering solidarity across movements and enabling youth facilitation in community dialogues.

Recommendations called for the systematic operationalisation of intersectionality across all pillars of the YPS agenda to ensure responses reflect the diverse realities of young people. Overall, the session affirmed that equality and intersectionality are foundational to achieving meaningful youth participation, effective protection, and sustainable peacebuilding outcomes within EU external action.

## PARALLEL THEMATIC ROUNDTABLE ON YPS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** panel
- **Number of Participants:** 15 (not including organizers/panelists). (7 men + 8 women)
- **Participant Profile:** (youth, leaders from civil society, peacebuilding orgs, experts working with digitalization in their respective fields)

### *Session Objective*

Co-organized by CMI - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and DG INTPA, this interactive session explored how emerging digital tools can enhance youth-inclusive participation in peace and security. Drawing on the experiences of young peacebuilders and experts, the discussions examined not only the opportunities that new technologies present for advancing youth agency in conflict prevention and resolution, but also the risks and limitations that shape their real-world applicability.

Combining expert interventions, youth-led examples and real-time use of digital engagement tools, the session spotlighted experiences from conflict-affected contexts, illustrating how technology can support participation and trust-building across divides, while also underscoring the critical need for ethical safeguards and responsible practice.

### *Executive Summary*

This roundtable discussion invited participants to engage on the role of emerging technologies in peace mediation and dialogue. Speakers shared concrete examples of both positive and harmful uses of digital tools in conflict-affected settings. On the harmful side, participants noted how digital spaces – amplified by social media dynamics and algorithmic biases – can escalate online and offline violence, particularly against women, by fuelling harassment and targeted hate campaigns. Additional risks included the growing use of digital content as evidence against peace actors, raising concerns around data security and digital safety for youth activists and mediators.

Positive use cases were also presented. CMI and its partners highlighted several examples where digital tools have facilitated or enhanced peace dialogue processes. A prominent case involved CMI's deployment of a digital chatbot in Yemen, designed to gather diverse community perspectives and broaden youth engagement. Another example of a positive use case was the *Digital Sisterhood Initiative*, which is a digital storytelling platform that aims to unite women of colour and counter pre-existing narratives on what it means to be a Muslim woman – the efforts include the creation of an Arabic speaking chatbot built to support those who have suffered from hate speech.

Beyond case presentations, participants were invited to position themselves on key questions regarding assumptions surrounding technology in peacebuilding. The discussion addressed whether technology can be considered inherently neutral, the widely held notion of youth as a “tech-savvy” generation, the uneven digital risk management practices across peacebuilding organisations, and the distinction between equal and equitable access to digital spaces. Further points explored included the ethical use of new technologies, the need for stronger protection frameworks, and the importance of youth-centred design in digital peacebuilding.

The conversation prompted constructive and open questions from participants. These included inquiries about the replicability of similar digital tools in other contexts, the training and governance of AI models, and how to balance youth engagement with the reality that young people may be skilled users but are rarely the developers of the technologies that shape their environments.

In conclusion, speakers and participants reflected on the delicate balance required to pursue peace in a technological environment that is not inherently designed for

peaceful outcomes. They emphasized the need for peacebuilders – especially young actors – to develop a deeper understanding of frontier technologies so as not to be left behind as these tools become more central to political and social life.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth perspectives played a central role throughout the session. A majority of participants were themselves young people, and their insights drove much of the discussion – ranging from lived experiences of online risks, to practical examples of youth-led digital innovation, to critical questions around ethics, safety, and the real influence of digital participation on decision-making.

Youth panellists also shaped the debate by grounding abstract technological questions in their personal experiences from conflict-affected contexts, helping ensure that the session remained rooted in practical realities rather than purely conceptual or technical considerations.

### *Final suggestions*

Participants highlighted several areas for further attention and action:

- Peacebuilding actors should strengthen their understanding of AI and other emerging technologies – not just how they are used, but how they are built, by whom and for what purpose – to remain effective and relevant.
- Digital tools should be designed with, and not only for, young people – especially those in conflict-affected regions.
- Gender biases in the technology design should receive more attention – like car safety systems being based on male bodies, male-dominated development teams often exclude (young) women's need, leading to real world harm and reinforcement of inequalities.
- Ethical and protective frameworks for digital engagement must evolve to address surveillance, harassment, algorithmic bias, and data misuse.
- Policymakers should ensure that digital engagement feeds into real decision-making spaces rather than functioning as symbolic or parallel processes.

These reflections underline the importance of continued dialogue between youth, peacebuilding practitioners, and technology actors to ensure that new tools meaningfully contribute to the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.



## PARALLEL THEMATIC ROUNDTABLE ON YPS IN THE AFRICA EUROPE PARTNERSHIP

### *Organizers:*

- [The Africa-Europe Foundation](#)
- [Sustainable Cooperation for Peace and Security](#)
- [Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding](#)

The session built on the existing Africa-Europe framework to position the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda at the core of the partnership's evolution. With the 7th [AU-EU Summit](#), happening right after the 2nd EU YPS conference, it set the strategic direction for engagement, and positioned the YPS agenda as both a priority and a catalyst for renewed cooperation. Building on the fact that over 60% of African youth consider their voices crucial in preventing election-related violence (Afrobarometer, 2022) and youth-led and local organizations provide up to 70% of essential support in conflict-affected communities across the Sahel (IOM). This session focused on showcasing that youth are not only contributors to peace but indispensable partners in stability and governance.

The roundtable explored the dual potential of the partnership and YPS: how the Africa-Europe relationship can accelerate the YPS agenda across both continents, and how YPS can, in turn, advance the partnership's shared priorities in peace, resilience, and security. Building on the 10-year review of UNSCR 2250, the dialogue moved from evidence to action by generating concrete recommendations on national action plan development, financing, and implementation. Participants called for multi-level accountability through structured follow-up and integration into upcoming policy fora, shaping a lasting legacy—one where youth are empowered as formal partners in peace within a strengthened Africa-Europe cooperation framework.

Ahead of the pivotal 7<sup>th</sup> AU-EU Summit, this session advanced a compelling vision for the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda, framing it as possessing an essential duality: it is both the **engine for a more just AU-EU partnership** and the **benchmark of its success**. It was demonstrated how National Action Plans (NAPs) are the critical mechanism to systematically channel the demonstrated potential of youth—evidenced by the 23% higher intercultural competence among exchange participants (EC 2022)—into formal peace and security architecture. The dialogue

emphasized the importance of committing to joint AU-EU funding and political support for the YPS agenda. It highlighted that beyond addressing a shared challenge; this translated into investing in a shared asset for sustainable peace, directly aligning this Summit outcome with the 10-year review of UNSCR 2250, AU Agenda 2063, and the EU's Global Gateway.

The session was spearheaded by **Dr. Manal Benani**, Youth and Culture Manager for the **Africa Europe Foundation (AEF)** as part of the Foundation's **#RoadtoLuanda25** campaign. She articulated the Foundation's multifaceted mandate to catalyse a just and equitable Africa-Europe partnership. This is operationalized through a dedicated platform for candid deliberation on contentious issues; rigorous research, monitoring, and accountability tracking of **AU-EU** commitments, as documented in its flagship [\*State of Africa Europe Report\*](#); and its unique convening power as a "network of networks." This structure, reinforced by a High-Level Group, ensures its evidence-based advocacy directly informs and aligns political agendas across both continents.

**The Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and State-building** was represented by **Peter van Sluijs**, Expert on Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention and Coordinator of CSPPS who captured the importance of national and regional consultations led by member states such as Germany in ensuring coherent and efficient National Action plans as well as alignment with the 2nd independent progress study on YPS. The latter is done via the German funded **YPS Consultations for Big Impact** project which couples youth-led, country-level YPS-consultations with a structured pathway for policy influencing and peer-to-peer exchange. Peter also flagged other spaces which can support the implementation of the YPS such as the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State-building (IDPS) and the importance of multistakeholder engagement in these processes.

**The Sustainable Cooperation for Peace and Security** was represented by its Copresident, **Marjus Cevoli**, who shared insight on the progress made by the Italian coalition of YPS and the SCPS as a lead of the coalition to prepare the Italian NAP. He shared the experience of SCPS in the development of the Italian National Manifesto on YPS, structured dialogues with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and capacity building of young peace builders across Europe.

#### *The debate:*

The moderator, Dr. Benani, presented the impressive lineup of speakers, which featured a good balance of representation of state and non-state actors from Africa and Europe:

- Mr. Elizeu Chaves, Chief of Staff of the UN Youth Office.
- Ms. Cristiana Carletti, Prof. International Public Law, Expert CIDU representing Italian MFA.
- Ms. Esther Osalenlen Adu, Vice Chairperson of The Finnish African Society.
- Mr. Chalachew Worku Adane, Founding Director PPE.

The debate started with a reflection on the statement: ‘ *The Paradigm shift: The upcoming AU-EU summit’s need to choose between two futures: one of perpetual crisis management, or one of co-created opportunity. Moving beyond conventional focus on peace and security as a short-term fix; and ensuring a genuine commitment to the YPS agenda—where youth are architects of stability, not its subjects—as the only long-term solution. The need for the Africa Europe partnership to decide whether its value lays in controlling the present or investing in the future.*’

The discussion was guided by the following questions:

- The YPS agenda's dual role requires long-term commitment, but politics is inherently short-term. How do we make this agenda politically irresistible and operationally independent, so it isn't held hostage to the next election cycle or diplomatic spat between our continents?
- We often discuss youth in terms of 'inclusion' and 'participation'. But if we truly saw this generation as a strategic asset, how would it fundamentally change the investment thesis of the AU-EU partnership? Would we see dedicated 'Youth Impact Bonds' or a 'Generational Security Fund' managed jointly by young people?
- If we were to dissect the anatomy of a genuine partnership, what current 'co-creation' ritual best represents the old, hierarchical model in disguise? And what single, non-negotiable element—be it in the first or the final stage of a project—would serve as the ultimate proof that the model has been flipped, and youth are in the architect's chair?
- In a time of global divisions, the YPS agenda can be a powerful bridge of trust. What is the most inspiring example you've seen of this agenda fostering genuine, unexpected solidarity and partnership between African and European youth, and how can we scale that model?

Speakers engaged in a very interactive debate building on the experiences of their respective institutions and organizations and looking at future opportunities to ensure real progress in the implementation of the YPS agenda and capitalizing on its potential to foster a real partnership between Africa and Europe:

**Mr. Elizeu Chaves** reframes the primary challenge of the YPS agenda: the issue is not political adoption but practical implementation. Governments routinely endorse National Action Plans (NAPs) without significant resistance. The real obstacles are a lack of dedicated funding, operational capacity, and sustained political will to translate policy into action, challenges compounded by a fragmented multilateral landscape.

A key institutional advantage is that YPS is now a permanent, established element within the UN system. Its core strategy integrates three essential UN pillars: human rights, sustainable development, and security.

To move forward, three pragmatic steps are critical:

- **Mainstream YPS Operations:** Scale efforts by formally embedding YPS objectives and NAPs into the standard procedures and budgets of relevant government ministries and UN country teams.
- **Build Functional Connections:** Systematically connect youth platforms with formal decision-making bodies in peace, development, and security to enable direct input and collaboration.
- **Expand the Coalition:** Move beyond traditional partners by securing concrete commitments and resources from development agencies, the private sector, and local governments, framing YPS as essential to broader stability and economic goals.

**Mrs. Esther Osalenlen Adu** articulated how Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have made distinct and pragmatic contributions to promoting Finland's role in Africa across three key areas:

1. **Building Credibility and Operational Presence:** CSOs have consistently translated Finnish foreign policy principles into on-the-ground practice. Through sustained collaboration with local communities, African institutions, and international partners, they have built tangible evidence of Finland's commitment, thereby reinforcing its reputation as a reliable and principled actor.

2. **Leveraging Informal Channels for Ground-Level Impact:** CSOs complement formal diplomacy by operating effectively within informal networks and flexible structures. They engage directly with grassroots leaders, youth movements, and local innovators, generating trust and yielding practical insights that often precede and enable broader formal cooperation.
3. **Sustaining Strategic Communication and Engagement:** CSOs maintain a dedicated, pluralistic dialogue around Finland-Africa relations. By curating this long-term engagement beyond isolated projects, they foster a deeper understanding and sustained constituency for partnership, which in turn legitimizes and stabilizes policy directions.

**Professor Cristiana Carletti** addressed the question of efforts and lessons learned by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in engaging young people by framing it as a structural reconsideration of institutional influence. She emphasized that meaningful engagement represents a fundamental rethinking of how institutions understand and share power:

Key insights from her analysis included:

1. Youth are actively rebuilding civic trust through community-based dialogue, creating national-level understanding and advancing critical discourses such as climate action.
2. It is essential to examine existing structures on the African continent to see how youth have been integrated into discussions, learning from these models at a regional and global level.
3. The partnership model itself must be redesigned. The approach should move beyond passive consultation to actively asking youth to co-design processes and actively contribute in the implementation phase as well.

She insisted that the genuine and substantive participation of youth must be the operative principle, not merely an aspirational goal, for both the effective implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda and the construction of a just and sustainable partnership between Africa and Europe.

**Mr. Chalachew Worku** addressed the question of the partnership's impact by highlighting systemic challenges within national frameworks that affect its potential as an enabler. His analysis, rooted in Ethiopia's experience, points to structural hurdles:

- **Lack of Institutional Clarity:** Ethiopia lacks a dedicated youth ministry, with the mandate for youth engagement dispersed, creating challenges for clear leadership and accountability.
- **Coordination & Ownership Gaps:** While a YPS Task Force exists, a strong national coalition is absent. The ambiguity over the "main actor" in development progress hinders coherent action and partnership engagement.
- **Implementation Delays:** The prolonged process (11 years) to finalize a National Action Plan on WPS demonstrates systemic bottlenecks in translating agendas into actionable policy.
- **Low Awareness & Capacity:** Collaborative efforts to take stock of YPS revealed that awareness levels remain a significant barrier to effective implementation and mobilization.

The session opened for a general debate, facilitated by Mr. Peter, with young peacebuilders from Africa and Europe, who raised pressing questions regarding the implementation of the Pact for the Future, the creation of sustainable financing mechanisms, and the practice of meaningful intergenerational cooperation. In response, the dialogue converged on a set of strategic imperatives essential for advancing the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda within the Africa-Europe partnership:

- Operationalize the Policy-to-Practice Nexus. The partnership must establish concrete, jointly owned mechanisms to translate high-level political commitments—particularly within the UN-EU strategic framework—into actionable, context-specific interventions with robust monitoring and evaluation.
- Institutionalize Direct and Predictable Funding Pathways. Move beyond ad hoc project grants towards pooled, multi-annual funding mechanisms that provide direct fiscal support to youth-led civil society organizations, recognizing them as indispensable implementing partners in peace and security architecture.
- Embed Co-Design as a Governance Principle. Formalize structured modalities for youth participation in all phases of the policy cycle, from agenda-setting and program design to implementation oversight and impact assessment, ensuring partnership initiatives are jointly architected.
- Adopt a Multi-Track Engagement Strategy. Leverage the partnership to synergistically support youth agency through formal diplomatic and policy channels while concurrently investing in and amplifying grassroots, community-based peacebuilding dialogues and initiatives.

Forge Transnational Advocacy Coalitions. Cultivate structured, cross-continental alliances that strategically link political champions, technical experts, and youth civil society networks to drive coherence, maximize resource leverage, and ensure YPS remains a cross-cutting priority in bilateral and multilateral agendas.

SCPS's closing remarks drew attention to existing initiatives and models of collaboration between youth-led organizations across Africa and Europe. In particular, the YPS symposium hosted in partnership with Positive Peace Ethiopia within the Youth Awards' Special Edition of Africa Europe Foundation within the **#RoadtoLuanda25** Campaign which provided a knowledge sharing opportunity among the two organizations.

In closing, **the Africa Europe Foundation** reaffirmed its commitment to championing the outcomes of this dialogue through its role within the **AU-EU processes**. Committing to formally present these recommendations at the forthcoming **CSO-Youth Forum** in Luanda on the 20-21 of November 2021, with the strategic objective of their integration into the official declaration to be presented for consideration at the **7th AU-EU Summit**. **CSPPS** added that it, as done so in the past decade, will continue to amplify the YPS-agenda with political dialogue processes around peacebuilding and prevention.

## **SIDE EVENT: RECEPTION AND PROGRAMME AT THE EEAS, WITH EXPOSITION ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND AFGHAN MEMORY BOX INITIATIVE**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** reception with speeches and quiz
- **Number of Participants:** 100
- **Participant Profile:** young peacebuilders

**With:** Cosmin Dobran, Director for Peace, Partnerships and Crisis Management (EEAS) and Erica Gerretsen, Director for Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace (INTPA). Moderated by: Davie Chisale and Wendie Hadassah Chipofya Okenzie, young peacebuilders.

### *Scene Setter*

The reception for young peacebuilders provided an informal and welcoming conclusion to the second day of the EU Youth, Peace and Security Conference. Bringing together over 120 young participants, EU and Member State representatives, and partners from around the globe, it celebrated the collaborative spirit and sense of community that has developed throughout the week. Taking place in the EEAS canteen, the event featured light refreshments, music and short speeches, providing a relaxed evening atmosphere. The reception provided an opportunity to reflect on the conference's achievements, strengthen personal connections, and encourage ongoing dialogue between young leaders and institutions.

Prior to the reception, participants were presented two exhibitions located in the EEAS entrance hall. Ms Sina Gussek and her colleague from UN Women made a short presentation of the exhibitions. These visual stories set the tone for the evening — a celebration of engagement, creativity, and shared purpose.

The programme featured short speeches and informal contributions from young peacebuilders, as well as a light-hearted YPS quiz to conclude the day on a positive note. In their short speeches, Ms Erika Gerretsen and Mr Cosmin Dobran highlighted that over the past two days, they have seen the power of young people from different regions coming together, not only to share their experiences, but also to influence how we think about peace and inclusion.

They also highlighted that the YPS agenda is, at its heart, about partnership. They also stressed that what we have witnessed this week is exactly that institutions and young leaders learning from and challenging one another to co-create solutions. They took the opportunity to thank the partners of the Conference, particularly EPLO.

They also mentioned that *“their dedication and expertise, supported by the Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), made this entire conference possible!”*. They concluded their speeches by noting that *“what makes this community unique is its diversity: you come from different countries, backgrounds, and realities, yet you are united by one shared belief: that peace is possible and must include young people.”*

#### **Wendie Hadassah Chipofya Okenziee’s speech:**

*“My name is **Wendie Hadassah Chipofya Okenzie**, a proud member of the European Union- Malawi Youth Sounding Board and mother to two precious boys.*

*For me, peace is not an idea on paper, it is a mother’s earnest prayer. It is the hope that my children will grow up in safe neighborhoods, with dignity, opportunity, and a future they can trust.*

*In Malawi, we have seen how fragile peace can be. During violent demonstrations before and after elections, schools closed, leaving children behind in their learning.*



*Markets shut, cutting off the daily income many families depend on. Hospitals were overwhelmed or inaccessible, and fear sat heavy in our homes. Progress slowed. Dreams paused.*

*The wellbeing of ordinary people especially women and youth suffered most. These moments reminded us that when peace breaks, development breaks with it.*

*My journey with the Youth Sounding Board has shown me that when young people are meaningfully engaged, peace is strengthened. Youth are not just beneficiaries, we are partners, creators, and protectors of peace.*

*I carry a quiet dream that one day I may serve as **Secretary-General of the United Nations** Not for prestige but so that mothers like me, and young voices from places like Malawi, can help shape decisions that keep children safe and hopeful.*

*Motherhood has taught me that peace begins in small acts: listening, loving, and teaching. But it must be held firmly at the highest levels too. My sons remind me every day that leadership is service, and that the future we build must belong to all children.*

*Today, I stand here not as someone who has arrived, but as someone becoming, learning, advocating, and believing.*

*Thank you to the EU and all peace-builders who continue to create space for young people and protect the foundations on which our children will stand.*

*May we continue to build bridges where there are walls, and ensure every child in Malawi, in Europe, and across the world inherits a future defined by peace.*

*Thank you."*

The quiz was the following:

### ***Youth, Peace & Security Quiz***

1. What does the Youth, Peace and Security agenda mainly recognise?

- a) That young people cause most conflicts
- b) That young people are partners in building peace
- c) That peace processes should exclude youth
- d) None of the above

**Answer:** b

2. Which UN Security Council resolution launched the YPS agenda?

- a) Resolution 1325
- b) Resolution 2250
- c) Resolution 2419
- d) Resolution 2535

**Answer: b**

3. What age group does the UN generally refer to when speaking about “youth”?

- a) 12–18
- b) 15–29
- c) 15–24
- d) 18–35

**Answer: c** (though ranges vary by institution)

4. Which region has the fastest-growing youth population?

- a) Latin America
- b) Africa
- c) Europe
- d) Middle East

**Answer: b**

5. What is a common stereotype the YPS agenda tries to correct?

- a) Youth are naturally peaceful
- b) Youth are reliable political actors
- c) Youth are only perpetrators of violence
- d) Youth always want to migrate

**Answer: c**

6. When was Resolution 2250 unanimously adopted?

- a) 2010
- b) 2012
- c) 2015
- d) 2019

**Answer: c**

7. Which principle is central to YPS?

- a) “Nothing about youth without youth”
- b) “Peace through force”
- c) “Security first, dialogue later”
- d) “Experts decide, youth follow”

**Answer:** a

8. What global challenge most affects young people’s role in peacebuilding?

- a) Lack of electricity
- b) Shrinking civic space
- c) Fashion trends
- d) All the above equally

**Answer:** b

9. Which sector is increasingly linked to YPS work?

- a) Creative industries
- b) Digital technologies
- c) Climate action
- d) All of the above

**Answer:** d

10. Which region adopted the first continental YPS framework?

- a) ASEAN
- b) African Union
- c) European Union

**Answer: b — AU adopted its Continental Framework on YPS in 2020.**

11. What is one unexpected skill many young peacebuilders rely on?

- a) Meme-making
- b) Conflict analysis
- c) Marathon running
- d) Singing

**Answer:** b (though memes sometimes help!)

12. How many UN Security Council resolutions currently make up the YPS agenda?

- a) 1
- b) 2

- c) 3
- d) 4

**Answer: c — 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), 2535 (2020).**

**13. Which country held the presidency of the UN Security Council when UNSCR 2250 was adopted?**

- a) Jordan
- b) Sweden
- c) United Kingdom
- d) Portugal

**Answer: a**

**14. Which EU institution is primarily responsible for coordinating peace and security policy externally?**

- a) European Parliament
- b) European Council
- c) European External Action Service (EEAS)
- d) European Court of Auditors

**Answer: c**

**15. Which EU policy framework most closely aligns with the YPS agenda?**

- a) EU Youth Strategy
- b) EU Global Strategy
- c) EU Green Deal
- d) EU Digital Agenda

**Answer: b**

**16. What was one of the key commitments made by the EU following UNSCR 2250?**

- a) Establishing youth-only delegations
- b) Increasing military recruitment
- c) Supporting youth participation in peacebuilding
- d) Creating EU youth passports

**Answer: c**

**17. Which document guides the EU's cooperation with the UN on peace, security, and development?**

- a) The Cotonou Agreement
- b) The EU–UN Strategic Partnership
- c) The European Neighbourhood Policy
- d) The Lisbon Treaty

**Answer: b**

**18. In which city is the European External Action Service (EEAS) headquartered?**

- a) Luxembourg
- b) Strasbourg
- c) Brussels
- d) Vienna

**Answer: c**

**19. What is a common barrier youth face in peace processes?**

- a) Not enough stickers
- b) Meetings scheduled at 7 AM
- c) Tokenistic consultations
- d) Being asked to “come back when you’re older”

**Answer: c**

**20. What is the main purpose of the UN Youth, Peace and Security agenda?**

- a) To train youth to work in diplomacy only
- b) To promote youth participation in peace and security efforts
- c) To replace peace negotiators with youth delegates
- d) To standardise youth programmes globally

**Answer: b**

**THURSDAY, 13 NOVEMBER**

**INHERITING A WORLD ON FIRE? INTERGENERATIONAL FAIRNESS & YPS  
AMID THE CLIMATE CRISIS**

*Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Panel
- **Participant Profile:** youth, member state representatives, civil society, international organisations

*Session Objective*

This session served as a practical and participatory platform for youth to discuss how different future scenarios could influence peace and security, how these might impact future generations, and expectations from Team Europe.

*Executive Summary*

The session explored the intersection of climate change, youth participation, and intergenerational justice through scenario planning and policy discussion. Participants examined three potential futures for 2050 using interactive foresight mapping, emphasizing that climate change represents a fundamental human rights emergency requiring immediate action.

*Key Themes*

The discussion highlighted a critical disconnect between the Global South—which bears the disproportionate burden of climate impacts—and the Global North as primary contributors to climate change. This inequality extends to inadequate distribution of responsibility and resources. Participants from the MENA region noted how transactional political decisions often undermine long-term climate action, while observers pointed to unity emerging during humanitarian catastrophes despite chronic resource shortages.

Several speakers emphasized the financial responsibility of wealthy individuals and corporations, coupled with the urgent need for political education on climate justice. Particular attention was given to threats facing environmental defenders, with Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil identified as especially dangerous countries for human rights defenders working on environmental protection.

*Key Takeaways*

- Climate justice and youth justice are inseparable; the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda must fully integrate climate considerations.
- Security frameworks must be redefined to prioritize planetary survival over militarization.
- Digitalization offers opportunities for green, ethical, and youth-inclusive climate solutions.

- Global governance structures require fundamental evolution to represent future generations.
- Climate change sits at the crossroads of all contemporary crises.

**Core Principle: We owe future generations not only survival but dignity and peace.**

### *Framework Presentation*

The session opened with an overview of the Pact for the Future, focusing on:

- Chapters 1–3: Foundation principles
- Chapter 4: Youth and future generations
- Chapter 5: Transforming global governance

### *Interactive Foresight Mapping Exercise*

Facilitators introduced foresight methodology as "a way to imagine multiple possible futures so we can act better today." Using Mentimeter, participants developed a timeline to 2050 based on three UNICEF-derived scenarios:

**Scenario 1 – Collective Action:** Participants explored optimistic futures where coordinated global response addresses climate challenges effectively.

**Scenario 2 – Worst-Case Scenario:** This scenario examined outcomes if current inaction continues, generating significant emotional responses from participants.

**Scenario 3 – Compromise:** A middle-ground scenario balancing progress with ongoing challenges prompted discussion about realistic pathways forward.

For each scenario, participants shared emotional reactions and discussed practical implications for policy and action.

### **Main Discussion Points**

#### **1. Global Inequity and Responsibility**

Multiple youth participants emphasized the stark disconnect between those experiencing climate impacts (predominantly Global South communities) and those primarily responsible for emissions (predominantly Global North nations). This inequality manifests in insufficient resource distribution and failure to allocate responsibility appropriately.

#### **2. Regional Perspectives**

Representatives from the MENA region highlighted how short-term, transactional political decision-making undermines long-term climate resilience. Despite resource constraints, participants noted examples of unity and solidarity during humanitarian crises.

### 3. **Economic Justice and Education**

Discussion addressed the disproportionate financial burden that could be addressed through accountability for billionaires and large corporations. Participants called for comprehensive political education to build understanding of climate justice principles.

### 4. **Protection of Environmental Defenders**

Speakers raised urgent concerns about violence against human rights defenders, particularly environmental activists. Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil were identified as particularly dangerous contexts, prompting discussion about international protection mechanisms.

### 5. **Redefining Security**

Several participants argued that militarization diverts resources from climate action. Member state officials and youth representatives debated how security frameworks must evolve to prioritize planetary survival.

### 6. **Digital Technologies**

The role of digitalization emerged as both opportunity and challenge. Participants explored how digital tools can support green transitions while ensuring ethical implementation and youth inclusion.

### 7. **Governance Transformation**

Discussion emphasized that existing global governance structures inadequately represent future generations. Participants called for institutional reforms that embed intergenerational fairness into decision-making processes.

### **Emerging Insights:**

- Climate change functions as an amplifier of existing inequalities and a catalyst for multiple intersecting crises.
- The YPS agenda provides a framework for recognizing young people as agents of change, requiring integration of climate considerations into peace and security work.
- Intergenerational fairness demands protecting rights of both current and future generations.
- Scenario planning and foresight methodologies help translate abstract climate threats into concrete policy discussions.

### **Actionable Follow-up Recommendations:**

- **Embed intergenerational fairness principles** across policy frameworks to ensure equity for current and future generations.
- **Redefine security paradigms** to deprioritize militarization in favour of climate resilience and planetary survival.
- **Develop green, ethical, and youth-inclusive digitalization strategies** that support climate action.
- **Reform global governance structures** to institutionalize representation of future generations in decision-making.



- **Integrate climate considerations fully into the YPS agenda**, recognizing that climate justice is youth justice and requires meaningful participation, protection, and empowerment of young people.
- **Strengthen protection mechanisms** for environmental and human rights defenders, particularly in high-risk contexts.
- **Establish accountability frameworks** for wealthy individuals and corporations regarding climate responsibility.
- **Expand political education initiatives** focused on climate justice and intergenerational equity.

Youth perspectives fundamentally shaped the session's direction and conclusions. Young participants brought urgency, moral clarity, and lived experience to discussions of climate impacts and intergenerational justice.

Intergenerational collaboration was evident throughout, with youth representatives and member state officials engaging in substantive dialogue. However, some tensions emerged regarding pace of action and adequacy of current commitments.

Youth-led calls to action emphasized that young people should be recognized as agents of change rather than simply future beneficiaries of policy. Participants insisted that meaningful participation requires not only consultation but also decision-making power and resource allocation.

The interactive foresight exercise proved particularly effective in engaging diverse participants and generating emotional connection to future scenarios, demonstrating the value of participatory methodologies in climate discussions.

## PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: VIOLENCE

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** workshop
- **Number of Participants:** 40
- **Participant Profile:** youth

### *Session Objective*

This session had 3 to 5 objectives for Team Europe and 2 to 3 concrete actions that Team Europe can implement under each objective.

### *Executive Summary*

The session identified key forms of violence that affect youth in different contexts. The top 3 forms are: 1. Online violence, 2. Gender-based violence and 3. Armed violence.

Root causes of violence are varied but can be grouped into 3 broad categories:

- 1) Institutional weakness/problems;
- 2) stereotypes/perceptions;
- 3) inequalities/poverty.

From the group discussions on the 3 main forms of violence and their root causes, the following recommendations have been derived.

### **Actionable follow-up recommendations for Team Europe:**

#### **Gender-based violence:**

- Strengthen gender-responsive youth-peacebuilding by integrating GBV, participation, prevention, protection into all YPS frameworks and policies. Women are not only limited by violence but also by exclusion and lack of participation.
- Raise awareness in local projects to train populations on how to identify and report gender-based violence.
- Address sexual- and gender-based violence by humanitarian workers and put in place accountability measures and fight impunity.

#### **Online Violence:**

- Have fact-checking missions and ensure a secure and inclusive online environment for all.
- Put in place training on prevention of online violence and sensibilization on media literacy and information.
- Put in place cyber-committees and AI extensions to detect and counter automatic online violence.

#### **Armed violence:**

- Tackle root causes of armed conflicts such as poverty and lack of education and livelihoods which make youth vulnerable to recruitment.
- Addresses unstable family environments and social marginalization that make youth more vulnerable to violence.
- Counter ethnic or political forms of violence and discrimination through local projects and activities.
- Launch targeted education and skills programmes that can help youth receive better education through internships and scholarships.
- Create reception and welcome centres for victims of armed conflict.

- Implement family- and community-based support initiative, tapping into family and community-support networks. Establish psychological and mentoring programmes to increase safety and psychological wellbeing and reduce violence.

### Content Summary of Session on Violence

**Introduction:** What do we need to do? What do we suggest to Team Europe on the focus point “violence”? How do we reduce violence? Youth are on the frontlines of multiple forms of violence. How to connect the global YPS agenda to regional and local realities? We will define 3-5 SMART objectives for Team Europe.

#### Types of violence:

What are the areas of violence that affect you the most?

1. Online hate speech and cyber bullying (94%)
2. Gender-based violence (77%)
3. Everyday women and girls’ safety is compromised (100%);
4. Armed attacks (77%)

3 trends: 1. Armed violence, 2. Online violence, and 3. Gender-based violence

#### Root causes of violence:

- **100%:** Intolerance, misinformation and lack of inter-cultural dialogue, political instability, polarized society, inequality, discrimination, lack of empathy, experience of abuse and neglect, impunity and lack of accountability
- **Strong:** Occupation and colonization, influence of media, weak trust in justice system and weak institutions, manipulated information, institutionalized discrimination, corruption
- **Trends:** 1) Institutional weakness/problems, 2) stereotypes/perceptions, 3) inequalities/poverty

#### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

- The discussion was entirely youth-led and shaped. Everyone participated actively in the discussion, including through online tools such as Polis with polls.
- There was no intergenerational dialogue or dimension as most participants were 35 years and younger.
- See the general recommendations for youth-led recommendations or calls to action.

## PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: POLARISATION

*Session Details*

- **Number of Participants:** 25
- **Participant Profile:** Youth workers, civil society representatives, and participants from different regions.

*Session Objective*

To explore the dynamics of polarization within societies, understand how it manifests internally and externally, and discuss strategies to reduce its negative impacts - particularly through youth engagement, dialogue, and education.

*Executive Summary*

The session explored polarization as a multifaceted and contextual phenomenon deeply embedded in social, political, and emotional structures. Participants emphasized that polarization is often strategically amplified to provoke reactions rather than genuine emotions. Discussions revealed how hate speech, disinformation, and emotional manipulation reinforce division and hinder democratic cooperation.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Polarization is context-dependent and manifests politically, socially, and emotionally.
- Hate speech carries a strong emotional charge, often rooted in fear and hopelessness.
- Youth have a crucial role in reshaping narratives through storytelling, critical thinking, and digital literacy.
- Multi-stakeholder cooperation is necessary to counter polarization through education, dialogue, and inclusive policymaking.

**Actionable Recommendations:**

- Support intergenerational dialogue and peer-to-peer learning to humanize polarized groups.
- Invest in digital literacy and media accountability tools for youth.
- Promote sustainable funding for initiatives addressing root causes such as poverty and lack of education.
- Foster cooperation between CSOs, institutions, and international actors to advocate against divisive narratives.

**Content Summary of Session on Polarization**

The session began with a brief introduction of participants, followed by reflections on how polarization is highly contextual and manifests differently across regions. Participants explored both **external and internal expressions** of polarization and reflected on how individuals and systems contribute to its perpetuation.

### The main discussion points:

- **Nature of Polarization:** It is often *strategically created* to provoke reactions rather than express authentic emotions. Everyday polarization appears in politics, hate speech, corruption, isolation, and power struggles.
- **Emotional Dimension:** Hate speech is particularly powerful because it is emotionally charged. Underlying emotions like fear and hopelessness reinforce its influence.
- **Duality and Group Dynamics:** Participants noted polarization often creates a “me versus them” mindset, though in reality, social groups are more complex and multifaceted.
- **Power and Hierarchies:** One youth worker highlighted that behind every binary, there is a hierarchy that benefits from division. Some actors intentionally exploit polarization for political gain, while others are trapped in cycles of unmet social and economic needs.
- **Complexity of Truth:** Participants questioned whether an objective truth exists. Many shared experiences of disinformation and media mistrust leading to confusion and disengagement from democratic processes.

### Impact on Society:

Polarization divides communities, weakens democracy, and fuels extremism. Intergenerational transfer of disbelief and hopelessness, especially in the Western Balkans, exacerbates youth disillusionment. Families and communities often reinforce outdated narratives and biases. The EU enlargement process was seen as a potential unifying factor in the Western Balkans.

### Proposed Solutions:

- **Humanize the “other side”:** Encourage dialogue where people share experiences as individuals rather than representatives of opposing camps.
- **Local and Cultural Approaches:** Address cultural judgment, inherited ideologies, and religious or ethnic biases.
- **Education and Storytelling:** Promote media literacy, truth-seeking, and story-based awareness campaigns to reshape narratives.

## Group Work Outcomes

### Group 1

- Promote youth-led intergenerational dialogue.
- Develop social media algorithms and platforms that reduce polarization.
- Hold politicians and media accountable through fact-checking initiatives.

### Group 2

- Address social media “echo chambers” by creating safe, informal spaces for exchange (e.g., art, music, storytelling).
- Raise awareness of algorithmic influence and promote education and economic opportunities to empower critical engagement.

### Group 3

- Foster dialogue focuses on mental health and shared values.
- Institutionalize Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) practices in organizations.
- Integrate peer-to-peer learning and child protection mechanisms.

### Group 4

- Promote cooperation between youth and institutions to reshape public narratives.
- Strengthen formal and informal education as tools for awareness and resilience.
- Use AI and digital tools to detect and combat fake news.

### Group 5

- Expand opportunities for new generations through sustainable funding and education.
- Leverage digital platforms for campaigns and literacy programs.
- Prioritize addressing basic needs-education, poverty, and access to information.
- Build policy coalitions and international advocacy networks to apply pressure on governments.

## *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth participants contributed diverse insights grounded in community experiences. They demonstrated strong analytical skills in identifying power dynamics, emotional manipulation, and digital influences behind polarization. Intergenerational collaboration was recognized as essential to bridge perspectives and rebuild trust. Youth emphasized storytelling, empathy, and education as key tools to counter divisive narratives and strengthen social cohesion.

## PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: INSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY

### *Session Details*

- **Format of the Session:** rotating fishbowl discussion between voluntary participants and the two experts, followed by two breakout groups for focus discussions with reporting to the plenary group.
- **Number of Participants:** 25
- **Participant Profile:** youth delegates, civil society experts, and international organisations representatives

### *Session Objective*

To strengthen understanding and dialogue on how Team Europe Actions can reinforce institutional legitimacy within the YPS framework.

1. Examine the current state of institutional legitimacy of Team Europe initiatives and identify key factors that influence youth trust and engagement in governance and peace processes.
2. Discuss the main opportunities and challenges young people face when seeking to participate in institutional and decision-making spaces.
3. Showcase good practices and successful experiences where youth inclusion has contributed to strengthening institutional credibility and accountability within Team Europe-supported interventions.
4. Develop actionable proposals to enhance youth engagement within Team Europe initiatives.

### *Executive Summary*

The session underscored that institutional legitimacy is essential for peace and stability, yet many young people experience institutions as inaccessible or unresponsive. Within the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda and the Team Europe approach, participants highlighted that legitimacy depends on transparency, accountability, and meaningful youth influence over decisions—not symbolic engagement. Strengthening trust requires both structural reforms and practical mechanisms that enable sustained, intergenerational collaboration.

Discussions emphasized the need to shift from fragmented youth consultation to consistent, results-oriented participation, address barriers rooted in political systems and bureaucratic processes, and ensure institutions proactively reach young people—including through digital spaces. Examples from local, national, and regional contexts showed that when youth have real mandates, resources, and follow-up mechanisms, institutional credibility increases and peace outcomes improve.

Furthermore, institutional legitimacy must be earned through transparency, accountability, and inclusion. It grows when young people co-shape institutional priorities. Examples were shared from El Salvador, where municipal youth councils supported by UNDP helped reduce tensions and improve service delivery by formally engaging youth in community decision-making.

In Liberia, UNDP supported youth-led digital engagement to ensure institutions reflect youth priorities in municipal funds allocation.

In Timor-Leste, youth participated in an artificial intelligence platform, supported by UNDP, to inform public policy nationwide. Further examples were raised on bridging the digital divide with mobile podcast and intergenerational dialogue between decision-makers and youth living in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

On a good and engaging intergenerational dialogue note, worthwhile mentioning that Ms Kiri Ginnerup from UNDP and Mr Rok Koželj from the EEAS were kindly available to attend this session in their quality of experts / decision makers, and their availability to dialogue was highly appreciated by the young peacebuilders.

#### **Key takeaways/lessons learned:**

- Institutional legitimacy relies on transparency, accountability, inclusion, and youth co-ownership of priorities.
- Youth disengagement stems from disillusionment, not apathy; rebuilding trust requires reciprocal dialogue and tangible influence.
- Structural barriers—party dominance, bureaucratic procedures, under-representation of under-30s, limited political education—restrict youth participation.



- Innovative mechanisms such as civic councils, youth advisory bodies, digital platforms, and intergenerational dialogue processes can bridge gaps and enhance legitimacy.
- Successful models from multiple regions show that youth participation improves governance outcomes, strengthens peace infrastructures, and builds mutual trust.
- Institutions must move beyond consultation toward shared decision-making and co-responsibility.

#### **Actionable follow-up recommendations:**

- Invest in civic and political education as a foundational element of legitimacy and democratic participation.
- Promote participatory democracy tools such as civic councils combining youth and decision-makers, with clear mandates, M&E frameworks, and diverse representation.
- Reduce bureaucratic barriers to youth participation and ensure predictable, results-oriented engagement channels.
- Strengthen digital engagement, ensuring institutions actively reach youth on online platforms.
- Provide adequate funding and incentives (e.g., per diems, logistical support) to enable sustained youth participation.
- Expand opportunities for representative participation, including mentorship schemes, review of age thresholds, and measures to increase youth access to political processes.
- Systematically measure and publicise levels of institutional legitimacy to track progress and build accountability.

#### **Content Readout**

Institutional legitimacy was defined as a vital foundation for peace, stability, and social trust. When institutions are seen as inclusive, transparent, and responsive, they gain the credibility necessary to sustain peaceful societies. Yet, many young people often experience institutions as distant or unrepresentative, which can weaken confidence in governance systems and risk fuelling frustration or disengagement.

Within the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) framework (particularly through UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020)), youth are recognized as key partners in shaping legitimate and accountable institutions. Complementing these global efforts, the Team Europe approach provides a collective

framework to support youth participation, strengthen institutional legitimacy, and translate engagement into sustainable, system-wide change. However, challenges remain in ensuring that young people's voices are meaningfully integrated into institutional decision-making and that trust between youth and institutional actors is consistently reinforced across diverse contexts. Reinforcing institutional legitimacy, therefore, requires not only structural reforms but also new and inclusive spaces for intergenerational trust, dialogue, and shared decision-making.

Building on Team Europe initiatives on YPS, this session sought to identify impact-focused objectives and actionable proposals to guide future Team Europe Action in reinforcing institutional legitimacy; explore how institutions can move from symbolic to substantive youth participation, ensuring that engagement translates into tangible influence over policies, peace processes, and governance structures; and unpack how institutional trust can be strengthened among young people through inclusive practices such as participatory governance, youth advisory bodies, or locally grounded peace infrastructures; and share good practices that illustrate how youth participation strengthens legitimacy and peace, to generate collective insights and concrete recommendations to guide future Team Europe Actions and partnerships in the YPS field.

While recognising an institution's authority and credibility to take decisions and implement rules, young people see institutions as distant, which can lead to frustration and disengagement. Transparency and accountability were identified as key concepts to reinforce institutional legitimacy. That means institutions must answer to the public for their use of resources and actions, and youth must be able to receive clear answers and reach out when things are not working.

➤ **How can Team Europe reinforce institutional legitimacy in working with youth?**

Institutional legitimacy must be earned through **transparency, accountability, and inclusion**. Legitimacy grows when young people **co-shape** institutional priorities.

Examples were shared from **El Salvador**, where municipal youth councils supported by UNDP helped reduce tensions and improve service delivery by formally engaging youth in community decision-making.

In **Liberia**, digital engagement was used to ensure institutions reflect youth priorities in municipal funds allocation.

In **Timor-Leste**, youth participated in an artificial intelligence platform to inform public policy nationwide. Further examples were raised on bridging the digital divide with mobile podcasts between decision-makers and youth living in rural and hard-to-reach areas, recorded in the latter areas.

To reinforce institutional legitimacy, it examined the sources of the legitimacy. For instance, the EU is a superstructure of national institutions. The latter, such as governments and parliaments, have been chosen and legitimised through a process of **elections** in the majority of democracies.

Promoting youth participation in political life through **political parties** as a vehicle for militancy and grassroots political activism at the national level was stressed as a reinforcing institutional legitimacy. If no movement represents one's ideas, one can create their own political movement.

Young people should be incentivized to create political parties and movements, like in Italy. Media speaking time is a way for smaller movements to express themselves.

➤ **What concrete steps are needed to strengthen institutional legitimacy through youth participation?**

Some youth argued that while creating one's own political party is a good suggestion on paper, institutions will make that endeavor so prohibitive that it is impossible to achieve without large funds.

In many countries, the same big parties have been keeping the status quo in the institutional domain for a very long time. The democratic party system may have served its time because parties tend to serve their own purpose rather than the people's. Thus, we must reinvent the table.

**Civic councils** were raised as a good example of political participation, picking people at random to create a representative micro-society to advise policymakers.

**People under 30 are under-represented in parliaments all over the world.** Mentorship schemes within party structures would be helpful. It was suggested that the voting age should be aligned with the age of running for office in countries, and youth quotas should be established in parliaments - noting that participants were divided over the latter suggestion. It was argued that voting should be based on the alignment of ideas rather than alignment of age between the voter and the representative.

Youth participants suggested taking a step back, starting with **political education**, teaching young people how to involve themselves in politics. Measures such as enhancing civic education were seen by some as more efficient than quotas.

**Bureaucratic barriers** within the institutions themselves were identified as an obstacle to the regular and consistent engagement of youth with institutions. If youth were able to create tangible results through their engagement with institutions, this would increase trust in their own ability to change things.

➤ **How to increase political and institutional will to engage youth?**

In some countries, like Sweden, there is trust in the political system, but there is not a large interest in YPS in the national agenda. While immense power structures exist, there are avenues to work with institutions; for instance, the EU's work on YPS is progressing thanks to **capacity-building** programmes that expanded the knowledge basis of what the agenda is about among youth. While there is no universal recipe, creating context-tailored solutions through co-creation and co-organisation with youth is key - as exemplified by the process of designing this very conference. This empowers youth not only to have a seat at the table, but to take ownership of this seat and the responsibility that comes with it.

➤ **What good practices or local innovations show how youth engagement enhances trust in institutions?**

The establishment of a **youth committee for the Cypriot** to establish peace was raised as a positive example. It was a high-level decision approved, among others, by Cypriot political leaders at the head of state level, the UK, Türkiye, and the UN as guarantors. Young members have a clear mandate from the leaders of both Cypriot communities to build peace, and they benefit from EU funding to do this work. The committee has positive results to show, with horizontal participation of young people from all over the island, giving youth not only a seat at the table, but also executive power. This could be replicated in other national contexts, but also at the European level. Cooperation with civil society and independent young individuals to form decision-makers, builds the trust of young people in institutions and in their ability to make change. This example showed that trust-building is about influence, not just access.

Another positive example to reinforce legitimacy of institutions between the international and the national level was raised with **CMI's "Rejuvenating policies initiative" in the Council of Europe**. It brings together youth delegates from 46

Member States to bring ideas from the international level to the local level, and present results in congress sessions each year in the Council of Europe. Alumni of this programme became powerful emerging leaders in YPS.

For **regional organisations**, such as ECOWAS, legitimacy also had to be derived from the citizens. Reinforcing youth agency was identified as an important avenue to reinforce legitimacy in regional bodies where each Member States' own national interests tend to prevail.

➤ **How can intergenerational dialogue and power-sharing between youth and institutions sustain long-term democratic legitimacy?**

**Power-sharing in action:** it was argued that the notion of “power-sharing” affects democratic procedures where people give power to elected representatives, thus power-sharing should be exercised within existing institutions. However, it was also argued that there is a crisis of representative democracy, and that power can corrupt individual elected representatives' legitimacy with the erosion of their will and capacity to drive necessary change within society. Many individuals who come into powerful positions have been corrupted by existing power dynamics (being loyal to someone else) to get into this position of power, especially in institutions. Such pre-existing loyalties can foster harmful actions or an unwillingness to act, because non-action can be seen as the best way to achieve power within institutions.

In this regard, institutional legitimacy should be reinforced through **strengthening representative democracy, but also by increasing participatory democracy, including through digital means**. Power-sharing is not only featured through democratic electoral processes, but also through long-term forms of political participation which strengthen co-responsibility. The example of an Italian observatory controlling the impact of legislative processes on youth was raised. Another example raised was that of city planning in Germany, which endeavored to recover the availability of public spaces where young people meet and talk about politics.

**Intergenerational dialogue:** the methodology implemented by the Folke Bernadotte Academy helps share perspectives and overcome the misunderstandings that erode institutional legitimacy, based on the theory of change that sharing more knowledge creates more political will. ECOWAS endeavors to include young people in governance and policy committees at all levels of decision-making, whilst taking measures to avoid tokenism.

**Demographic realities:** The expansion of the voting age to reflect a country's demographic realities could be considered to expand democratic legitimacy.

In aging countries like Germany, where youth are wondering how to make the increasing number of older voters think about key priorities for their future. For instance, youth is not involved in the discussion on potentially reinstating a military service in Germany, yet in this endeavor youth is seen as a resource. It was raised as paradoxical and problematic for democratic legitimacy that younger workers are financing retirement pensions, yet lack opportunities to give their opinion. Youth voting for extremist parties was also identified as an emerging threat to democratic legitimacy, and such youth should be engaged with rather than simply excluded.

### **Final suggestions**

- **What challenges hinder young people from engaging with institutions, and how can these be addressed?**

**Mistrust and polarisation** were identified as the main challenges hindering young people from engaging with institutions. Fostering exchange of perspectives between youth representatives and institutional actors, youth inclusion in parliament, and investing in political education were the main avenues to address these challenges concretely.

**Young people are not disinterested, but disillusioned, in the institutions.** Engagement between youth and institutions must be a two-way dialogue to foster true power sharing, not only youth constantly asking to be included.

People working within institutions often do not know **how to reach young people**: this is where dialogue initiatives come in. Institutional actors should also take the digital space and social media much more seriously to overcome these obstacles.

- **How can youth and institutions co-create inclusive, legitimate spaces for decision-making?**

Institutions should invest in **civic education** as a foundational endeavor to reinforce institutional legitimacy and youth participation.

The format of **civic councils** with existing decision-makers and youth, including solid monitoring and evaluation frameworks, ensuring both demographic and geographic (urban/rural) representation, was identified as a best practice to be developed.

Institutional actors should ensure that youth from diverse backgrounds are actually **incentivised to participate** through adequate funding and mechanisms, such as per diems.

In conclusion, the importance of measuring institutional legitimacy and making this **data** visible was underlined. In this regard, the progress study on YPS currently undertaken by the UN, including a youth consultation on 14 November in Brussels, is seen as a powerful resource.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

The fishbowl discussion format, meaning rotating two participants at a time to exchange face-to-face directly with the experts at the panel area in front of the audience, enabled the intergenerational exchange of perspectives and expertise, and generation of structured insights within the time allocated to the session.

Youth participants insisted on innovative formats of engagement with institutions, such as civic councils; institutions investing in the digital space to reach youth; and incentives for youth participation in institutional processes as a positive return on investment, in a context where mistrust in institutions is a key challenge for peacebuilding worldwide.

## **PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: POSITIVE AGENCY**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** open talk transitioning into teams
- **Number of Participants:** 7 total
- **Participant Profile:** youth from civil society

### *Session Objective*

To explore what positive agency means in different contexts and life related experiences. To Explore the advantages of positive agency on team europe and to co-create recommendations on how Team Europe actors can actively support

youth-led peacebuilding and policy influence. To identify barriers and enablers to youth leadership, participation, and decision-making power. To identify what actions that Team Europe and partners should take to help youth. To identify the future of positive agency and its effect on youth and to explore adult agency on youth agency and what to do in the future.

### *Executive Summary*

The positive agency session explored youth participation in different contexts. It started with a reflective question where does agency start and what is positive agency. After participants offered their perspectives, the group was divided into two and after 15 mins the groups convened to exchange about the discussion. The positive agency was the main key theme and participants suggested the following key notes with specific timeline, by 2035:

- most youth can identify mechanisms/spaces to influence decisions they care about that are effective, safe, and accessible for themselves and peers, whatever their personal Situation;
- global average of youth representation in political bodies (both elected and appointed positions) increases to 15% and every country has some mechanism to increase representation;
- global average of youth representation in peace processes increases to 15% and every process supported by Team Europe has some mechanism for integrating youth / intergenerational input;
- youth-led and intergenerational civil society peacebuilding initiatives are easy to set up and impactful

### **Content Summary of Session**

The participants were asked to reflect on these questions and give their view point.

What positive agency means was the breezy glasses which allowed participants to share their views?

Some participants described the positive agency as being provided with the space and tools to participate freely without risks.

The first question was: what changes when youth are not just included but have influence?

- We have a peaceful world
- Represent young perspectives more sustainably and they do not need use violence as a mean of frustration
- It increases ownership of what happened and will happen in the future



This question prompted another one which was why young people use their energy for negative rather than positive?

The participants shared various views such as:

- When youth are protesting, state apparatus such as the police and army respond often in a violent manner, which makes young people to also be violent during their demonstrations.
- The government limits the agency of young people hence contributing to negative agency. Being dismissed leads to negative agency.
- Even when it comes to following the rules on protest, you need to fill up a form and in the end it is up to the government to decide whether it is important or not.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

- Give additional visibility (where safe) to youth-led best practices;
- Lead by example on meaningful spaces for youth to exercise agency;
- Provide technical support to governments on reforms to increase youth political representation;
- Support capacity building and awareness raising initiatives that promote positive youth agency;
- Use all means to encourage and support peace process actors and parties to increase youth agency in processes;
- Provide increased accessible and flexible resources for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives (financial, in kind (e.g. Europe Houses as free, accessible venues for youth activities), etc.);
- Support efforts to increase youth capacities and access to information, including training / training of trainers led by partners etc., which are adapted to the local context
- Ensure more flexible protection mechanisms for youth peacebuilders at risk, including those who might not identify as Human Rights Defenders, and support awareness of such mechanisms, including via partnerships with locally trusted actors;
- Integrate Do No Harm, mental health, and wellbeing into all support.

### *Final suggestions*

For Team Europe, participants suggested: to start with small exchange programs, to meet local content needs, to provide capacity building for young diplomats and to provide anonymous funding for young peacebuilders at risk.

## PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: RESOURCING PEACE

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** roundtable discussion
- **Number of Participants:** 25-30 participants
- **Participant Profile:** young peacebuilders

### *Session Objective*

This session was one of five parallel discussions held after Mr. Saji Prelis's presentation, *"How can we measure our progress & impact together?"* Each session explored one of the five pillars that contribute to "healthy and peaceful" societies: agency, legitimacy, trust, safety, and resourcing - based on the *Peace Impact Framework*.

This particular session focused on *resourcing peace*, aiming to map existing resources, reflect upon current trends, challenges, and opportunities, and explore together possible pathways forward in alignment with the Peace Impact Framework.

### *Executive Summary*

The session brought together a majority of youth participants alongside institutional actors to reflect on resource mapping, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening youth-led engagement in peacebuilding. Youth perspectives shaped the conversation substantially, highlighting systemic barriers to funding and participation, while proposing innovative, locally led, and impact-oriented solutions. Discussions emphasized the need for more flexible, youth-centric financing structures, localization, recognition of youth contributions, and stronger multilateral partnerships.

Participants noted that while there is a wide range of existing resources - including institutional support, international mechanisms, private sector opportunities, digital tools, and human capital - youth access to these remains constrained by administrative complexity, language barriers, rigid financing systems, and insufficient recognition of youth expertise and volunteer contributions.

The discussion shifted from identifying gaps to proposing practical approaches to rebranding youth engagement, demonstrating value through quantifying volunteer time, promoting income-generating models, and positioning youth as strategic partners rather than beneficiaries. The session concluded with a shared

understanding that this is the beginning of a longer-term dialogue and collaborative effort.

### **Content Summary of Session on *Resourcing for Peace***

#### **Segment 1 – Resources mapping exercise**

Participants were divided into different groups and were asked to individually reflect and summarize their key points on different colored post-it notes in response to the following question: *What resources am I aware of/using in my context?*

#### **1. Institutional & Policy Resources**

- Government institutions and foundations
- National youth policies (youth participation in decision-making spaces)
- Local authority support (financial and in-kind)
- Municipal institutions (cities, townhalls)
- Government embassies and local Requests for Proposals (RFPs)
- Institutional grants from Ministries of Foreign Affairs (Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Italy, Sweden)
- Financial Framework Partnership Agreements with the EU Commission

#### **2. International Organizations & Multilateral Funding**

- UN Peacebuilding Fund (UN PBF)
- UN and EU funding mechanisms (including those less accessible to youth)
- OECD support platforms
- EU-level foundations and funding initiatives
- AU–EU Youth Voice Lab and similar youth platforms
- Erasmus+ (international collaboration funding)
- Independent philanthropic foundations (e.g., Fundación la Caixa, Bezos Foundation, Nordic and private trusts)

#### **3. Financial & Funding Mechanisms**

- Membership fees and donor-based funding
- Individual donors
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funding
- Microfinance institutions
- Remittances
- Social entrepreneurship and sustainability models
- Revenue from product/services selling
- Traditional donor funding
- Youth Empowerment Funds
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) — private sector investment

#### **4. Partnerships & Collaboration Networks**

- Strategic partnerships with private sector (telecom, beverages, transport, education)
- Broader private sector engagement
- Partnerships with INGOs through sub-grants
- Collaboration with CSOs / youth-led organizations
- Community-based resource mobilization
- Peacebuilding and networking platforms in the African region
- Mediator and dialogue-facilitator communities

### **5. Knowledge, Tools & Methodologies**

- Existing literature (research, documentaries, reports, community stories)
- Toolkits and methodologies (conflict analysis, trauma-informed dialogue, resilience models)
- MNYIP mentorship and youth training program (Malawi)
- Open calls for climate action / thematic funding opportunities

### **6. Human Capital & Skills**

- Youth human resources at local, national, and global levels
- Indigenous professionals volunteering support to their communities
- Interpersonal and soft skills (influencing, motivation, creativity, arts, public speaking)
- Volunteering and community engagement

### **7. Digital & Technical Enablers**

- Access to digital connectivity and tools
- Digital collaboration spaces and platforms
- Internet-based free training and learning resources
- Storytelling and advocacy through digital channels
- Material and technical infrastructure

## **Segment 2 – Concerns and challenges**

Once individual findings were shared in plenary, participants re-grouped for a collaborative exercise to map common concerns and challenges. The following core themes emerged:

### **1. Funding access, complexity & sustainability**

- Complex grant application processes and limited capacity for youth to apply.
- Language and accessibility barriers (applications mostly in English)
- Competition between UN agencies, large CSOs, and youth-led organizations for the same funding opportunities.
- Short-term funding cycles with no sustainability focus.

- Rigid donor requirements and systems (e.g., registration needed to receive funds).
- Funding is more accessible from international donors than national ones.
- Cuts in funding from USA and Member States; reduced budgets for aid and peacebuilding programs.
- Lack of technical advice being considered when designing funding or programs.

## **2. Policy, government & institutional barriers**

- Government restrictions and legal challenges.
- Gatekeeping practices limiting youth access to decision-making and resources.
- Political instability and changing priorities with government turnover.
- Budget changes linked to shifts in government leadership.
- Peacebuilding is often deprioritized at a political level.
- In some contexts (e.g., Somalia), resources benefit governments rather than youth.

## **3. Human capital & participation challenges**

- Human resource constraints: skilled youth prefer cities or migrate abroad (“brain drain”).
- Volunteerism VS economic pressures
- Small organizations struggle to retain personnel and maintain quality work.
- High turnover within institutions, making relationship building difficult.

## **4. Conflict, security & access barriers**

- Working in conflict or “red zone” areas is highly risky and discouraged by partners.
- Difficulties accessing communities in insecure regions.
- Some governments prohibit operations in certain zones (e.g., Sudan).

## **Segment 3 – Areas of improvements**

To conclude the discussion, participants collaboratively identified key solutions and areas for improvement. The main recommendations included:

### **1. More flexible and youth-friendly funding systems**

- Develop flexible and youth-centred financing mechanisms.
- Multilingual access to funding mechanisms, not only in English (ex: using AI)
- Introduce easy, simplified application processes tailored to youth-led organizations.
- Donors should give young people the flexibility to determine their own priorities and resource needs.

- Donors should include a specific budget for youth only

## **2. Localization and community-driven solutions**

- Promote locally led and youth-driven initiatives, ensuring solutions reflect real community needs.
- Encourage donors to better align funding priorities with grassroots realities rather than top-down agendas.
- Support youth organizations to get familiar with specific funding mechanisms before applying to them (ex: via trainings)

## **3. Enhancing Sustainability and impact**

- Include sustainability planning in project design from the start.
- Encourage income-generating activities for financial independence.
- Promote impact-focused programming and demonstrate clear youth added value of to donors (“data-driven advocacy”)

## **4. Collaboration & Partnerships**

- Strengthen partnerships among CSOs, private sector actors, and international organizations.
- Co-create joint platforms for accessing opportunities, resources, and shared learning.
- Restructure existing systems and institutional processes to become more youth-friendly and inclusive.

## **Segment 4 – How do we “rebrand” youth work?**

Participants discussed how youth work and volunteering can be rebranded to better reflect its value, impact, and professionalism, emphasizing the need for recognition, compensation, and visibility. Key ideas included:

### **1. Recognize volunteering as valuable work**

- Organizations should allocate a budget for volunteer incentives or honoraria, recognizing time, expertise, and effort.
- Establish youth councils inside organizations to advocate for compensation and recognition.
- Demand budgeting for youth contributions as time + expertise, not just as optional support.

### **2. Quantify and communicate the value of volunteer contributions**

- Measure and track volunteer hours to showcase their real economic and social value.
- Include a clear statement in proposals: *“Here is our contribution to society, not just to the project.”*

- Frame volunteering not as charity work, but as a significant investment in community development, backed by data.

### **3. Reframe the purpose and narrative**

- Clearly communicate the purpose and impact of youth engagement: *Why are we doing this? How does it create positive change?*
- Highlight that youth work contributes to social transformation, civic engagement, and peacebuilding, not just project delivery.

### **4. Introduce income-generating and sustainability models**

- Encourage youth organizations to explore income-generating activities to strengthen sustainability and reduce dependency on donor grants.

### **5. Show the Return on Investment (ROI)**

- Communicate the impact not only on project beneficiaries but also on society, institutions, and the economy.
- Show the social, economic, and civic ROI of youth-led initiatives, engaging the private sector and public institutions in demonstrating this value.

Due to time constraints, facilitators ended the session with a shared understanding that this is only the first step, and the conversation will continue to grow.

### **Reflection on Youth Participation**

Youth made up the majority of participants and shaped the conversation with their own lived experiences, while organizers mainly held a facilitation role. The perspectives expressed were therefore primarily youth-driven, emphasizing funding accessibility, recognition of contributions, and the need for more flexible, locally led systems. Intergenerational exchanges were constructive, with youth calling for co-creation, fair compensation, and greater autonomy in decision-making.

### **Final suggestions**

Based on the workshop discussions, several youth participants emphasized the need for more flexible and youth-responsive funding systems, including simplified application processes, reduced administrative burdens, and greater freedom for youth to determine priorities. They also highlighted the importance of recognizing and valuing youth contributions, not only through financial incentives but also by quantifying the economic and social value of volunteer time, skills, and local expertise.

There was broad agreement across groups on the need to advance localization, ensuring that resources and decision-making power reach community-based and youth-led organizations, rather than remaining concentrated at higher institutional

levels. Participants emphasized diversifying language accessibility beyond English to enable more inclusive participation.

Participants also suggested creating multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together youth organizations, CSOs, private sector actors, and international institutions to enhance collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and co-creation. Such platforms could support joint advocacy, capacity building, and innovation.

Several participants noted that making funding systems and participation spaces more flexible, accessible, and language-friendly would improve engagement of young people from diverse backgrounds, including those in conflict zones or rural settings.

Finally, participants recommended integrating impact measurement, evidence-based advocacy, and sustainability planning into youth-led initiatives, helping position young people not just as beneficiaries, but as strategic partners contributing measurable social, economic, and peacebuilding outcomes.

## PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF IMPACT-FOCUSED ON YPS POLICY FRAMEWORKS

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** roundtable
- **Number of Participants:** 70
- **Participant Profile:** all types of participants (youth, member state representatives, civil society, international organisations, etc.)

### *Session Objective*

In this session it was aimed to bring together different ways of youth participation. Through open discussion and merging expertise, there were calls to action for different actors responsible for YPS policies and their implementation on strengthening the inclusive nature of youth participation in their work.

### *Executive Summary*

Camilla Brückner, Director of the UN/UNDP Office in Brussels and Representative of the UN System in the EU spoke about youth participation in YPS NAPs and policy



processes supported by UNDP and UN organizations. We learned that effective YPS frameworks must be co-created with young people and grounded in their diverse lived realities. UNDP and UN partners have supported inclusive, context-specific processes-combining inclusive consultations, digital participation, and multi-stakeholder engagement - to ensure intersectional perspectives, including gender, climate and inequality, shape regional, national and local YPS strategies such as in the Gambia, Senegal, Liberia, Kenya, Colombia, Honduras and in the Arab States. Country experiences showed that youth leadership, sustained resourcing and strong coordination mechanisms are key to translating commitments into meaningful impact.

After this the participants were split into smaller groups to continue the discussion and record best practices and recommendations on inclusive youth participation. The groups reflected on the points the speakers had raised together with them and had fruitful discussions that brought both deep insight into the current practices and realities of youth participation with YPS as well as what steps should be taken to improve the inclusivity of the youth participation. A lot of the points raised were related to the need to tailor youth participation to specific context and needs of the youth. Likewise several groups raised the need for multipartner and equal collaboration in policy processes.

### **Content Summary of Session on Inclusive development of impact-focused YPS policy frameworks**

The different perspectives that were presented in the speaker interventions in the beginning of the session were:

- Luca Fratini, Coordinator for WPS, YPS and Mediation Policies from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy spoke about the Italian NAP process and how youth participation was facilitated as part of that in collaboration with the national youth council.
- Camilla Brückner Director of the UN/UNDP Office in Brussels and Representative of the UN System in the EU spoke about youth participation in YPS policy processes supported by various UN organizations. We learned that

youth participation has been mainstreamed in various ways in different UN projects and activities keeping in mind the context specificity.

- Karoliina Vaakanainen, Coordinator from the Permanent representation of Finland to the EU spoke about the Finnish NAP processes and multipartner collaboration in implementation and follow-up of the NAP. We learned that in the Finnish system in all stages (preparation, implementation and follow-up) there is a strong collaboration between ministries, civil society actors and youth.
- Tuulia Toivanen, young volunteer and Board member of YMCA Finland spoke about the potential of youth organizations to support and facilitate youth participation in NAP processes. As an example Tuuli told about how YMCA for example has been a strong part in facilitating youth participation in NAP processes in Finland and Kenya making use of their ability to reach large groups of youth from different backgrounds.
- Yairy Vega Muenala, Indigenous woman, advocate and project leader from Ecuador spoke about examples and principles of supporting the participation of underrepresented youth and why it is important to pay particular attention to including youth who are not usually involved in such processes but have valuable experience and ideas on YPS and related topics.

In the breakout groups the groups discussed the following questions:

- What lessons can we take from existing NAP that can inspire other countries or international actors to involve youth more effectively?
- How can governments and youth networks co-lead the creation and implementation of NAPs?
- What are the best ways to reach and include underrepresented youth (e.g. Indigenous, rural, or LGBTIQ+)?
- How can we make sure that NAPs are impactful, sustainable and monitored, not just written and forgotten?

Based on this the groups came up with the following points and recommendations:

- To be inclusive, processes need to reach youth where they already are (school, where they spend their freetime, rural areas, social media) and in ways they wish to engage in (also including digital technologies, gamification). This also includes being mindful of the language used to make sure it is accessible and understandable.

- Organizers of YPS policy processes need to identify barriers to participation (i.e. timing, transportation, child care, disabilities) and adapt to overcome these barriers
- Youth inclusion in YPS processes needs to be highly context specific. Best way to ensure this is to involve youth and grassroots organizations from the communities in preparing the process.
- To set up a committee, with reps from gov and reps of youth, reps of ministries - important to involve youth from all levels and backgrounds. Existing structures can be political/not truly representative or involved with the official structures/administrative systems.
- Raise awareness – use existing structures (EU etc.) for support and advocacy, with money with awareness raising, through multiple channels; civil society, media, radio etc. young people can get involved in these processes + national curriculum in schools about YPS so people learn from a young age.
- Civil society actors unite – finding common ground and making real suggestions not just requests, have clear goals and ideas that are based in reality (and local realities as well).
- Get the ministers/people in power off the pedestal; they are just people.
- Lobbying is a tool that could strengthen the actions.
- Resolutions need to be translated into languages of advocacy and that have something tangible. Also translating the language of YPS into something that is a possibility for governments etc., not a threat by grassroots-organisations.
- There is a need for cooperation on all levels. YPS is something that is not only for youth that benefits the entire society.
- Meaningful youth engagement requires moving beyond producing written documents and instead prioritizing inclusive and participatory processes. A small group of individuals cannot adequately represent the diversity of youth, so it is essential to share drafts widely and collect amendments from different actors. To support this, governments should develop databases that help identify and reach diverse groups, strengthening outreach, coordination, and cooperation.
- Organizations also need to stay connected and consistently follow up with youth groups to ensure continuity. Co-creation with youth-led organizations is key, as it increases ownership and leads to more relevant and sustainable outcomes.
- However, institutions often design overly ambitious initiatives without having the necessary capacities, and they end up relying on other institutions, an

approach that is not viable. As seen with some examples, efforts should be cross-cutting, as current competencies and roles can become confused.

- It is also important to acknowledge the willingness (or lack thereof) of governments to meaningfully engage young people. In contexts of authoritarianism, for example, collaboration between civil society and institutions becomes extremely difficult.
- Finally, securing sustained funding for actors who influence grassroots groups is essential, as they play a critical role in connecting young people with institutional processes.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth voices were equitably included in both the speaker interventions and the working groups. The groups also consisted quite representatively of both youth and institutional/state representatives allowing for fruitful intergenerational discussions as well.

### *Final suggestions*

This session was a good opener for discussions on systemising good practices for inclusive youth participation, but further work and especially knowledge-exchange is needed to ensure these good practices and ideas are actually transmitted to parties responsible for planning and implementing YPS policy processes. International organizations and bilateral state collaboration are invaluable in this and should make sure to center youth voices in this knowledge-exchange. The NAP Community of Practice is a good example of a combination of these. In addition, implementers should make use of the expertise of the youth and youth organizations in the planning of the processes as well to tailor approaches to each context.

## **PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: CROSS BORDER ACTION ON YPS IN EUROPE**

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Roundtable

- **Number of Participants:** around 8
- **Participant Profile:** youth, civil society

### *Session Objective*

With the 2250 Network of Finland and European youth partners, this session aimed to explore the potential for Team Europe and partners to collaborate on YPS actions across borders in Europe, including among neighbouring Member States, cooperation with Enlargement countries and other European neighbours, and action in the online space (with input from the New Technologies and Enlargement sessions). It aimed to explore both concrete actions and approaches for sustained reflection in this space.

### *Executive Summary*

Best practice examples from national YPS implementation/efforts in Europe have been shared by young peacebuilders from Finland and Ireland, and session participants added insights from other national contexts, including Germany. In addition to highlighting national perspectives, the Nordic YPS coalition was presented as a successful example for cross-border action on YPS. The group discussion focused on entry points and challenges as well as needed infrastructure for cross-border action on YPS in Europe. The participants agreed that more cross-border YPS measures are needed in Europe.

Key points from the group discussion included:

- Implementation across European countries is at quite different stages, with the Nordics as frontrunners;
- Similar but also different challenges as well as political discussions across countries in Europe;
- Current (defense-focused) security discussions could be an entry point for integrating YPS -> need to bridge “security”, “peace”, and “youth” actors; bridging YPS and security discussions but avoid securitisation;
- Need for peer support/learning among YPS practitioners across European countries -> participants expressed the wish to stay in contact; existing knowledge sharing platforms were highlighted;
- Need for more data on YPS/needs and wishes of young people in Europe as well as entry points/opportunities for cross border action on YPS;
- Need for more awareness raising/knowledge on YPS among young people and political stakeholders in Europe;

- Calls for a regional strategy on YPS, e.g. European Regional Action Plan;
- EU YPS Coalition: expand focus on pushing EU external YPS support to also focus on domestic YPS implementation.

### *Content Summary of Session on Cross-Border Action on YPS in Europe*

#### **Intervention of Finland:**

- The second Finnish NAP will be released soon;
- Young YPS advocates have good relations with the Finnish foreign ministry;
- Finland puts lots of efforts into sharing best practices;
- Push for the YPS agenda in international arenas, most prominently in OSCE (e.g. YPS youth forum, organised by the foreign ministry);
- Drafted a roadmap for other countries on how to advance YPS when they host the OSCE chairpersonship;
- Currently, it seems too big of a focus on YPS national implementation, we should do better in pushing for the YPS agenda in international organisations, such as the EU --> call for a regional action plan/strategy on YPS;
- Finnish YPS approach combines an internal and external track.

#### **Intervention of Ireland:**

- Youth working on creating a working relationship with government officials (in the Foreign Ministry) who have been engaged in WPS and peace and security more generally, research and design underway on the idea of a NAP on YPS.
- Explanation given to the group of an Irish civil society context and relevance of YPS, e.g. post-conflict context in Northern Ireland, border, lack of social cohesion, racism, hate crime and hate speech.
- Trying to find opportunities for Ireland to lead by example on the national level, with opportunity for best practice to be shared international / collaboration and partnership internationally.
- There is a lack of knowledge on peace and security among young people in Ireland.
- The just elected president could be an opportunity to be interested in youth and peacebuilding.

### **Intervention of Nordic Coalition on YPS:**

- Nordic coalition as an informal network, brings people from five Nordic countries together to cooperate on cross-border regional issues;
- Countries are supportive but see Finland as the lead;
- Coalition exists officially since three years, they cooperate with national youth councils and bigger organisations, also with UN;
- Have a very informal structure but think about the development (either more centralised or more decentralised structure);
- The coalition identified four big overarching issues and challenges of the region: peace education, disarmament, AI/digitalisation and peace, prevention or radicalisation --> bring youth who have a background on these topics together from all the Nordic countries and create solutions and recommendations.

### **General discussion:**

- Nordic communication is very special, probably hard to replicate .
- Strong partnership contacts across the Nordic countries and allies in the ministries.
- Offer to help if someone needs connections etc. --> recommendation: make use of the existing knowledge/expertise.
- Discussion on bridging YPS and current security discussions, but warned not to securitise youth.
- Sweden is a good example of merging peace and security, given that the youth atlantic treaty organisation of Sweden is very involved in the YPS space.
- It is important that countries have an internal and external component in implementing YPS.
- The EU YPS coalition, currently mostly focused on EU external action, potentially starts trying to engage in focusing on the domestic implementation --> discussion on leadership of youth versus civil society partners involved in the coalition; invitation to become part of the coalition.
- Difficulties to engage in cross-border action given that there are huge differences in levels to start (e.g. compared to Finland/the nordics).
- In some countries in Europe there is very little knowledge about the agenda, and for some it's hard to feel connected to it (the "UN agenda" feels distant).

- Recommendation: establishment of a peer support system connecting youth from different countries with different levels of YPS progress --> noted the Community of Practice on NAPs for YPS.
- Cross-border communication could create “healthy competition” between countries, e.g. on NAP developments and incentives to advance YPS implementation (but: should not come at the expense of an inclusive process; should not rush the process).
- Call for a regional YPS framework across Europe.
- Call for standardised meeting points.
- Need for a data driven approach to advance YPS -> Call for more research on the topics that young people in Europe care/are concerned about.
- Potentials for cross-border action with partner countries that are either neighbours or otherwise closely connected, e.g. Germany and France.

#### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

Youth owned the discussion given that there have only been youth (and one civil society partner) in the room. It was a very dynamic discussion given the small group size.

## **PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: SUPPORT YOUTH-INCLUSIVE PEACE PROCESSES**

#### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** open floor exchange
- **Number of Participants:** 30
- **Participant Profile:** youth from diverse contexts and representatives of mediation supporting organisations/agencies (Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, EEAS, IGAD, FBA, various NGO's).

#### *Session Objective*

To gather retrospective lessons learned in terms of more or less successful efforts for meaningful engagement of/by youth in and around peace processes and to develop recommendations for how these lessons could be applied by Team Europe to current critical cases.

#### *Executive Summary*



The session focused on cross-context learning for improving Team Europe support to youth-inclusive peace processes as a vector for more effective and impactful processes. It centred the experiences and insights of young experts on this question, while also fostered exchange among and between youth and older participants. Key insights covered the value of such cross-context learning, how intergenerational and youth-inclusive approaches contribute the overall quality of peace processes and their real impact at society level, and the ways young people already play effective roles in and around peace processes or in their preparation or follow-up, despite an overall trend of exclusion from high level processes. The potential of co-creation with and real buy-in from institutions was also highlighted, with several positive examples offering potential inspiration for Team Europe actors.

Based on the needs and potential solutions identified, recommendations for Team Europe included supporting (cross-border) youth-inclusive initiatives for learning and coordinated action and establishing or supporting the establishment of meaningful institutionalised mechanisms for youth input. Recommendations also covered the utility of working with youth on diverse, innovative grassroots initiatives to ensure peace process outcomes are really experienced at society and community levels, including the multigenerational work of (re)building social cohesion and addressing mental health and socio-economic aspects. Important for all such partnerships, with youth facing oppression, war, and other harms, are real respect for youth partners, accessible technical and financial support, and due attention for safeguarding.

### **Content Summary of Session on Support to youth-inclusive peace processes**

#### **Intergenerational approaches are an important part of quality peace processes more broadly:**

Preliminary insights from the few cases of more youth-inclusive processes indicate clearly that such inclusion contributes both to the quality, acceptability, and sustainability of outcomes, for peace process outcomes to go beyond the signature of an agreement and reach society. As with the wider question of civilian inclusion, and especially where youth are a demographic plurality, it helps reduce the risks associated with processes limited to conflict parties, the very actors who often actively seek to divide the youth population. Moreover, meaningful youth participation brings in useful innovations in both thinking and action that can help overcome blockages, including often having fewer barriers to imagining a future of equality and positive peace. Youth also represent the most transnationally connected generation in history, a particular advantage when it comes to cross-border conflicts or poorly coordinated parallel processes. In the Great Lakes region, for example, better coordination among diverse processes can and should go hand-in-hand with

greater involvement of youth, especially transnational youth networks. This is also an advantage in terms of cross-context learning, as with exchanges with the Young European Federalists which led to the creation of Young Palestinian and Young Israeli Federalists groups, or the innovations brought back by youth studying abroad, including Ukrainian youth displaced internationally by the war.

Youth inclusion and intergenerationality is also critical for safeguarding hope and resilience where a sustainable peace still feels far off or throughout the long, multigenerational work of reconciliation. For Palestinian youth, keeping hope alive can take the form of even small acts, like distributing toys to displaced children or the intra- and inter-community work of the Young Federalists groups. Education and addressing intergenerational trauma are often key, whether in contexts like Israel where education currently plays a major role in effectively mobilising communities against each other or in Brazil where education remains an important propaganda tool as the national truth process has stalled. In Northern Ireland, legacies of polarisation, inequality, and segregation - including ongoing segregation in schooling - require ongoing intergenerational work, with due attention to mental health and psychosocial support.

**Youth are rarely meaningfully included in formal processes:** In the Great Lakes region, formal conflict resolution mechanisms and peace processes from 1994 to today have at best provided merely symbolic space for youth, despite their demographic majority and innovative ideas. Current processes are seen as closed to wider civil society, let alone youth who face additional financial and socio-cultural barriers. This exclusion crosses both peace processes and the highly-connected realm of political processes. In Sri Lanka and elsewhere, gerontocratic norms which limit the space for youth in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and political spaces compound intersectionality with marginalisation faced by women and ethnic or religious minorities. Gender quotas for local councils in Sri Lanka have seen some gains in terms of political representation of young women, but they often have little independent influence amid pressure from their family.

Even in relatively good examples of formal participation, youth have had to struggle for a real seat. In South Sudan's Revitalization Forum this was helped by the solidarity which led older women to ensure places for young women among the seats assigned for women delegates, and how women and youth delegates worked together to platform further marginalised perspectives, such as displaced youth. Though much more restricted, the ongoing Tumaini process has one official youth representative, who has used the position to try to channel broad input from South Sudanese youth. Youth are unfortunately broadly missing in other major processes, from Sudan to the Middle East.

**Youth can and do play impactful roles in and around peace processes, and carve out space to act for peace even when excluded from or in the absence of formal peace processes:** In Northern Ireland, civil society in a broad sense, including churches and sports clubs, were instrumental in building the movement for reconciliation and peace, with youth most often in the lead in advocating for solutions that met needs of different groups. This is even more marked in contexts with very young populations. Youth in and around South Sudan's Revitalization Forum were among the few voices bringing in cross-community and marginalised perspectives into the process (see also the [We Are Here report](#)).

While the high level South Sudan processes continue, much of the important work is happening far away from negotiation tables however, and youth are leading bottom-up reconciliation efforts, like Wrestling for Peace initiatives, to address the lasting divisions and violence affecting communities. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, while youth are not well included in the political process today, they instead find their own creative ways to contribute to sustainable peace, including powerful artistic and cultural projects. In DRC, youth are innovating with digital tools to engage youth that are harder to reach physically around the peace process. Meanwhile, youth networks such as Youth Network for Peace in the Great Lakes Region or the Young Federalists groups in the Middle East, are innovating cross-border solutions for peace, generating some of the new ideas that will be needed for meaningful breakthroughs. At the very local level too, youth are playing important roles, such as the members of a peace club in Sikasso, Mali, who mediated a successful resolution to an inter-community conflict over gold mining which had worsened despite five years of elder-led mediation efforts.

Such efforts face many hurdles too, however. In Sri Lanka, youth community volunteering was well developed and supported by the National Youth Services Council with its mission of engaging youth in societal development. However, this youth engagement never grew into any real influence over decision making, and now, with the economic crisis, youth volunteering has declined. Youth are also now at the forefront of humanitarian and social cohesion efforts in Ukraine, but this important work receives rather little recognition and support. Government restrictions, such as Georgia's Foreign Agents Law, can also severely limit the space for youth-led civil society efforts.

**Institutional support can be transformative when it is based on co-creation and meaningful partnership with youth:** This is a prime objective of the [5 Year Global Strategy on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes](#) and its intergenerational and multistakeholder Steering Committee. A good example of such transformative support is the recent – arguably, long overdue – establishment of the Technical Committee on Youth to enhance collaboration and dialogue between Greek Cypriot

and Turkish Cypriot youth, with a real mandate to influence the Cypriot Track 1 process. Such bodies combining cross-community participation, peacebuilding objectives, and real influence on decision making should be replicated, including potentially at EU level and in the strengthening of Youth Sounding Boards with real connections to political processes and peace process support. Such institutionalisation rarely comes easily: the relative commitment to youth inclusion in South Sudan's Revitalization Forum only came via hard learned lessons from prior processes focused on elite bargains. More recent institutional support in the region, such as the mandate of the IGAD Youth Envoy and the coordination with Special Envoys, offers some new hope for the future of youth inclusion around both the South Sudan and Sudan processes. These also offer wider lessons for European Special Envoys/Representatives, as does the successful model of the women's network working with the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.

Technical, financial, and political support to youth-inclusive or youth-led efforts is an important piece of the puzzle, as with how the Northern Ireland process benefited from dedicated funding instruments and cooperation under the EU and British-Irish Council. EU support to the Sudan process has a very small component on capacity building for women and youth, a positive start that should be expanded. In the Great Lakes, prospects for the process would also be helped by greater institutional commitment to youth inclusion across and more coordination among the overly siloed tracks led by different actors, and greater recognition and support for grassroots youth efforts from partners like the EU. A high potential cross-continental initiative in this space is the new young mediators network supported by Finland and South Africa, which includes capacity strengthening in mediation skills and joint strategising. Similarly, the new Italian Meditation Community of Practice made a conscious effort to include youth groups.

Italian and Finnish authorities and youth have also shown the value of co-creation with youth in their respective YPS National Action Plan processes. Such efforts have not only lead to higher quality immediate outcomes, but also helped shift cultural norms and foster champions as older generations experience the benefits of partnering with youth. Such impact does require real, sustained institutional buy-in, which can be harder to maintain in conflict or politically fraught contexts. In Lebanon, youth successfully convened a cross-community mobilisation in favour of institutional commitments on YPS and even received positive signals at the highest political level as part of a National Forum. YPS and the wider question of youth inclusion were deprioritised however with the escalation of violence since October 2023 and individual Ministerial discretion has left the issue repeatedly postponed.

**Based on these insights, participants proposed the following actions for Team Europe, aligned with the global five year strategy, the youth-inclusive guide to peace**

mediation developed by the EU YPS Coalition, the EU Youth Action Plan for external action, and the EEAS mediation guidelines.

- Support cross-context learning and innovation for mediation support teams, including via the Steering Committee of the Global Strategy on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes;
- Ensure EU and Member State Special Representatives and similar roles have YPS focal points and youth advisory structures, notably those working on youth-majority contexts;
- Support youth or intergenerational mediator networks and mediation support teams at different levels (local, national, regional...);
- Support intergenerational dialogue and reconciliation processes, ensuring youth are able to meaningfully share ideas, notably new ideas, to advance peace;
- Ensure diverse youth needs and solutions are integrated at different tracks around a peace process, including support for youth-led and intergenerational initiatives at community level, such as art- and media-based and digital peacebuilding;
- Support all efforts to ensure outcomes do not stay on paper, but are implemented at felt at society and community level, including the long work of intergenerational healing, positive cultural norm shifts, peace education, addressing mental health and socio-economic aspects, and reducing polarisation;
- Incorporate cross-border youth-youth and intergenerational mechanisms around regional peace processes, including on potential regional integration solutions for peace, as well as migrant/diaspora engagement;
- Support coordination on effectiveness and inclusivity of processes with multiple parallel tracks (e.g. Great Lakes);
- Develop youth engagement mechanisms that bridge divides and have a mandate that allows for real impact on decision-making, including for example an EU-wide YPS mechanism and increasing the ability of Youth Sounding Boards to influence decision-making;
- Develop creative solutions to support youth peacebuilding organisations working around peace processes and groups who face repression and attacks, such as Foreign Agents legalisation.

### ***Reflection on Youth Participation***

- Light preparation with young participants and an open floor format allowed young experts to share perspectives on previous, ongoing, and hoped for future processes. This formed the core content of the session.

- Institutional and INGO representatives had the chance to share lessons from their own experiences. Several also brought questions for the young participants, listened actively to their ideas, and for the most part engaged in a constructive discussion that fostered mutual learning and building on each other's ideas.
- There was one unfortunate instance of an older participant taking the floor to inaccurately "correct" a point from a young participant that they had misunderstood.

## PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: TEAM EUROPE COORDINATION ON MAINSTREAMING YPS

### *Session Details*

- **Session Format:** Interactive roundtable discussion
- **Number of Participants:** ~20
- **Participant Profile:** young peacebuilders, representatives of international organisations, civil society, EU

### *Session Objective*

To develop youth-driven, practical recommendations that strengthen Team Europe coordination for mainstreaming YPS across political and operational tracks.

### *Specific Objectives*

1. Identify the main gaps and opportunities in current Team Europe YPS
2. coordination.
3. Surface the missing questions that should guide mainstreaming efforts.
4. Explore how institutions across Team Europe can better coordinate with
5. youth-led organisations and partners in different regions.
6. Draw on relevant regional lessons (including those discussed in the learning
7. session) as inputs to inspire better coordination practices.
8. Produce concrete recommendations for political and operational mainstreaming.

### *Key Guiding Questions*

- What are the main challenges to integrate YPS and youth considerations in peace and security policies that are not considered 'youth-specific'?
- What important questions are not being asked, and how can they be integrated into coordination processes at HQ and in Team Europe coordination in third countries
- How can EU institutions, Member States, and EU Delegations better align them

approaches to YPS?

- What insights from regional mechanisms (including those discussed in the learning session) can support Team Europe's coordination?
- What practical tools or mechanisms could strengthen mainstreaming?

### *Executive Summary*

The session on Team Europe Coordination on Mainstreaming YPS was designed as an interactive roundtable discussion. Before splitting into two thematic groups on practical implementation and political coordination, the participants were asked to reflect on the main hurdles for implementing YPS into policies.

Participants highlighted several persistent barriers to effective YPS implementation, including limited political will, trust gaps between institutions and young people, siloed working structures, and tokenistic approaches to youth engagement. The discussion also emphasised the need to expand youth involvement in areas such as peacebuilding, security sector reform and humanitarian action, while making better use of existing but underutilised mechanisms that support youth participation.

The interactive group exercises focused on two main priorities: **strengthening political commitment and improving practical coordination**. Key recommendations included:

- increasing youth participation in decision-making
- facilitating regular intergenerational dialogue
- ensuring diverse representation, involving young people early in policy processes,
- supporting both youth and policymakers through targeted capacity-building

Participants also stressed the importance of **linking commitments with adequate funding and clearly communicating the risks of neglecting YPS**.

The session concluded that clearer indicators, sustained dialogue and more transparent coordination structures are essential for advancing meaningful youth engagement across Team Europe.

### **Content Summary of Session on Team Europe Coordination on Mainstreaming YPS**

#### **Ground Rules:**

The ground rules of the session were set. The focus was on creating and interactive and inclusive space, emphasising respectful interactions.

### Opening Remarks:

- **Mainstreaming Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Across Team Europe:**
  - Goal for today: Identifying unanswered questions related to YPS.
  - Focus on improving coordination and identifying knowledge/information gaps.
  - Drawing on relevant regional insights to inspire youth-driven engagement.
- **Double Purpose of the Discussion:**
  - Mainstreaming YPS in policies and enhancing coordination.
  - Key challenges:
    - How to mainstream YPS without diluting its importance.
    - Including youth in policies traditionally not seen as youth-centered (e.g., education, sports, security, agriculture).
- **Practical Example - Youth Check:**
  - Introduced last year to assess the potential impact of policies on youth.
  - Applied to European Commission policies, including those in:
    - Agriculture, Enlargement, and Budgets.
    - Security and Defense (partially included, yet there needs to be more discussion on practical implementation).
- **Key Questions that still need to be discussed and that should be integrated into the session:**
  - How can member states and institutions better align with YPS?
  - Are there lessons to be learned from other regional approaches that could inform Team Europe?

### Interactive Exercise: Main Barrier to YPS Integration in Non-Traditional Youth Policies:

Each participant receives a post-it note and writes down the main barriers they face in integrating YPS into policies, especially those that do not traditionally include youth considerations. Afterwards, these barriers were collected on a flipchart and clustered into core themes.

### Core Themes and Barriers to YPS Integration:

1. **Lack of Political Will:**
  - Political buy-in is often absent.
  - Negative stereotypes about youth participation.
  - Exclusion of youth from critical policy conversations.
2. **Trust Issues:**
  - Lack of trust in youth's expertise on "hard" issues.
  - Youth being instrumentalized for political gain.
3. **Working in Silos:**
  - Lack of knowledge exchange between sectors.
  - Youth voices are excluded due to hierarchical social norms.



4. **Tokenism:**
  - o Youth involvement is often symbolic rather than substantive.
  - o Lack of adequate financing and resources for meaningful youth participation.
5. **Inadequate Youth Networks on Security Issues:**
  - o There is a lack of youth networks addressing "harder" security issues like peacebuilding and disarmament.
6. **Access Issues:**
  - o Limited access for youth to participate in key policy-making discussions.

*Debrief: Interactive Exercise*

After collecting and clustering the participants' points, the groups came together to discuss their experiences in more detail.

- **Challenges Identified:**
  - o **Lack of Trust:** Youth are often seen as not capable of handling "hard" topics.
  - o **Political Will and Buy-in:** Access issues and entrenched hierarchies hinder inclusion.
  - o **Silos:** Information isn't shared effectively across sectors.
  - o **Tokenism:** Youth involvement remains superficial.
  - o **Limited Knowledge:** Policymakers often lack understanding of how to engage youth effectively.
  - o **Mainstreaming Climate Change Policies:** Climate change policies require broader sectoral integration, complicating the mainstreaming of YPS.
- **Untapped Areas for Youth Engagement:**
  - o **Peace and Security:** How to integrate youth perspectives into international peace and disarmament efforts?
  - o **Security Sector Reform:** Opportunities to involve youth in civilian oversight mechanisms.
  - o **Youth Inclusive Security Policies:** Need for a stronger focus on including youth in security sector reform and peacebuilding.
- **Youth's Role in Humanitarian Settings:**
  - o Youth are often excluded from policy-making despite being key actors in their communities (e.g., heads of families, peacebuilders, etc.).
  - o Youth should be included in areas such as terrorism response, peacebuilding, and humanitarian coordination.

- **Reflection on challenges in the context of policy-making / implementing YPS foreign policies from West Africa:**
  - Mechanisms for youth involvement are often limited.
  - Trust-building is essential between institutions and youth.
  - National Action Plans (NAPs) can be a useful tool for fostering youth involvement in policy discussions but they are not the only tool.

**Group Exercise:** The group was split into two groups to discuss the political and practical needs to ensure the efficient coordination and implementation of YPS efforts. The participants were given 25 minutes to discuss and come up with actionable policy recommendations.

**Political/Strategic Coordination: Focus on how to get more political coordination and buy-in for YPS.**

1. Improve youth political participation in decision-making (both traditional and non-traditional structures).
2. Foster frequent interaction and knowledge exchange between policymakers and young peacebuilders.
3. Raise awareness about the consequences of ignoring YPS (e.g., shifts in voting patterns).
  - a. Participants underlined the need to clearly communicate the **impact of not mainstreaming YPS**, including:
    - i. political consequences (e.g., changes in youth voting patterns)
    - ii. risks to prevention and peacebuilding efforts
    - iii. broader societal impacts when youth perspectives are excluded
    - iv. Stakeholders should understand both the benefits of mainstreaming and the costs of ignoring YPS.
4. Identify measurable benefits of YPS, including economic impact, to engage policymakers.
  - a. A participant proposed demonstrating the **economic impact** of YPS. For example:  
 “If you invest one euro in the YPS agenda, you may save several euros across sectors such as defence, education or social spending.”  
 Quantifying these impacts was seen as a persuasive strategy for policymakers, who often respond to concrete, measurable arguments.

**Practicalities: Focus on practical steps to facilitate coordination and information-sharing.**

1. Create spaces for intergenerational dialogue to build trust. Participants proposed establishing **structured intergenerational dialogues** to rebuild trust between generations. These spaces would enable meaningful exchange before transitioning into fast-paced policy or programming environments.
2. Ensure diverse representation of youth in decision-making bodies. This diversity helps avoid narrow or tokenistic youth engagement.
3. When involving young people, it is important to:
  - a. ensure geographical, socio-economic and gender diversity
  - b. include youth from both urban and rural areas
  - c. involve youth from different sides of political or social divisions.
4. Involve youth early in the process (not just during drafting, but also in identifying goals and interests).
5. Develop clear indicators to track progress and ensure accountability.
6. Strengthen capacity-building efforts for both young people and stakeholders.
  - a. Two-way capacity building is needed:
    - i. Train experts on how to safely and effectively include youth in dialogue.
    - ii. Train young people to engage confidently with decision-making bodies, speak publicly and present policy suggestions.
7. Match funding with commitments to youth inclusion. Participants emphasised that commitments must be matched with adequate funding. Policy ambition without financial resources limits meaningful implementation of the YPS agenda.

### Reflection of the Exercise:

- There is alignment across groups, but coordination efforts remain complex and context dependent. Although the groups were aligned on identifying barriers, the “so what” was more challenging. Turning reflections into practical political and operational strategies requires:
- Importance of identifying the right allies (e.g., finance, political decisions, stakeholder access). Without a proper understanding of stakeholders, it is difficult, especially for younger peacebuilders, to find a forum to be heard and included in policy discussions. Real change starts with convincing the right people. This includes:
  - engaging both governing and opposition actors
  - coordinating across diverse audiences and institutions
- Existing mechanisms for youth inclusion are underused and can be scaled up. Oftentimes, there are already mechanisms or policies in place, which allow

for the integration of youth perspectives. However, they remain at times untransparent or not publicised efficiently.

- o Participants mentioned existing coordination mechanisms, including examples from the Philippines and security sector reform environments, as practices that can be adapted or scaled.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

- The format allowed for young people to participate and share their experiences and engage in a nuanced dialogue with peers, policy makers and other relevant political stakeholders.
- The presence of a lot of policy makers and implementing partners allowed for critical reflection of the gaps between intent and execution when it comes to encouraging youth participation.
- The experiences and reflections of the young participants were well received by policy makers and allowed for them to reflect on how their actions are perceived through a youth lens.
- The group discussions allowed for more in-depth and meaningful intergenerational exchange on the matter, in which young participants were heard and treated as equal partners and resources to better understand the needs of young people in policy discussions.

### *Closing Thoughts:*

- This should not be the end of the conversation; we look forward to the outcome documents and the policy makers in the session to get inspired by the discussions of today.
- **Encouraging and enabling youth**
  - o Empowering youth, particularly in political participation, needs continuous support.
  - o Past programs have shown encouraging results when young people are supported through every step of the process.
  - o Youth engagement should be supported by influential cultural and political leaders.
- **Insights from policy makers**
  - o Policy proposals should be made concrete and identified in coordination groups.
  - o Having the right contacts and building relationships is key for advancing youth-related agendas.
- **Diplomacy and Quantification:**
  - o Quantifying the impact of youth inclusion can be difficult, but more models and evidence can provide better insight.

- o Engaging youth effectively requires both diplomatic skill and a data-driven approach to show the results.
- o **Successful diplomacy often comes down to knowing the people behind the institutions and identifying practical entry points for engagement.**

## **PARALLEL ROUNDTABLE SESSION: PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUNG PEACEBUILDERS ON THE GROUND: ENGAGE, EMPOWER, CONNECT**

### *Session Details*

The session counted around 25 participants, including youth delegates, civil society experts, and international organisations representatives (European Commission, United Nations).

The format consisted of a moderated roundtable discussion with interventions from youth participants and officials, followed by a facilitated Q&A session.

### *Session Objective*

This session sought to explore how Team Europe can jointly strengthen engagement with young partners by focusing on approaches that engage, empower, and connect youth peacebuilders in practical and impactful ways. Participants were to reflect on intergenerational dialogue, youth-adapted funding modalities, and strategies that prioritize safeguarding and the principle of Do No Harm, and explore models for long-term, sequential funding that build on prior youth programming investments and ensure continuity of impact. Special attention was given to mechanisms for transferring the knowledge generated from grassroots and community-based initiatives into policy and decision-making processes. By translating this local expertise into actionable steps, the session aimed to generate concrete recommendations for advancing the implementation of the YPS Agenda—ensuring that youth partnership becomes a cornerstone of sustainable peacebuilding efforts across all levels.

### *Executive Summary*

The roundtable explored how Team Europe can deepen meaningful partnerships with young peacebuilders by advancing approaches that engage, empower, and

connect youth actors across local, national, and regional levels. Participants highlighted persistent barriers—including limited access to funding, administrative burdens, unequal access to decision-making spaces, and safety risks—that prevent grassroots youth organisations from fully shaping peacebuilding policies and programming. Discussions emphasised that youth expertise, particularly grounded in lived experience of conflict, is critical for designing effective interventions and must be valued on equal footing with institutional knowledge. While existing mechanisms such as Youth Sounding Boards, the AU–EU Youth Lab, and UN-supported programmes provide useful foundations, participants stressed the need for clearer mandates, stronger policy influence, and long-term support structures.

The session underscored that meaningful engagement requires intergenerational collaboration built on trust, shared ownership, and sustained dialogue. Practical steps were proposed to make funding more accessible and sustainable, including sequential funding streams, support for organisational development, and safeguarding measures. Participants also identified the importance of translating grassroots insights into policy processes through community-based monitoring, age- and gender-disaggregated data, and transparent pathways to track how youth recommendations shape institutional decisions. Differing views emerged on direct vs. intermediary funding, balancing accountability with accessibility, and navigating structural limitations within institutions.

### **Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned**

- Meaningful youth participation requires platforms for co-shaping decisions, not advisory-only spaces.
- Grassroots youth remain hard to reach due to language, digital, administrative, and registration barriers.
- The sustainability of youth-led work depends on flexible and accessible funding models beyond the project-based model.
- Safeguarding, psychosocial support, and Do No Harm principles must be integrated across peacebuilding partnerships.
- Effective youth–institution partnerships require clear mandates, continuity mechanisms, and stronger influence pathways.

### **Actionable Follow-Up Recommendations**

- Develop multilingual, offline and locally grounded mechanisms to identify and reach grassroots youth peacebuilders.

- Create sequential and long-term funding tracks, including budget lines for admin, safeguarding, staff wellbeing, and continuity.
- Strengthen youth capacity in fundraising, organisational management, and monitoring practices.
- Establish transparent systems showing how youth inputs influence programming and policy decisions.
- Enhance community-based monitoring approaches and institutionalise age- and gender-disaggregated data use.
- Scale and adapt existing partnership models by clarifying mandates and expanding youth roles in “hard” security sectors.
- Continue EU support for youth-led initiatives under Youth Action Plans and develop youth-institutions networks linked to EU Delegations across the world.

### *Content Summary*

The African Union – European Union Youth Lab mechanisms were presented, combining the Youth Voices Lab with participation, networking, and feedback from youth representatives of 14 different countries; and the Youth Action Lab, re-granting to youth-led initiatives in 12 eligible countries over 2024-2028, implemented by NGO partners.

The UN’s peacebuilding fund youth programming was also presented. This year’s PBF thematic review focused on YPS. Among its main conclusions, socio-economic opportunities were found to be a prerequisite for social and political engagement of youth.

The Youth Action Plan of DG-INTPA supports the global implementation of the YPS agenda, including the UN network of young peacebuilders, youth sounding boards, and PVE programming. Despite a global decline in funding dedicated to peacebuilding, the EU managed to increase its funding to youth-led actions through the framework of this action plan.

- **How can Team Europe more effectively identify, reach, and include young peacebuilders working at the grassroots level, ensuring their voices are represented in policy and program design?**

Youth participants emphasised that many grassroots actors remain unreachable due to language barriers, digital divides, limited organisational capacity, lack of formal registration, and funding conditionalities that disqualify smaller initiatives.

Tools like the Youth Voices Lab app help broaden outreach but need further localisation.

Meaningful inclusion requires partnerships with community-based actors who understand local realities—reinforcing the call for ground-rooted collaboration.

Participants highlighted that meaningful engagement requires platforms enabling co-shaping, not “advisory-only” roles; sustained dialogue with institutions; shared decision-making power; and political support for youth-led priorities. Terminology matters: referring to youth groups as “advisory” risks limiting influence; framing must reflect the equal value of youth expertise.

- **What barriers currently prevent meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding partnerships, and what accountability mechanisms can ensure that engagement leads to real decision-making power rather than tokenism?**

Key obstacles include bureaucratic requirements (due diligence, financial reporting) that overwhelm small youth groups; short-term project cycles preventing continuity of impact; tokenistic consultation without decision-making power; scarcity of administrative, safeguarding and psychosocial support costs in youth-friendly funding instruments; unequal access to international spaces as a privilege; and imbalanced representation of young women—with tendencies for older women dominating WPS spaces, and young men YPS spaces.

For Team Europe, areas of improvement reside in building up the EU-youth network with EU delegations around the world as a community of practice; developing NAPs within EU countries drawing best practice from the African continent; making funding more accessible and flexible for youth; and creating a safe and supportive space online and offline for peacebuilders.

- **What examples of effective youth-institution partnerships exist, and how can these models be adapted or scaled across different contexts to strengthen youth-led peacebuilding?**

Mentioned or implied models included the Youth Sounding Boards (global and local), especially in fragile contexts; the AU-EU Youth Lab as an emerging model of co-creation and funding; multi-stakeholder coalitions (government + UN + CSO + youth) for reviewing successes and challenges; and foresight networks involving young peacebuilders in the Sahel.



These models were considered adaptable but require clearer mandates, more influence on policy decisions, and structural resources for sustainability.

- **What does authentic intergenerational dialogue look like in practice—where youth expertise is valued equally to that of senior actors—and how can Team Europe cultivate this culture?**

Participants described “authentic” dialogue as valuing youth expertise equally to senior leadership, recognising generational differences in emotional distance in conflict. Youth mediation and peacebuilding actions hold added value in both issues of the past, which youth may feel more distant from, and those of the present, where youth may be at the forefront of conflict. Collaboration through coalitions to amplify youth power was underlined as a powerful way forward.

Youth organisations should have clear theories of change, identifying their specific added value and where there is political space for change. Officials emphasised strategic engagement: “pick your battles” and pursue political connections. Beyond an advisory role, youth should seek to build political networks, find champions within relevant institutions, making successes their win as well as the youth’s. The importance of targeting intergenerational people-to-people connections in this endeavor was underlined.

- **What practical steps can be taken to make funding and capacity-building support more accessible, flexible, and sustainable for young peacebuilders, particularly in fragile or high-risk environments?**

Consistent concerns and proposals included the need for direct funding to youth-led groups, reducing intermediaries, and calls for long-term, sequential funding streams to build on existing youth programming. Youth highlighted missing budget lines (admin, staff wellbeing, safeguarding), especially in short-term or more flexible funding, forcing excessive voluntary labour. Officials reaffirmed intentions to make funding more accessible, despite increased donor scrutiny. A study was referenced showing high impact/ROI of youth-led initiatives, reinforcing arguments for investing in them.

Some participants advocated for direct funding to youth-led initiatives and going beyond project-based funding to enhance the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts. Others argued that indirect funding enables CSOs that undertake advocacy work to keep a certain distance from institutions. Participants also suggested investing in fundraising capacity-building to increase the independence of youth organisations,

and decrease the EU's dependency on large international organisations to implement youth programmes.

As the prioritisation levels of the YPS/WPS agendas are decreasing among many Member States, it was suggested to turn towards International Financial Institutions as a source of funding.

- **How can Team Europe design partnerships and monitoring mechanisms that protect and empower young peacebuilders—through safeguarding, peer learning, and the use of age- and gender-disaggregated data—to ensure real, sustained impact?**

Peacebuilding involves emotional and physical risks; safer funding models must integrate psychosocial support, safeguarding measures, digital protection (especially when countering online radicalisation), and clear Do No Harm principles.

Community-based monitoring surfaced as a strong mechanism, as youth monitoring teams uncovered barriers (e.g., women restricted from participation). Adaptive programming also proved essential when dealing with issues like addiction among youth beneficiaries.

Participants underlined that sustainable impact requires partnerships between youth, CSOs and local governments to transform agents of chaos into agents of peace; and that youth expertise must be valued equally beyond tokenism.

Areas of divergence included direct funding vs. risk-management constraints; balancing accountability with accessibility; unequal generational positioning in WPS/YPS spaces; and structural limitations within institutions to accommodate cross-department youth panels.

### *Reflection on Youth Participation*

The AU-EU lab co-presentation by a project expert and member of the Youth Advisory Board offered concrete perspectives on an example of partnership on the ground through an intergenerational approach. The set-up of participants and panelists all sitting around the same large rectangular table provided a physical space for moderated roundtable and face-to-face discussion between youth and panelists in a breakout session format.

Young participants stressed the need for direct, flexible and sustainable funding; for safe, supportive ecosystems—including psychosocial care; for opportunities to influence “hard” peace and security policies; stronger internal systems for continuity and mentoring; and institutional follow-through mechanisms to ensure youth recommendations to Team Europe translate into tangible programming shifts rather than remaining anecdotal.

### *Final recommendations*

- Develop **mechanisms to identify and reach grassroots young peacebuilders**, including multilingual, online and offline strategies.
- Build youth capacity for organisational continuity through **fundraising training, knowledge-transfer systems and tiered leadership models**, enhancing mentoring and coaching to ensure successful transitions between cycles of engagement and stronger institutional memory.
- Consider **short, medium and long-term impact** in project design, and consider **local realities** throughout the project cycle in order to reach realistic targets and objectives.
- Create **long-term, sequential funding tracks** allowing continuity beyond one-off grants.
- Strengthen **safeguarding** and psychosocial support within all youth-led funding schemes.
- Scale youth–institution partnership models by **defining influence pathways, elevating youth roles in “hard” security sectors, and improving internal coherence across institutional departments**.
- Enhance **community-based monitoring and evaluation** using age- and gender-disaggregated data.
- Promote **2-way communication systems for collecting, analysing and disseminating data** on what is working or not working in YPS.
- Ensure session recommendations feed into the **EU’s next 7-year budget negotiations**.

## **CLOSING SESSION: WHAT FUTURE FOR THE TEAM EUROPE APPROACH?**

Martin Bille Herman told young peacebuilders that they have had the opportunity to build bridges, to learn, to experiment their skills and knowledge in organising

sessions to promote the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, to know each other and their aspirations and talents, including artistic talents.

He noted that the young peacebuilders are finalising the Conference guiding document, the Joint Declaration, in which they state their priorities that will guide their work and through which they will be able to make positive pressure on the Institutions to deliver and accomplish!

We also raised awareness, he continued, among the EU Members States, of the importance of the adoption of the National Action Plans on Youth, Peace and Security even in absence of a conflict; we discussed on the possible insertion of the Youth, Peace and Security Dimension in the operational plans of both the Civilian and Military Missions of the EU in third countries.

Furthermore, he recalled the touching and very operationable interventions the day before by Bukar and by Noerine in the EU Council of Ministers' working group on the United Nations, and stressed that the doors are wide open and momentum has been gained for the scale up of cooperation with our Member States.

He concluded by saying that the young peacebuilders should remain connected in a permanent world – wide network in which they can self – organise, grow (both thematically and numerically) and not lose momentum and the Institutions help them, advise them, and stand side by side with them and share the same fight: to build peace!

His words were echoed by Hilde Deman, who subsequently raised a serious concern: in Belgium, all the 17 year old adolescents received a postcard inviting them to enrol in the military service. In other EU countries, notably in Germany, they are thinking of reintroducing compulsory military service. These are all worrying signals of a return to the past, that indicates dangerous shifts in mentalities and values. Hilde said that she doesn't wish to prejudge or to influence the free choice of young people to join the military should they wish to, but she called on the EU Member States to increase, in parallel, other types of offers for the young people, like training for peacebuilding, diplomatic academies and similar.

Valentina Aslani said that young people face interconnected and similar challenges which demand shared, youth centred solutions.

She then shared the following suggestions that were raised during some of the sessions she took part in:

1) Permanent mechanisms should be established at the EU level for youth participation with mandates, which includes mainstreaming YPS in all the policy dialogues. In this context, Italy will soon launch the 1st National Action Plan on YPS, while Finland launched the 2nd one and we have examples of good practice in Cyprus as well.

2) Funding is shrinking due to several factors such as pressures on governments' budgets and cuts to Official Development Assistance. Therefore, we should think strategically about collaboration over competition.

3) This conference has been a great opportunity to meet and exchange experiences among peers - we can start from here to build consortia that can work on complementarities and add value to the YPS Agenda overall.

4) We need to consider Partnerships as a space for shared (co-created) transformation - not a transfer (one - way process, from a source to a receiver) - in this way the YPS Agenda becomes a strategic imperative at all levels.

Yvette Ruth Ariwo Adhiambo raised the issue of “selective advocacy” to her fellow young peacebuilders: “sometimes we ignore some conflicts especially in Africa. It's not a “victim” mindset, but the reality! A lot is happening in Africa and we need global voices to speak up and create awareness about it. Let's start with Sudan , DRC and Tanzania! Let's all speak for each other and let's unite together to achieve peace!

On the inclusion of more women in peace processes: “we face a lot of discrimination when working for peace, let us be at the forefront not as audiences but also voices and decisionmakers when it comes to peace!”

## **SPECIAL FOCUS SESSION: TOWARDS AN ITALIAN NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON YPS**

This event was hosted at the Residence by the Representative at the “COPS/PSC” (Political and Security Committee, an EU Council Working Group), HE Ambassador Andrea Orizio.

The meeting, which was inter alia attended by high-level representatives of the European External Action Service (Deputy Managing Director for Multilateral Relations, Ms Ronner-Grubacic), the European Commission, the EU Member States

(COPS Ambassadors) and the United Nations, provided an opportunity for interactive dialogue with young activists and made it possible to highlight Italy's commitment to promoting greater integration of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in the various areas of the European Union's external action.

In particular, the outlines of the forthcoming National Action Plan were outlined, also with a view to encouraging other Member States to move in the same direction. In addition to the desire to invest in initiatives that increase the space dedicated to young people in peace mediation and conflict prevention, Mr Orizio recalled, in his introduction, Italy's focus on programmes to promote their active participation in EU operations and missions. In order to ensure the sustainability of peace processes, Ms Ronner-Grubacic stressed that it is essential to better integrate the perspective of young people and exploit their potential as agents of change, who have shown capacity for political mobilisation for the protection of their rights in different areas of the world ("youthquake", in her words).

The meeting was also attended by:

- Luca Fratini (who also gave an opening speech together with Amb. Orizio and Stella Ronner-Grubacic) coordinator of the Agendas "Youth, Peace and Security", "Women, Peace and Security", Mediation Policies and Deputy Director for Human Rights and the United Nations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.
- Cristiana Carletti: Prof. International Law Public University Roma Tre and Expert of the Interministerial Committee on Human Rights / Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Marjus Cevoli and Valentina Aslani: Co-chairs of the Italian Youth Peace and Security Coalition.

## **FRIDAY, 14 NOVEMBER**

### **FINALISING THE JOINT DECLARATION**

Following the preparatory phase that consisted in three online meetings (on 10 October - explanation of the process, 21 October - floor to the young peacebuilders to present their ideas and declare their ideological intentions on the basis of which they will table the amendments and 7 November - presentation of the amendments by the young peacebuilders), with two time spans in which the young peacebuilders had the

possibility to table the amendments to the draft text - from 21 October to 2 November and from 7 November until 13 November at 20:00 CET), the final adoption process of the Joint Declaration was conducted by Rok Koželj and his colleagues from the EEAS Secretariat.

It started with a catch-the-eye moment, in which every participant could raise their hand to speak about the Declaration and “make a case” for his / her individual or group amendment.

Around 15 young peacebuilders profited from this occasion.

Then, the participants split into thematic working groups to table additional group amendments. A total of 5 additional amendments were tabled in this way, on top of the more than 130 amendments already tabled before, during the preparatory activities or the previous Conference days.

Then, at around 11:15 we started the voting procedure: 67 amendments were voted upon **by around 90 participants present in the room**. Additional clarifications were provided by the Secretariat. The session was suspended due to time constraints at 13:00, and resumed online on Tuesday 18 November at 15:30. At resumption, **voting on the remaining 73 amendments was successfully completed by the 37 ( + 3 interpreters) participants** that connected to the session. Among these 40 participants, 3 disconnected before the final vote, so the Joint Declaration was formally adopted with **22 votes in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention and 14 young participants not participating in the online vote**.

As the Joint Declaration is open to endorsement by the EU Member States and other relevant stakeholders and practitioners, up to the time of writing (beginning of December 2025), the Secretariat received the following communications from the EU Member States:

- Ireland *“welcomes the process of youth peacebuilders convening, consulting and developing the Joint Declaration in a participatory manner, and restates its support for the YPS agenda.”*
- Spain: *“Spain welcomes the organisers and the young peacebuilders gathered in Brussels for the Second EU Youth, Peace and Security Conference, and congratulates them on the important work carried out, while reiterating its strong support for the YPS agenda.”*

- Belgium: *"Belgium welcomes the process of youth peacebuilders convening, consulting and developing the Joint Declaration in a participatory manner, and restates our support for the YPS agenda."*
- Finland: *"We are not able to express direct political support to the declaration, but in line with some other Member States, we would also like to warmly welcome the process, expressing our support to strengthening the voice and agency of the youth and to making the YPS-agenda more visible. We also appreciate that Finland's second YPS NAP is mentioned in the declaration."*

The Joint Declaration is also open to endorsement by individuals and organisations. In this framework, we received the following from the United Nations Development Programme: *"Please count on UNDP's support to follow up on the Declaration, and we will gladly engage our Country Offices and YPS experts to ensure continuity of this work at the national level and turn the Declaration into tangible outcomes for young peacebuilders on the ground. We look forward to continuing our great collaboration and advancing our shared efforts to promote the joint declaration and the YPS agenda."*

Any further updates on the support to the Joint Declaration by the EU Member States will be communicated to the participants via the WhatsApp group "EU YPS Conference 2025" and via e-mail.

## SECOND PROGRESS STUDY REPORT — REFLECTIONS ON AGENDA 2250 IMPLEMENTATION

### *Introduction*

This consultation explored youth perspectives on the global implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace and Security – YPS), highlighting innovative approaches, recurring challenges, and contextual differences across regions. Participants emphasized the importance of grounding the agenda in lived realities, avoiding generalizations, and ensuring meaningful—not tokenistic—youth participation.

#### 1. Innovative Framing of Agenda 2250

The consultation began by discussing the value of showcasing best practices from different parts of the world. This approach was viewed as innovative, as it shifts the focus from gaps to successful models that can inspire adaptation elsewhere.



Participants stressed that sharing what works helps build momentum and fosters ownership among young peacebuilders.

However, they noted that discussions on peace often lack a nuanced understanding of identity—an element frequently overlooked in peace frameworks. Addressing identity through intercultural and cross-cultural approaches was identified as essential to strengthening the YPS agenda.

## 2. Rebalancing Peace and Security

Young participants pointed out a persistent imbalance: while global debates emphasise peace, discussions of security are often sidelined or framed only in traditional terms. They argued that security should be understood through a broader human security lens.

Access to education, basic services, and fundamental rights were highlighted as central to a non-traditional approach to security. When these needs are not met, protection gaps arise and youth often turn to social unrest as a mechanism to demand accountability.

Participants underscored that reports should therefore prioritise:

- Protection
- Structural and transformative solutions, and
- The fulfilment of basic rights and services
- These elements were considered critical to preventing violence and instability.

## 3. Divergent Realities, Shared Concerns

Although priorities vary across regions, youth from different countries expressed parallel forms of insecurity:

- Finland: Young people experience insecurity linked to feelings of unsafety, even when material conditions are relatively stable. Social fragmentation, political polarization, and mental health concerns shape their perspectives.

- Pakistan: Youth face a material and existential insecurity stemming from a lack of opportunities, kidnappings, trafficking, gender inequality, and systemic violence. Their concerns are grounded in daily risks and structural exclusion.

Despite these contrasting realities, both contexts reveal a shared desire for secure, equitable, and inclusive societies.

Participants emphasised that consultations and reports should avoid generalising youth concerns across contexts, as this undermines the specificity required for meaningful policy action.

#### 4. The Role and Limitations of the YPS Agenda

Youth stressed that the YPS agenda is important because it provides an entry point to influence governments and create cascading effects at the national level. It equips youth with a political tool to advocate for reform, accountability, and institutional responsiveness.

However, participants raised a critical issue:

Implementation often becomes tokenistic, with youth included symbolically but not meaningfully.

To address this, they recommended:

1. Conducting consultations directly in territories, ensuring representation from diverse and marginalized groups.
2. Developing context-specific analyses, grounded in local realities rather than broad generalizations.
3. Strengthening accountability mechanisms to ensure that youth input leads to measurable change.

### ***Conclusion***

The consultation highlighted that while the global YPS agenda has advanced, progress remains uneven and often superficial. For Agenda 2250 to remain relevant and transformative, youth perspectives must be integrated through localized consultations, intercultural approaches, and a broader understanding of security rooted in human rights and access to basic services.

## PARTICIPANT VOICES

La paix durable ne se construit pas pour les jeunes, elle se construit avec les jeunes : en leur donnant la parole, on leur donne le pouvoir de transformer les crises en opportunités.

*Fatoumata Dia (Senegal)*

"Tujiunge sote Tutimize Amani" (Let's unite together and achieve peace)

*Yvette Ruth Ariwo Adhiambo (Kenya)*

\*\*\*

African girl

I am an African girl,  
In the saharan desert,  
I dance and I swirl  
I wear cowrie shells around my neck,  
I own no pearls  
When in the west,  
I dance to the sound of Djembe  
And I sing sweet highlife all day  
My feet leads me to the mighty Amazon  
For the kingdom of Dahomey, they bravely fought  
Then I twirl to the Central,  
I walk to the Kivu river  
then echo; Kende Malamu  
And In the sky I soar and I fly  
Sawubona!!!  
Guess where I just landed?

Of course in the South  
Here, I sing in Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa  
Habari, can you hear me sing in the east?  
I savor ugali, oh what a feast!  
With matoke my soul finds peace  
I am an African girl,  
I stand in the North, South, Central, West and East  
With Ubuntu in my heart, I fear no beast  
I am here, I am there, I am everywhere  
I am an African girl, I claim my space  
Carrying the strength of women who came before me with grace.

*Anjali Vurden (Mauritius)*

If the table is not accommodating, if the table is so rigid that it can't be redesigned by us (the youth), maybe, it's high time we begin to break the table down!

*Mobile M. Jöthdīt (South Sudan)*



“It is always such a magic moment when young people from across the world show up with and for each other – what a beautiful and powerful group of human beings. Signing off with an Irish proverb: Ni neart go cur le chéile – There’s no strength without unity.”