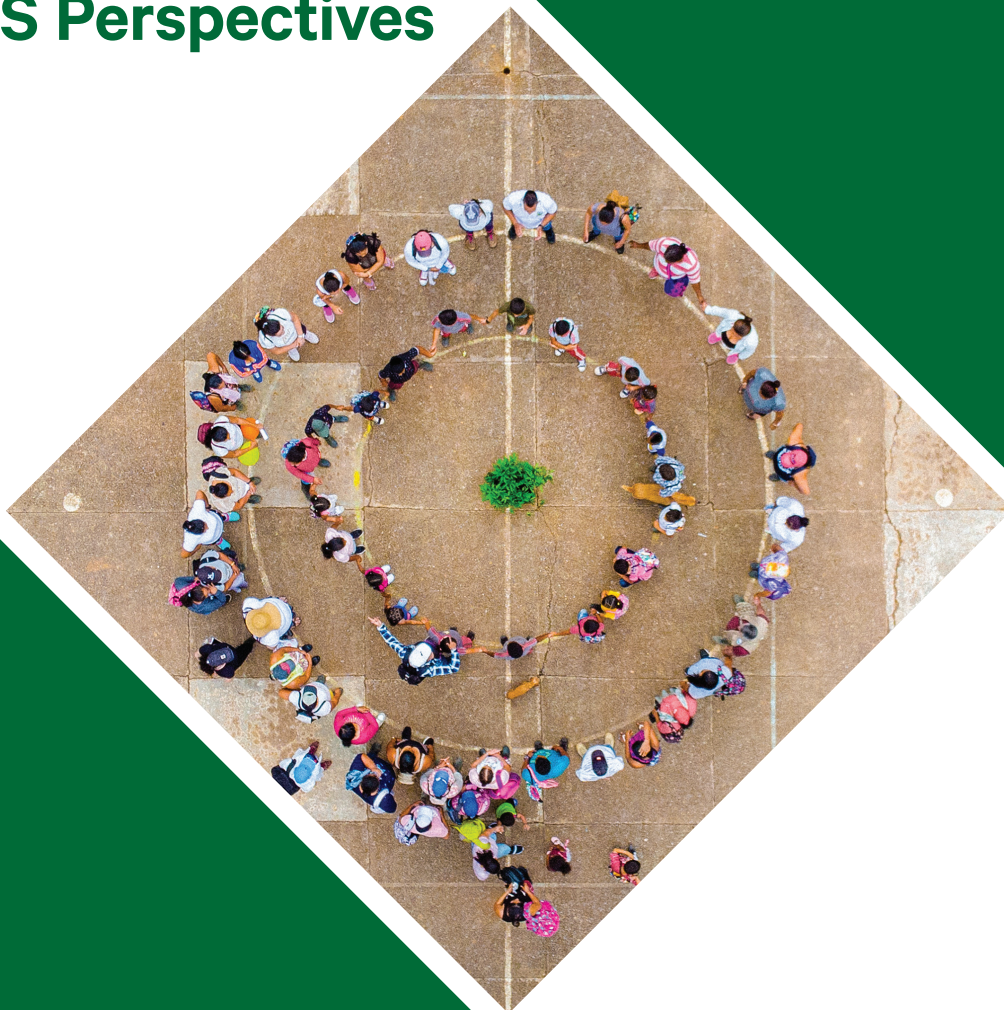


BKHS Perspectives



**Peace powered by youth: Germany
needs to champion the Youth,
Peace and Security agenda**



Bundeskanzler
Helmut Schmidt
Stiftung

Key findings and recommendations

- #1 Youth as force for peace:** Youth are not only leaders of tomorrow but already leading change today. The UN Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda recognises their important contributions to peace and security and calls for their meaningful inclusion as partners for peace.
- #2 Universal relevance:** Germany should strengthen and support efforts to implement the YPS agenda internationally and recognise the relevance of YPS in Germany to address current security crises, such as increasing institutional mistrust and polarisation. Credible YPS support in other countries requires strong domestic implementation.
- #3 Intergenerational agenda:** The YPS agenda addresses intergenerational challenges, benefits the entire society and must be implemented in genuine cross-generational partnerships.
- #4 YPS by Germany – foreign policy:** Germany should actively champion YPS in the UN, including in the Peacebuilding Commission and during its candidacy for a Security Council seat in 2027/28; push for a coordinated Team Europe approach to integrate YPS into EU external and domestic action; and strengthen YPS in development cooperation efforts.
- #5 YPS made in Germany – domestic implementation:** YPS should be implemented via an interministerial approach together with diverse youth. The YPS agenda should be embedded into existing policies, such as the Youth Strategy and the National Security Strategy. German civil society must take ownership of YPS and bridge the gaps between youth, peace and security actors.

Peace powered by youth: Germany needs to champion the Youth, Peace and Security agenda

Author: **Kirsten Hartmann**

What do the recent mass protests in Kenya, Nepal and Morocco have in common? All of them were labelled as ‘Gen Z’ protests – referring to the generation of those born in the late 1990s and early 2000s – as they saw mass uprising of young people in the streets. In Kenya, the protests were seemingly triggered by a proposed finance bill, in Nepal, by a social media ban and in Morocco, by the government planning to allocate funding for soccer World Cups rather than social services. However, the roots of these protests are structural and related to exclusion, mistrust and demands for accountability. As one protester in Nepal pointed out: “(...) it’s about silencing our voices, and we won’t let that happen.”¹ Young people around the world are claiming their right to be included in decisions that are made about their present and their future. A call for meaningful inclusion and participation of youth is at the heart of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, which recognises young people as agents of positive change and calls for their inclusion as partners for peace and security. Yet, ten years after YPS was formalised for the first time in the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2250 in 2015, implementation of the agenda remains uneven and under-resourced across the world. However, the agenda holds untapped potential for more sustainable and inclusive peace and security everywhere – from Kenya to Nepal and Morocco to Germany.

This policy paper contains recommendations for German decision-makers and civil society on how to strengthen the YPS agenda in Germany’s foreign and domestic policies. It builds on research conducted in the project “Gen P(eacebuilder) – Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda” of the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung.² In addition to extensive literature research, it is informed by insights from an on-site workshop with 11 YPS experts from eight countries held in Hamburg in June/July 2025.³ Additionally, the author⁴ conducted 20 qualitative research interviews with German and international (young) researchers and YPS practitioners working in organisations, networks or independently from March until August 2025.⁵

This paper begins by introducing the conceptual foundation of the YPS agenda before providing an overview of the progress that has been made and the continuous challenges after ten years of efforts to implement YPS. It then debunks six myths on YPS to explore its potential opportunities in a changing world order. Finally, the paper provides actionable recommendations to German decision makers on how Germany can advance YPS implementation, both nationally and internationally.⁶ Overall, the paper argues that Germany should assume a stronger role in implementing YPS and recognise it as essential to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace.

1 Dahal, Phanindra; Atkinson, Emily & Khan, Iftikhar (2025). [What we know about Nepal](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crkj0lzl3ro) anti-corruption protests as PM resigns, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crkj0lzl3ro> (last access 10.11.2025).

2 Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung (n.d.): [Gen P\(eacebuilder\) – Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda](https://www.helmut-schmidt.de/en/gen-peacebuilder), <https://www.helmut-schmidt.de/en/gen-peacebuilder> (last access 10.11.2025).

3 The author would like to sincerely thank Alina Reize (Germany), Bakary Sonko (The Gambia), Christine Odera (Kenya), Datu Raid Salik (The Philippines), Ehab Badwi (Syria/Germany), Galia Kademian (Argentina), Hannah Koch (Germany), Lisa Mastiaux (Germany), Paul Klahre (Germany), Paula Pättikangas (Finland), Velimir Milošev (Serbia) for their valuable input during the workshop.

4 The author, being born and socialised in Germany, is aware that the policy brief will have her biases.

5 All interview partners were anonymised that they could not be identified. The interviews were conducted virtually in English and German and coded according to a standardised scheme using a number, general profession/identification title and interview date. The author is deeply grateful to all the interviewees.

6 The author would like to thank Luisa Kern, Ines Meyer and several anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments to drafts of this paper.

Setting the scene: YPS who (and why)?

Providing an introduction to the YPS agenda is a difficult endeavour given that it unfolds in parallel on several levels – all of which are sometimes, yet not always, interconnected. YPS centres youth as positive agents of peace and security and urges countries to support the potentials of youth and intergenerational partnerships towards building and sustaining peace. In 2015, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 2250 that recognised for the first time “the important and positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”⁷ Five intersecting pillars of action were identified: participation, protection, prevention, partnership, and disengagement and reintegration. In short, the YPS agenda aims to increase youth participation in decision-making at all levels, ensure youth protection and human rights, support youth in preventing violence, strengthen partnerships in peacebuilding between youth, community actors and international organisations and support youth affected by and involved in conflict. To date, in total three resolutions constitute the normative framework of YPS – after Resolution 2250 set the ground, Resolution 2419 called for youth participation in peace processes in 2018 and, in 2020, Resolution 2535 urged for increased institutionalisation of the agenda. The agenda is unique in that it has been shaped by youth leadership from the outset, as UNSC Resolution 2250 was the product of years of advocacy by young peacebuilders and their partners.⁸ Additionally, interviewees and workshop participants stressed that, while the resolution represents a landmark milestone in recognising youths’ important role,

young people have worked to build and sustain peace long before 2015.⁹ Young people and their allies remain still today the driving force behind realising the agenda and its principles at local, national and global levels.

This policy paper refers to youth/young people in line with the YPS agenda, which defines them as those 18 to 29 years old. It recognises variations at national and international levels, such as in the AU, where young people are defined as those aged 15 to 35.¹⁰ Nonetheless, youth is a socially-constructed category and culturally and context-dependent rather than solely age-related.¹¹ Furthermore, like any other population group, ‘the youth’ are not a homogenous group, but a diverse demographic consisting of young people with different needs, perspectives and experiences – both within and between countries. Given that youthhood is a transitional stage, the youth is a constantly changing group.

As this policy paper primarily focuses on *how* Germany should implement the agenda, *why* it is needed will only be briefly explained. The rationale for YPS is (at least) fourfold. The first reason concerns young people’s demographic weight: today’s youth not only represent the largest global youth population ever, but in many conflict-affected contexts young people also constitute the majority of the population. For instance, in Gaza, 70 percent of the population is below 30 years old.¹² Second, quite simply, young people have a right to be included in decisions that affect their present and their future. Third, they are disproportionately affected by conflict and violence, including by being harmed, displaced or recruited by armed groups: the Institute for

7 [UN Security Council Resolution – S/RES/2250](https://docs.un.org/en/S/res/2250(2015)) (2015), [https://docs.un.org/en/S/res/2250\(2015\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/res/2250(2015)) (last access 10.11.2025).

8 Berents, Helen (2022). Power, Partnership, and Youth as Norm Entrepreneurs: Getting to UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(3); Berents, Helen & Prellis, Saji (2020). [More than a milestone: The road to UN Security Council Resolution 2250](https://documents.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The_Story_of_2250_FINAL_MK_3.pdf) on Youth, Peace and Security. Search for Common Ground/ Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, https://documents.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The_Story_of_2250_FINAL_MK_3.pdf (last access 10.11.2025).

9 Interview INT-12, Youth peace advocate from Colombia, 26.05.2025.

10 UN Security Council Resolution – S/RES/2250 (2015).

11 Özerdem, Alpaslan & Podder, Sukanya (2015). *Youth in conflict and peacebuilding: Mobilization, reintegration and reconciliation*. Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan; Simpson, Graeme, UNFPA & UN Peacebuilding Support Office (2018). [The missing peace: independent progress study on youth, peace and security](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3846611?v=pdf), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3846611?v=pdf> (last access 10.11.2025).

12 United Nations (2024). [‘Investing in youth is investing in peace’: UN Security Council hears. UN news](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148671), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148671> (last access 10.11.2025).

Economics and Peace estimates that one in four young people are globally affected by armed conflict or some form of violence.¹³ Youth experience direct physical violence as well as several forms of structural violence stemming from their continued political, social and economic exclusion.¹⁴ Yet, beyond being victims of and sometimes perpetrators of violence, youth are actively contributing to preventing conflict as well as building and sustaining peace and security on a daily basis. Youth are not only working for a more peaceful future for themselves, but for entire societies. Research has shown that more inclusive peace efforts will result in more sustainable peace outcomes and that youth-led and youth-supporting peacebuilding programming generates five- to ten-fold social returns on investment for society as a whole.¹⁵ According to one interviewee, rather than asking why youth need to be included in peace efforts, the real question should be why this has not already been the case for a long time.¹⁶ Lastly, establishing a global agenda around youth inclusion in peace and security holds strategic value, according to YPS experts. The official recognition of youths' important role through the UNSC, the highest body for international peace and security, provided legitimacy to and set off the important narrative shift of youth as partner for peace rather than perpetrators of violence. The agenda filled the existing gap in regard to a relevant yet marginalised demographic in peace and security discussions – one with experiences and needs that are distinct from those of children and women addressed in the 'Children and Armed Conflict' and the 'Women, Peace and Security' agendas, respectively. It also provided young peacebuilders and their allies with the framework to have a "foot in

the door"¹⁷ and to hold institutions and governments accountable for their commitments and push for the agenda's implementation.

10 years of YPS – Recognised but not realised

The year 2025 marks the 10th anniversary of the UNSC Resolution 2250 that established the global YPS agenda in December 2015. Anniversary years invite to take stock of the (missing) progress made in implementing a given framework. There has been increasing awareness and institutionalisation of the YPS agenda at the multilateral, regional, national and local levels. However, continuous challenges related to knowledge of the agenda, funding and uneven implementation persist and are exacerbated by current conflict and geopolitical dynamics.¹⁸

Slowly but surely: Progress

Workshop participants and interview partners highlighted the increasing awareness and mainstreaming of YPS in institutions.¹⁹ At the UN level, institutionalisation is visible through the establishment of the UN youth office in 2022 and the strengthening of the position of the Youth Envoy to the Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs in 2023. The UNSC, driven primarily by elected council members, has engaged in several efforts to advance the YPS agenda in the UN context, such as by requesting the Secretary-General to report biannually on the implementation of the three resolutions starting in 2020; inserting YPS

13 Simpson, Graeme; UNFPA & UN Peacebuilding Support Office (2018). *The missing peace: independent progress study on youth, peace and security*.

14 Ibid.

15 Nilsson, D. (2012). Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace, *International Interactions*, 38(2), 243–266; Kumar, Shubha; Olsen, Sara; Mallett, Aaron & Prellis, Saji (2023). *Summary Report | Building Evidence for Peacebuilding Investments*, Connexus, <https://cnxus.org/resource/building-evidence-for-peacebuilding-investments-a-snapshot-of-youth-led-youth-supporting-peacebuilding-programs-in-kenya-yields-five-to-ten-fold-social-returns-on-investment-sroi/> (last access 10.11.2025).

16 Interview INT-02, Chairman of an international peace organisation, 28.03.2025.

17 Interview INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025.

18 As mentioned by some interviewees, the author is aware that assessing (missing) progress is biased by one's own perspective, knowledge and interests and only presents a limited picture of the reality.

19 Interviews INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025; INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025; INT-20, YPS expert from Finland, 13.08.2025.

into numerous mandates of UN peace operations; and inviting youth briefers to participate in council meetings.²⁰ In addition, UN entities and partners have developed information and training materials on YPS; the Peacebuilding Fund of the Secretary-General launched a special funding modality, the Youth Promotion Initiative, in 2016; and the UN Peacebuilding Commission adopted a Strategic Action Plan on Youth and Peacebuilding in 2021, to name a few examples.²¹

Beyond the UN level, there have been several efforts to mainstream the YPS agenda across regional organisations as well. The AU has adopted a Continental Framework on YPS with a ten-year implementation plan (2020-2029) and launched the Youth for Peace (Africa) Program with the current third cohort of five regional African Youth Ambassadors for Peace.²² In addition, the League of Arab States adopted the Arab Strategy for YPS (2023-2028) while ASEAN established several youth-focused mechanisms that facilitate engagement between youth and ASEAN leaders while also recently launching a regional study on YPS in ASEAN.²³ After the first EU YPS Conference in 2018, the EU integrated YPS in the first Youth Action Plan in EU External Action (2022-2027). In 2025, the EU

YPS coalition and Team Europe²⁴ partners hosted the second EU YPS conference to advance YPS implementation by the EU and its Member States.²⁵

At the national level, the most common pathway to YPS implementation is a National Action Plan (NAP) – a document that outlines a country’s strategy to implement the YPS agenda, modelled after the NAPs adopted to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. To date, 11 countries have adopted a NAP on YPS – the majority being from the African continent – and several other countries across the world are at different stages of developing one.²⁶ Beyond counting the numbers of NAPs on YPS, many workshop participants and interviewees emphasised the importance of other efforts. They highlighted the creation of networks and so-called YPS coalitions on (sub-)national or regional levels as well as knowledge exchange and local initiatives on YPS that are happening below the surface and that remain invisible in most public discussions.²⁷

Due to insufficient available data as well as *YPS-ish* efforts that implement YPS principles but do not reference the agenda in their work, there is unfortunately no way to provide a comprehensive picture of YPS progress.

20 Security Council Report (2024): [Future of the Pact: Recommendations for Security Council Action](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/research-reports/future-of-the-pact-recommendations-for-security-council-action.php), <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/research-reports/future-of-the-pact-recommendations-for-security-council-action.php> (last access 10.11.2025).

21 United Nations & Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). [Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/ypps_programming_handbook.pdf), https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/ypps_programming_handbook.pdf (last access 10.11.2025); [UN Peacebuilding](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/gypi-en) (n.d.). Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/gypi-en> (last access 10.11.2025); [UN Peacebuilding](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/PBC_Youth%20Strategic%20Action%20Plan) (n.d.). The Peacebuilding Commission’s Strategic Action Plan on Youth and Peacebuilding, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/PBC_Youth%20Strategic%20Action%20Plan (last access 10.11.2025).

22 African Union (2020). [Continental Framework](https://www.au.int/en/documents/20200821/continental-framework-youth-peace-and-security) for Youth, Peace and Security, <https://www.au.int/en/documents/20200821/continental-framework-youth-peace-and-security> (last access 10.11.2025); African Union (2025). [Youth for Peace \(Y4P\) Africa Programme](https://www.peaceau.org/en/page/110-youth-for-peace-africa-programme), <https://www.peaceau.org/en/page/110-youth-for-peace-africa-programme> (last access 10.11.2025).

23 League of Arab States (2023). [The Arab Strategy for Youth, Peace and Security](https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/en_report_final_for_web.pdf) (2023-2028), https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/en_report_final_for_web.pdf (last access 10.11.2025); ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (2025). Regional Study on YPS, <https://asean-aipr.org/resources/publications/asean-ipr-regional-study-on-youth-peace-and-security-ypps-> (last access 10.11.2025).

24 Team Europe consists of the EU, its member states, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

25 [European Union External Action](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/youth-peace-security-agenda_en) (2025). Youth, Peace and Security agenda, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/youth-peace-security-agenda_en (last access 10.11.2025).

26 [YPS Monitor](https://yppsmonitor.com/naps) (n.d.). National Action Plans, <https://yppsmonitor.com/naps> (last access 10.11.2025).

27 Interviews INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025; INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025; INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025.

National Action Plans (NAPs) – What to keep in mind?

During the interviews and workshop discussions, YPS experts emphasised the following points for developing and implementing NAPs on YPS:

- **Process is key:** The process matters as much as the outcome. The NAP document is not the final product but only the start of the journey. It needs to be embedded in broader efforts to implement YPS at local, national and international levels.
- **Inclusive & participatory:** Youth from diverse backgrounds within a certain context – e.g. youth from rural areas, youth with disabilities, young refugees – need to be part of a participatory process. Intergenerational partnerships are crucial.
- **Full-cycle inclusion:** Youth need to be meaningfully included at every stage, from the design of the process through the implementation of the NAP to its evaluation and follow-up.
- **No paper tiger:** While the adoption of the NAP document is important, the focus should be on its implementation and its impact. Clear indicators to regularly measure (missing) progress are needed to hold political stakeholders accountable.
- **Time & resources:** The process of developing a NAP should not be rushed. Planning, consulting as well as implementation and evaluation processes require sufficient human and financial resources.
- **Contextualise & localise:** The intersecting YPS pillars must be adapted to the varying needs of youth and specific political, socioeconomic and cultural contexts in a country, including at subnational levels.
- **Political will:** Adopting and implementing a NAP requires continuous political buy-in for NAPs to “lead to action” rather than remaining “plans for action”²⁸.
- **Mutual learning:** Knowledge exchange is crucial for countries and institutions to learn from existing NAP development processes.
- **Alternatives:** Implementation of the YPS agenda should not be reduced to NAPs. A NAP must not be the *right* instrument to implement YPS in each context.

Nice-to-have, but...: Continuous challenges

Barriers to YPS implementation are widespread and the following section focuses on those emphasised by YPS experts during the workshop and in interviews and sheds light on their interconnections. They relate to knowledge and ownership gaps, lacking political will, increasing risks and shrinking funding for young peacebuilders and sidelining YPS in the current UN crisis mode.

YPS knowledge and ownership gaps

Many workshop participants and interviewees referred to the lacking knowledge and ownership of the YPS agenda among young and older people. This relates to different aspects. Youthhood is a transitional stage resulting in a permanently changing population group. One interviewee noted that, in contrast to WPS advocates, this fluidity makes it harder to build consistent networks and to transfer knowledge.²⁹ Further, the agenda is perceived as ‘foreign’ by many youths. Experts referred to the agenda’s (exclusive) language and the fact that not only are most YPS discussions in English and fail to reach certain people but also point to the technical jargon and a lack of understanding of what it actually means on the ground.³⁰ Discussions highlighted that the mistrust in the multilateral system recently exacerbated by the UNSC blockage and its resulting inability to deal with major conflicts, particularly the war in Gaza, hinders ownership of what continues to be perceived as an UN agenda. A common point raised by YPS experts from different regions was that youth do not identify with the YPS agenda as they do not describe themselves as ‘peacebuilders’, while what they are doing – from climate activism to strengthening social cohesion in their communities – *is* peacebuilding. Some YPS experts reflected that this is not

28 Kern, Luisa (2025). Do National Action Plans actually lead to action on the Youth, Peace and Security?. [UNU-CPR](https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/do-national-action-plans-actually-lead-action-youth-peace-and-security-agenda), <https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/do-national-action-plans-actually-lead-action-youth-peace-and-security-agenda> (last access 10.11.2025).

29 Interview INT-19, Researcher, 22.07.2025.

30 Interview INT-11, Youth peace activist and chair of a youth-led civil society organisation in Yemen, 20.05.2025.

necessarily a problem as the YPS framework needs to support the work young peacebuilders are already doing rather than forcing them to adapt their work to ‘fit’ into an agenda.³¹ Nevertheless, the lack of widespread awareness of the agenda results in a limited circle of people engaging with it. YPS experts self-reflectively noted that active young people are those who can afford it and have the time, money, knowledge and skills, which excludes a broad range of diverse young people. This is not to blame young peacebuilders – many of whom spend their time and resources on peace and security efforts, some until activist burnout or others even sacrificing their lives – but governments and institutions that rely on their (mostly) voluntary engagement, fail to adequately support, protect and partner with youth and continue to exclude them economically, socially and politically. YPS experts stressed that awareness of the agenda, knowledge and skills are needed across a broad range of youth but also among older people. Too often, the YPS agenda seems to be misunderstood, for instance when YPS is mentioned in the context of talking about children, while the agenda refers to people aged 18-29 who are, in fact, adults.³²

Lacking political will to advance YPS

Several YPS experts further emphasised the lacking political will to implement the agenda. The supportive rhetorical commitments from institutions and member states often do not translate into significant policy changes and meaningful action on YPS. This lacking political will intersects with three

continuous challenges. First, workshop and interview partners highlighted that narratives of young people as potential peace spoilers widely persist. Those damaging stereotypes are largely based on the so-called ‘youth bulge’ theory that – based on flawed theoretical assumptions – frames (particularly male) youth as current or future perpetrators of violence and, as a result, creates a “policy panic”.³³ While some youths are involved in criminal or violent activities, the large majority are not. And as one interviewee put it: we would not consider all adults potential security risks simply because a few are.³⁴ While YPS advocates actively try to shift this limiting narrative, it continues to inform securitised policy responses and to shape partnerships with youth. Second, most participants and interviewees reflected on insufficient funding as a major challenge. Despite an overall increase in peacebuilding funding, direct investments in youth organisations, in particular, are missing. Most youth-led organisations operate with an annual budget of 5,000 US-dollars or less. Their funding is often restricted to project-based, short-term and inflexible opportunities, hindering the sustainability of their impact.³⁵ Lastly, it is a “data poor” field – the different definitions of youth across countries and regions further contribute to that.³⁶ The lack of (age-disaggregated) data on youth in project funding but also on YPS progress more generally results in difficulties to proving impact and making the case for more YPS investment. One interviewee argued that the lack of available research and data also mirrors the lacking political interest in the topic.³⁷

31 Interviews INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in Conflict Studies, 02.04.2025; INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025; INT-10, Independent YPS expert, 08.05.2025; INT-12, Youth peace advocate from Colombia, 26.05.2025; INT-14, YPS activist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 03.06.2025; INT-17, YPS Practitioner, 13.06.2025; INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025.

32 Interview INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025.

33 Simpson, Graeme; UNFPA & UN Peacebuilding Support Office (2018). The missing peace: independent progress study on youth, peace and security; Pruitt, Lesley (2020). Rethinking youth bulge theory in policy and scholarship: incorporating critical gender analysis, *International Affairs*, 96(3), 711–728.34

34 Interview INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025.

35 UNSC (2024). Youth and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/207.

36 Gaston, Erica; Karimou, Imane; Kern, Luisa & Bapt, Emma (2025). [2025 Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/2025_yps_thematic_review_final_report.pdf), United Nations University – Centre for Policy Research, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/2025_yps_thematic_review_final_report.pdf (last access 10.11.2025).

37 Interview INT-19, Researcher, 22.07.2025.

Increasing risks and shrinking funding for young peacebuilders

While the aforementioned challenges have accompanied the YPS agenda since its inception, YPS experts emphasised that current global crises and rising global militarisation increase the risks for youths' security and deprioritise funding for YPS. Armed conflicts, the climate emergency and democratic backsliding across the world threaten the safety and mental well-being of youth, particularly those working for human rights, democracy and peace. While the global UN report "If I disappear" from 2021 outlined the needs to protect young peacebuilders, YPS experts raised concerns that while security risks for youth are multiplying around the world, physical and digital protection efforts have not followed suit.³⁸ Security risks occur not only in active violent conflict settings but also in the context of shrinking civic spaces and youth offline and online participation.³⁹ Workshop participants also stressed the high mental load and the situation of "overworked and underpaid" young peacebuilders who often engage voluntarily alongside other obligations and share a feeling of exhaustion. In addition, experts expressed concerns about states' funding for YPS implementation given constrained budgets in times of stagnant economic growth as well as increased military spending.⁴⁰ While not always framed as an either-or, as defence spending is globally rising, including in many Global North donor countries amidst Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine, non-military peace and security assistance is decreasing.⁴¹ This can be expected

to result in an exacerbated underfunding of youth civil society, which will stall further progress on YPS implementation. The gap between rhetorical commitments regarding YPS and governments' concrete actions and pledged resources to advance the agenda have already nurtured a feeling among many young people that YPS has failed its promises on the ground, which risks increasing political mistrust.

Sidelining YPS in the current UN crisis mode

YPS experts highlighted that the UN's current political and financial crisis stalls further progress on YPS implementation. They elaborated on how the focus of the UNSC on major conflicts has resulted in the downgrading of other topics, such as the YPS agenda. Still too often, YPS continues to be considered 'nice-to-have', rather than essential in peace and security discussions. For instance, Russia as a permanent member regularly expresses reservations about young peoples' role as primary agents in peace and security and the UNSC as the appropriate forum to foster youth engagement.⁴² It is easy to neglect YPS when seemingly more pressing issues come up, given the lack of YPS institutionalisation in the council. In contrast to the WPS agenda, there is no regular reporting on YPS or a (permanent) council member that continuously pushes for YPS implementation, and the involvement of youth briefers in the UNSC remains ad hoc and unstructured.⁴³ Interviewees further noted that YPS could easily fall victim to the

38 [UN Envoy on Youth](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4014684?v=pdf) (2021). If I disappear: global report on protecting young people in civic space, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4014684?v=pdf> (last access 10.11.2025); Interview INT-05, YPS Practitioner, 02.04.2025.

39 Interviews INT-03, Peacebuilder from the Western Balkans, 31.03.2025; INT-13, Young women peace activist from Eastern Africa, 27.05.2025; INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025; INT-20, YPS expert from Finland, 13.08.2025.

40 Interviews INT-04, YPS officer in government agency, 28.03.2025; INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025.

41 Liang, Xiao; Tian, Nan; Lopes da Silva, Diego; Scarazzato, Lorenzo; Karim, Zubaida A. & Guiberteau Ricard, Jade (2025). [Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2024](https://www.sipri.org/publications/2025/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2024), <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2025/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2024> (last access 10.11.2025); Li, Melissa; Biller, Maximilian & Rotmann, Philipp (2025). [Peace & Security Aid in Crisis: Rethinking Civilian Investment and Local Leadership](https://gppi.net/assets/GPPI_PeaceSecurityAidinCrisis_FullStudy2025_web.pdf). Global Public Policy Institute, https://gppi.net/assets/GPPI_PeaceSecurityAidinCrisis_FullStudy2025_web.pdf (last access 10.11.2025).

42 Security Council Report (2024): Future of the Pact: Recommendations for Security Council Action. Interviews INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-09, Researcher at a think tank, 25.04.2025.

43 Interview INT-09, Researcher at a think tank, 25.04.2025; Security Council Report (2024): Future of the Pact: Recommendations for Security Council Action.

UN's overall survival management during its worst financial crisis in decades. The latter is connected to major donor countries not paying fully and/or punctually their dues and is exacerbated by major US funding cuts. While current UN discussions to “go back to basics” include calls to cut down inclusive agendas such as YPS and WPS, one interviewee warned not to unlearn from past experiences and evidence that show that more inclusive peace efforts lead to more sustainable peace outcomes.⁴⁴ YPS mainstreaming is particularly challenging in the context of the UN80 initiative that was launched by the UN Secretary-General in March 2025 to identify structural changes to the UN's structure, including a planned 20 per cent staff cut.⁴⁵ Based on the analysis of interviewees, negative consequences for cross-cut agendas such as YPS can be expected. Given that staff managed YPS in addition to plenty of other portfolios even prior to the UN's current crisis mode, a further compilation of tasks and a lack of dedicated YPS staff will likely hinder a coordinated approach to implement YPS.⁴⁶

Policy opportunity not policy panic: Debunking six myths on YPS

In this challenging environment, the YPS agenda offers great potential. Debunking six myths on YPS can provide a pathway for how political actors can make positive use of the current situation.

#1 “There is not enough evidence on YPS” – Despite existing knowledge on YPS, there is an unwillingness to change the status quo

While comprehensive data on YPS is only emerging, the main challenge is not a lack of evidence,

but insufficient application of existing knowledge and continued marginalisation of youth as critical knowledge producers. There are several resources that make the case for why YPS is crucial and highlight the important work from young people around the world and their impact.⁴⁷ The problem is a lack of political will to change the status quo *despite* the existing knowledge, rather than lacking evidence. Moreover, youth remain too often unrecognised as “architects of knowledge about peace and security” and their expertise is dismissed.⁴⁸ Yet, given that most youth currently do not know of the YPS agenda, YPS experts noted that increased awareness raising, capacity-building and cooperation mechanisms are important to strengthen knowledge of the agenda.

It is necessary to harness existing knowledge and strengthen mutual exchange. A promising development highlighted by workshop participants is the rising connection among young peacebuilders from across the world in a globalised and interconnected world. They organise and exchange in national, regional and global networks, digitally and in-person. Furthermore, there is an increasing knowledge base on NAPs on YPS with several countries at different stages of developing one that offers the opportunity to improve future processes. The Community of Practice on NAPs supported by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by Search for Common Ground presents a fruitful space for knowledge exchange and transfer.⁴⁹ Structures for coordination and mutual learning are crucial to avoid duplication of efforts and should include formats among young people as well as youth and political stakeholders.

44 Interview INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025.

45 United Nations (n.d.). [UN80 Initiative](https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/en), <https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/en> (last access 10.11.2025).

46 Interview INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025.

47 See, for instance, Simpson, Graeme; UNFPA & UN Peacebuilding Support Office (2018). *The missing peace: independent progress study on youth, peace and security*; Kumar, Shubha; Olsen, Sara; Mallett, Aaron & Prelis, Saji (2023). *Summary Report | Building Evidence for Peacebuilding Investments*, ConnexUs.

48 Leclerc, Katrina; Bulan Yague, Erika Isabel & Berents, Helen (2025). *Young People as Movers and Shakers of Peace and Security*. In: Leclerc, Katrina; Bulan Yague, Erika Isabel & Berents, Helen (Eds.) *Youth Leading Change: Emerging Sites of Knowledge in Peace and Conflict*. Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 1–7.

49 [ConnexUs](https://cnxus.org/theme/ypsnapscoop/) (n.d.). Welcome to the YPS NAPs CoPI, <https://cnxus.org/theme/ypsnapscoop/> (last access 10.11.2025).

#2 “YPS is a youth agenda” – YPS is an intergenerational agenda that benefits the entire society

Too often, the YPS agenda remains solely the responsibility of youth rather than being framed as an intergenerational effort. This is a matter of lacking knowledge about the agenda, continued adult-centred power structures and the unwillingness to share power with youth. First, there is a need to expand knowledge about the intergenerational benefits of implementing the YPS agenda. As one interviewee put it, older people must see the YPS agenda as contributing to their own safety, peace and stability, “not just as a favour or handout to these victims.”⁵⁰ Current challenges, including the climate crisis as well as functioning healthcare and pension systems, show the co-dependency of different generations, which is why addressing them requires a holistic intergenerational approach.⁵¹ Secondly, in the context of ongoing gerontocracy (rule by the elderly) in political systems and societal structures, youth cannot change the status quo without older people. Interviewees referred to this as a learning from the WPS agenda, which has been often framed as an issue to be handled by women and working ‘against’ rather than with their interlocutors that exclude them, mostly (white) men.⁵²

Older people need to meaningfully partner with youth and share their power. To address persisting respective negative stereotypes of youth from older people and vice versa and engage in collective action, (re)building mutual trust and understanding

is needed. Workshop participants and interviewees noted that successful intergenerational dialogues are a two-way street that require openness and empathy for perspectives and experiences of ‘the other’ as well as careful preparation.⁵³ The goal should be a “reciprocal relationship”⁵⁴ and “bi-directional learning and engagement”⁵⁵, rather than what one workshop participant referred to as “multigenerational conversations” where people from different generations present their perspectives but do not engage in dialogue with each other. Capacities are thus needed for all generations. To date, the focus on youth participation/inclusion is often only on training young people to engage with older people, but as one interviewee stated, “no one ever really trained the (...) older generation for them to be able to work with young people.”⁵⁶ Intergenerational YPS allyship is also key for advocacy and knowledge exchange: While the transfer of leadership among generations of youth is important, those who have technically ‘aged-out’ of the agenda should continue as YPS allies.

#3 “YPS is not about hard security” – The security sector benefits from a YPS lens

The youth, peace *and* security agenda is equally relevant for peacebuilding and security actors. Therefore, it is necessary to overcome mutual stereotypes and build bridges between human and hard security, while avoiding the securitisation of youth. Most YPS practitioners identify as part of the peacebuilding sector and one interviewee reflected on the hesitancy of some to engage with ‘traditional’

50 Interview INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025.

51 Interview INT-07, Director of Children and Youth Programs at an International Organisation, 03.04.2025.

52 Interviews INT-04, YPS officer in government agency, 28.03.2025; INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025; INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025; INT-11, Youth peace activist and chair of a youth-led civil society organisation in Yemen, 20.05.2025.

53 Tanghøj, Erike (2023). Connecting Generations: A Guidance Note on Inclusive Intergenerational Dialogue, Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa and [Folke Bernadotte Academy](https://fba.se/globalassets/publikationer/guidance-note-on-intergenerational-dialogue-1.pdf?epslanguage=en). <https://fba.se/globalassets/publikationer/guidance-note-on-intergenerational-dialogue-1.pdf?epslanguage=en> (last access 10.11.2025).

54 Interview INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025.

55 Interview INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025.

56 Interview INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025

security stakeholders, such as the military.⁵⁷ Particularly around efforts of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), many YPS experts point (often rightly) to the limited framing of youth as potential peace spoilers. These tensions have stuck with YPS since 2015 when Resolution 2250 was adopted in the context of global attention paid to the rise of the terrorist group ISIL (Da'esh), potential youth recruitments and an “understanding of youth as potentially dangerous”.⁵⁸ Criticising youth securitisation⁵⁹, interviewees nevertheless called to integrate a YPS lens in P/CVE or counterterrorism programming to avoid the further reproduction of stigmatising and damaging narratives.

Not least given the fact that youth constitute the majority of militaries, experts noted that the security sector would benefit from a YPS lens, such as by understanding young peoples’ rights and meaningfully partnering with them. This requires training for different security actors as well as YPS practitioners that are sensitive to the (technical areas) of the security sector.⁶⁰ Interviewees further emphasised the need to recognise youth’s agency in this sphere and the work they are already doing, for instance in the digital sphere.⁶¹ Thus, while it is not denied that young people are at risk of radicalisation, for instance through harmful online content, they are and must be part of the solution to prevent and counter dis- and misinformation. Overall, workshop participants noted that in the current defence-focused security discussions – such as public and political debates about a

return to military conscription in Germany – a YPS perspective is missing. Yet, in the context of globally rising militarisation, one interviewee warned against “weaponising” the YPS agenda as “promotion of hyper militarised response[s] to conflict” which would not do justice to the agenda’s aspirations.⁶² A holistic intersectoral approach to implementing the YPS agenda requires a broad security understanding that centres human security.

#4 “Promoting cross-agenda synergies waters down YPS” – Leveraging synergies with other agendas strengthens YPS impact

There are different opinions within the YPS space on whether promoting synergies of YPS with other frameworks is diluting the agenda. Workshop participants and interviewees emphasised the value of strengthening interlinkages with other frameworks, such as the WPS agenda, the Climate, Peace and Security agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.⁶³ According to experts, discussing YPS as a cross-cutting issue within other thematic areas or country/regional contexts is as important as having standalone discussions on the agenda itself.⁶⁴ Promoting synergies between agendas reflects the need to respond to the intersecting realities and identities of human beings. As one interviewee noted on WPS-YPS synergies, “it’s easy to forget in the policy space that we’re talking about humans and individuals who live their lives as one entity. So even if I am a young person and a woman, and so therefore I should fall under WPS and YPS,

57 Interview INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025.

58 Berents, Helen (2022). Power, Partnership, and Youth as Norm Entrepreneurs: Getting to UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(3).

59 Sukarieh, Mayssoun & Tannock, Stuart (2018). The global securitisation of youth, *Third World Quarterly*; 39(5), 854–870.

60 Interview INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025.

61 Interview INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025.

62 Interview INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025.

63 Interviews with INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025; INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025; INT-08, Representative of an intergovernmental organisation from the Western Balkans, 10.04.2025; INT-11, Youth peace activist and chair of a youth-led civil society organisation in Yemen, 20.05.2025.

64 Interview INT-09, researcher at a think tank, 25.04.2025.

I cannot live one day as a young person, and the other day as a woman. I live every day as both.”⁶⁵ Synergies are also useful with regard to shared data and can reduce duplicated efforts. Yet, integrated approaches should ensure that the distinct experiences and needs of diverse youth are not marginalised.

Many YPS experts raised that both agendas are complementary and mutually reinforcing. They pointed to important lessons that YPS has drawn from WPS, such as the language of UN resolutions, advocacy strategies or NAPs, while also highlighting what WPS practitioners can learn from YPS practitioners, including on queer-inclusive efforts.⁶⁶ Recognising the diversity of youth and their experiences underlines the importance of strengthening intersectional and inclusive approaches in YPS efforts.⁶⁷ This is key to make multiple forms of inequality and discrimination visible and ensure effective policy responses. Experts identified blind spots and emerging interest within the agenda, including postcolonial perspectives, youth with disabilities, the implications of AI and other technologies and the role of religion. They understand the agenda as continuously developing rather than a final and rigid framework. For instance, workshop participants highlighted that while the five YPS pillars – participation, protection, prevention, partnership and disengagement and reintegration – provide an important entry point for action, they need to be contextualised and considered as overlapping and intersecting. For instance, increased online and offline participation of young people

requires increased protection efforts.

#5 “It is not the time for YPS” – YPS is needed more than ever today

As major conflicts, geopolitical tensions and democratic backsliding dominate debates, YPS is needed more than ever. It yields a timely opportunity for multilateral cooperation and partnerships. Several interviewees reflected that YPS is less controversial than other topics, at least some amount of youth inclusion enjoys relatively broad levels of support and states can agree on it even if they struggle to work together on other issues.⁶⁸ Yet, framing YPS as a ‘feel-good agenda’ should not contain YPS discussions to so-called soft security issues or prevent substantial efforts to address the root causes of youth exclusion and change the status quo, as is sometimes the case.⁶⁹ Secondly, YPS holds the potential to strengthen partnerships between countries from the so-called Global South⁷⁰ and the Global North. Given the political imperative to advance YPS in many countries of the Global South that have youthful populations, the agenda can serve as a bridge to explore potential common ground for partnerships. While YPS can be an entry point for cooperation with countries of the Global South, countries from the Global North can learn about YPS implementation, particular from African countries that are leading on YPS efforts. A partnership approach is also evident in the UNSC resolutions on YPS, as two of them have been co-sponsored by Sweden with Peru and by France with the Dominican Republic.

65 Interview INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025.

66 Ibid.; Berents, Helen (2020). [Thinking Intergenerationally: WPS and the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda](https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/10/thinking-intergenerationally-wps-and-youth-peace-security-agenda/), IPI Global Observatory, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/10/thinking-intergenerationally-wps-and-youth-peace-security-agenda/> (last access 10.11.2025).

67 Kern, Luisa (2025). [Youth participation in peacebuilding](https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:10171/Intersectional_lens_youth_PB.pdf) through an intersectional lens, UNU-CPR, https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:10171/Intersectional_lens_youth_PB.pdf (last access 10.11.2025).

68 Interviews INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025; INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025.

69 Interviews INT-01, researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025; INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025; INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025.

70 The author is aware that the term ‘Global South’ remains contested and does not reflect the heterogeneity within and differences between countries. For the lack of a better terminology, this paper still uses the term.

The 10-year anniversary of Resolution 2250 in December 2025 offers several opportunities to build and sustain momentum for YPS implementation. Interviewees and workshop participants called for dedicated YPS discussions at the UN, particularly on the upcoming second progress study on YPS and the fourth YPS report of the Secretary-General to be released in 2026. In addition, they referred to windows of opportunity to strengthen YPS integration in the ongoing Peacebuilding Architecture Review, discussions on National Prevention Strategies, the Review of all Forms of UN Peace Operations, the COP30 and the follow-up and implementation of the Pact for the Future from 2024. The latter included important sections on strengthening the YPS agenda that have also been pushed by the revitalised Group of Champions on YPS co-chaired by Finland and Jordan.⁷¹

#6 “YPS is for other countries” – YPS is relevant for all countries

A common misunderstanding of countries of the Global North is that YPS is only relevant in violent conflict contexts. A foreign policy-oriented view of YPS, however, disregards different experiences of violence and domestic security challenges. In this regard, Johan Galtung’s distinction between the three “super-types of violence” – direct physical violence, cultural violence and structural violence – is crucial.⁷² In addition to direct violence, youth experience a “violence of exclusion” from structural forms of violence that stem from political, social and economic exclusion.⁷³ Connected to this broad understanding of violence is Galtung’s distinction

between a negative and positive peace. While negative peace refers to the absence of war or direct physical violence, positive peace includes increasing social justice and creating a culture of peace between people within a society and between societies beyond decreasing violence.⁷⁴

Such an understanding of violence and peace illustrates the universal relevance of peacebuilding more broadly and of YPS more specifically. First, youth experience several forms of violence, including in Europe. While climate change and cyber threats have repercussions across borders, the ongoing war of Russia in Ukraine affects young people on the European continent. In addition, interview partners reflected on youth experiences of (everyday) violence in societies not affected by active violent conflict related to migration, gender-based violence, racism, socio-economic inequalities and intersected discrimination and marginalisation of underprivileged communities.⁷⁵

YPS experts highlighted the relevance of YPS principles and concepts to address these forms of violence. Recognising that youth political, social and economic exclusion is driving institutional mistrust on country and multilateral levels, they suggested that meaningfully including them and co-creating policy responses to current challenges in genuine partnerships present avenues to rebuild political trust and counter mis- and disinformation. In addition, they noted that prevention concepts can help to address security threats in Germany, such as the increasing prevalence of right-wing and fascist ideologies and polarisation.⁷⁶ Countries of the Global North, including Germany, should thus recognise

71 Interviews INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025; INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025; INT-09, Researcher at a think tank, 25.04.2025; INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025.

72 Galtung, Johan (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291–305.

73 Simpson, Graeme; UNFPA & UN Peacebuilding Support Office (2018). The missing peace: independent progress study on youth, peace and security.

74 Sönsken, Sebastian; Kruck, Anne & El Zahel, Zina (2020). Nachhaltig wirken: Friedensentwicklung und -erhalt, [Berghof Glossar](#) zu Konflikttransformation und Friedensförderung: 20 Essays zu Theorie und Praxis. Berghof Foundation, <https://berghof-foundation.org/files/publications/Glossary-GER-2020-online.pdf> (last access 10.11.2025).

75 Interviews INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025; INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025; INT-19, Researcher, 22.07.2025.

76 Interviews INT-03, Peacebuilder from the Western Balkans; INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025; INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025; INT-19, Researcher, 22.07.2025.

YPS as one pathway to addressing domestic challenges. YPS experts stressed that in addition to domestically implementing YPS, countries of the Global North should not neglect their international responsibility. A positive example is the first Finnish NAP on YPS (2021-2024) that included a foreign and a domestic component.⁷⁷

YPS by Germany: Recommendations for foreign policy

As YPS slowly but surely moves into its adolescent phase there is a shift needed to move beyond explaining the purpose behind YPS and into action mode. In the words of one interviewee: “hopefully at some point [we] can move beyond the why question and ask, how can we like, do this?”⁷⁸ Germany can play an important role in pushing forward the YPS agenda across the world as part of its foreign policy. The Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the German development agency (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ) have launched different strategies and supported projects on youth⁷⁹, peace and security, yet not always with reference to YPS. Overall, the YPS agenda currently only plays a marginal role in Germany’s foreign, development and security policy. Germany should recognise the potential it yields and advance implementation of the agenda across the UN and the EU level as well as in its bilateral engagement with partner countries.

1. On the UN level

To cooperate on and coordinate global action on YPS, it is crucial to advancing the YPS agenda in

the multilateral system, with the UN at its centre. Germany plays an important role in the UN, including as the fourth-largest funder of the regular UN budget and second largest contributor to the whole UN system, as home to 37 UN organisations and through its support to UN peace operations.⁸⁰ This makes Germany an ideal candidate to push the YPS agenda forward in different parts of the UN system. Workshop participants and interviewees noted several entry points for Germany, including across the UN peace and security architecture.

Champion YPS in UN peacebuilding: The UN Peacebuilding Architecture is key to advancing the YPS agenda. Throughout 2025, Germany is chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which adopted a Strategic Action Plan on Youth and Peacebuilding in 2021. It could use its role as chair (and after this year, as a member) to strengthen YPS within different country/regional and thematic PBC discussions, in PBC advice to the UNSC and the UNGA and in the ongoing Peacebuilding Architecture Review. As the biggest contributor to the Peacebuilding Fund, Germany could further use its influence to strengthen YPS in the work of the fund, for instance through its special funding modality, the Youth Promotion Initiative.

Ensure implementation of the Pact for the Future:

In 2024, world leaders gathered for the Summit of the Future to make the UN fit for present and future challenges. They adopted the Pact for the Future, which included important commitments to advance the YPS agenda, as well as a declaration on future generations. Together with Namibia, Germany co-facilitated the Summit and the drafting process of the pact. Through its role as co-facilitator, Germany

77 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2021). Youth, Peace and Security: [Finland’s National Action Plan 2021-2024](https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/items/ae07440c-5610-4abc-8f1d-b493b37161e4), <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/items/ae07440c-5610-4abc-8f1d-b493b37161e4> (last access 10.11.2025).

78 Interview INT-20, YPS expert from Finland, 13.08.2025.

79 Note: German laws and ministries apply different definitions of youth/adolescent/young adult in several variations from 12 to 27 that differ from the definition of youth by the YPS agenda.

80 [Federal Foreign Office](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/sr-mitgliedschaft-391348) (2024). Germany in the United Nations, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/sr-mitgliedschaft-391348> (last access 10.11.2025).

is uniquely positioned to ensure that the commitments for follow-up actions in the pact, including on expanding meaningful youth participation at national and international levels, investing in and protecting the human rights of all young people, are implemented.⁸¹

Reinforce YPS in peace operations: Not least because youth constitute the majority population in many contexts where peace operations are deployed, the meaningful engagement of young people in the work of those missions is crucial. Germany supports UN peace operations politically, financially and with personnel and material, and it should use this role to strengthen YPS in missions. As host of the Peacekeeping Ministerial in May 2025, Germany involved two youth observers into a ministerial for the first time. This positive step should be strengthened at future ministerials.⁸² Furthermore, Germany can push for strengthening YPS elements in peace operations within the ongoing review of all forms of peace operations that was mandated in the Pact for the Future.⁸³ As a so-called champion in the area of training and capacity building, Germany should strengthen YPS elements in trainings of military, police and civilian mission personnel.

Strengthen YPS as (future) council member: With peace and security at the centre of the UNSC mandate, the council has a crucial role to play in strengthening YPS. In its current candidacy to become a non-permanent member of the UNSC in 2027/28, Germany is stressing youth participation with the aim of empowering young persons in its potential membership.⁸⁴ During its last UNSC membership in 2019/2020, Germany supported the process of the last UNSC YPS resolution (UNSCR

2535) that was adopted in 2020. If Germany becomes a council member again (which is to be expected), it can build upon that and should raise the YPS agenda in the UNSC, including in interactive dialogues, open debates and side events, and integrate it into discussions of peace operation mandates. Additionally, Germany should include youth briefer in UNSC sessions – ensuring their protection in offline and online spaces. Germany should also support calls from a joint letter to the UNSC from UN Youth Delegates to establish a permanent youth constituency and to reform the council.⁸⁵ Beyond the UNSC, Germany can push YPS across other parts of the UN system, including through the revitalised Group of Champions on YPS.

2. On the EU level

Regionalising the global YPS principles ensures that the agenda responds to the specific opportunities and needs across different regions, including Europe. Therefore, regional organisations such as the EU are key to translating the 'UN agenda' to regional realities and advancing YPS in Europe and beyond. Germany is one of the EU's founding members and as the most populous country and the largest economy in the EU, it has a special responsibility. This role should be used to champion YPS in the EU. Experts stressed that Germany should push coordination among Team Europe partners to strengthen YPS in external *and* domestic EU policy, including in accession discussions.

Strengthen YPS in EU external action:

Implementing YPS abroad responds to the strategic interest of the EU and the foreign policy objectives

81 United Nations (2024). [Pact for the Future](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf). Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf (last access 10.11.2025). Interview INT-10, Independent YPS Expert from Germany, 08.05.2025.

82 Hartmann, Kirsten & Rosenow, Patrick (2025). Debatte: Ministerialkonferenz zur UN-Friedenssicherung in Berlin: Ein Zeichen der Hoffnung in Krisenzeiten?, [Deutsche Gesellschaft für die Vereinten Nationen e.V.](https://dgvn.de/meldung/un-peacekeeping-ministerial-in-berlin-ein-zeichen-der-hoffnung-in-krisenzeiten), <https://dgvn.de/meldung/un-peacekeeping-ministerial-in-berlin-ein-zeichen-der-hoffnung-in-krisenzeiten> (last access 10.11.2025).

83 United Nations (2024). Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations.

84 Federal Foreign Office (2025). [Germany for the United Nations Security Council](https://www.gdch.de/germanyunsc/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/PREVIEW_Brochure_English_130625.pdf) 2017-2028, https://www.gdch.de/germanyunsc/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/PREVIEW_Brochure_English_130625.pdf (last access 10.11.2025).

85 [Joint UN youth delegates letter to the UN Security Council](https://www.jugenddelegierte.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/UNYD-Letter-to-Security-Council.pdf) (n.d.), <https://www.jugenddelegierte.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/UNYD-Letter-to-Security-Council.pdf> (last access 10.11.2025).

of its member states like Germany to promote stability and peace in the world.⁸⁶ The EU committed to include youth in decision-making in external action, including in the Youth Action Plan in EU external action from 2022, which also established a global and in-country Youth Sounding Boards. In addition to allies in the EU External Action Service and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships, structures for a coordinated approach to implement YPS and dedicated YPS training for EU and member state officials are needed to drive YPS implementation forward in EU external action. Germany should push for high-level buy-in, dedicated YPS focal points across EU institutions and regular mechanisms such as more frequent Youth Policy Dialogues with senior officials.⁸⁷ Germany should champion coordinated YPS support in other countries and regions across Team Europe partners to ensure impactful support and, for instance, explore how to make best use of structures that have been set up by the EU. In addition, based on the updated Civilian Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) Compact in 2023 and the mini-concept on YPS in Civilian CSDP from 2024 that reference the agenda, Germany can strengthen YPS elements in trainings for CSDP mission staff, including those from the Center for International Peace Operations. Following conclusions of the Council of the EU from 2020 and 2022, Germany should raise YPS in the council, include it in statements and ensure its integration into EU policy frameworks.⁸⁸

Raise YPS in accession: Strengthening a Team Europe approach to support YPS implementation in partner countries also includes efforts in EU accession candidates. Existing efforts such as the

EU Youth Policy Dialogue on Enlargement and supporting the Regional Youth Cooperation Office should be built upon and ensure close collaboration with and direct support of local youth organisations. Some workshop participants and interviewees emphasised that Germany should use its influence within the EU to integrate YPS into discussions around EU accession. In the context of the Western Balkans, they argued that including a focus on young people more generally and YPS in particular would put pressure on the governments to advance YPS implementation across the countries of the region.⁸⁹

Strengthen YPS in EU domestic policy: While most YPS efforts of Team Europe are foreign policy-oriented, the EU and its member states need to strengthen YPS implementation across Europe, not least given Europe's own security challenges.⁹⁰ Experiences of advancing YPS in EU external action should be used to advance YPS in EU internal policy structures. Building on conclusions of the Council of the EU from 2018 and 2025, Germany should raise YPS in the council, include it in statements and ensure its integration into EU domestic policy frameworks.⁹¹ One important entry point is the upcoming update of the EU youth strategy (2019-2027). Beyond raising YPS in formal structures, including the different working groups of the Council of the EU, Germany should also raise YPS in informal structures with other member states.

Facilitate knowledge exchange: Aligning efforts and mutual learning is crucial to advancing YPS implementation in and through Europe. Germany should coordinate action on YPS with other Team Europe partners, for instance through informal gatherings with other member states and creating a

86 Interview INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an International Peacebuilding Organisation, 04.06.2025.

87 Ibid.

88 Council of the EU (2020). Youth in external action – Council conclusions (5 June 2020), No. 8629/20; Council of the EU (2022). Youth Action Plan in EU external action – Council conclusions (28 November 2022), No. 14756/22.

89 Interviews INT-03, Peacebuilder from the Western Balkans, 31.03.2025; INT-08, Representative of an intergovernmental organisation from the Western Balkans, 10.04.2025.

90 Hartmann, Kirsten (Forthcoming). Untapped potential: youth as partners for peace and security. BKHS Magazine 05 "Strengthening Partner Europe!", Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung.

91 Council of the EU (2018). Council conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe (2018/C195/05); Council of the EU (2025). Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a community of young people in Europe based on European values for a common and safe Europe (C/2025/2977).

“Group of Friends on YPS” at the EU level.⁹² Germany could also push other member states to raise the YPS agenda in different EU bodies. In addition, Germany can facilitate knowledge exchange among different stakeholders, including to inform efforts to advance YPS across Europe and EU institutions. This includes other regional institutions, most importantly the AU, as well as a diverse range of young peacebuilders and their partners, such as the EU YPS Coalition. In addition, Germany could work on cross-border action on YPS in Europe and learn from domestic implementation across Europe. Experiences from Finland that will soon launch its second NAP on YPS and Italy that is about to launch its first NAP on YPS offer important lessons. Overall, Germany could support data gathering on current YPS implementation in Europe. Workshop participants further called for an EU Regional Action Plan on YPS, which Germany could lobby for.

3. On the bilateral level

To complement its efforts to advance the YPS agenda within multilateral and regional organisations, Germany should push for YPS in its bilateral engagements with partner countries, including in development cooperation. Based on its share of the gross national income, Germany was the fifth biggest contributor of official development assistance in 2024.⁹³ This offers an important entry point for Germany to strengthen YPS in partnerships. Workshop participants and interviewees highlighted the need for funding national and local YPS efforts, knowledge exchange and coordinated action with other external partners.

Support national and local YPS efforts: Germany should support existing national and local YPS initiatives across the world and adopt a YPS lens in planning and implementing development cooperation. YPS experts emphasised the need to support (sub-)national processes to implement the agenda, such as YPS networks and coalitions, consultation processes and different stages of NAP development processes. Existing GIZ support to NAP development processes in AU member states should be built upon.⁹⁴ While interviewees and workshop participants highlighted financial resources, including small, youth-led organisations, some also referred to other possible support measures. For example, one interviewee mentioned that the availability of meeting rooms and printers they got from partners was helpful during the NAP development process.⁹⁵ Development cooperation projects should be implemented in close cooperation with local partners, including youth-led and youth-serving organisations, and adopt a YPS lens. Additionally, YPS experts stressed to use Germany’s embassies across the world for YPS efforts, such as hosting youth consultations. Building on the deployment of WPS focal points to around 50 German representations across the world in 2021, the Federal Foreign Office could also deploy YPS focal points.⁹⁶

Facilitate knowledge exchange: A common theme across many interviews and workshop discussions was that Germany should facilitate knowledge exchange on YPS experiences, not least to inform domestic YPS efforts.⁹⁷ African countries in particular are the frontrunners in YPS implementation and

92 Interview INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025.

93 [OECD](https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html) (n.d.), Official development assistance (ODA), <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html> (last access 10.11.2025).

94 [GIZ](https://www.giz.de/en/regions/africa/african-union/news/presenting-giz-african-union-annual-report-2024-african-youth) (2025). GIZ African Union Annual Report 2024 – African Youth Leadership, <https://www.giz.de/en/regions/africa/african-union/news/presenting-giz-african-union-annual-report-2024-african-youth> (last access 10.11.2025).

95 Interview INT-14, YPS activist from the DRC, 03.06.2025.

96 [Auswärtiges Amt](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/menschenrechte/05-frauen/frauen-konfliktpraevention-209848) (2022). Ohne Frauen kein Frieden: Agenda „Frauen, Frieden und Sicherheit“, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/menschenrechte/05-frauen/frauen-konfliktpraevention-209848> (last access 10. 10.11.2025).

97 Interviews INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025; INT-10, Independent YPS expert, 08.05.2025; INT-11, Youth peace activist and chair of a youth-led civil society organisation in Yemen, 20.05.2025; INT-12, Youth peace advocate from Colombia, 26.05.2026; INT-13, Young women peace activist from Eastern Africa, 27.05.2025; INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025; INT-19, Researcher, 22.07.2025.

have gathered plenty of knowledge. YPS experts stressed that it is necessary to recognise this expertise rather than viewing them as beneficiaries. They mentioned that Germany should facilitate exchange among different actors in and between countries to inform YPS efforts in other countries and regions as well as domestic implementation. In this regard, mentioned GIZ support to NAP development processes would be an accessible entry point for exchange. Experts highlighted the need to increase knowledge transfer at the political and civil society levels, including by bringing together young people from Germany and elsewhere. Knowledge transfer is mutually beneficial, and some interviewees referred to experiences and peacebuilding learnings relevant to YPS that Germany can share, including dealing with the past and transitional justice after the Second World War.⁹⁸

Coordinate YPS action: Germany should pursue a coordinated approach together with other external partners to ensure its support of local actors has sustainable impact. As many interview partners noted the lack of coordination of efforts, it is important to recognise already existing actions and structures from various actors at different levels in a specific context and push for a coordinated approach with other external partners. This would avoid the duplication of efforts, ensure that the efforts are mutually reinforcing and provide more strategic support with long-term impact.⁹⁹ One positive example is the project 'EU Support to ECOWAS in Peace, Security, and Governance', which is co-funded by the EU and Germany, implemented jointly by development agencies from Germany, France and Spain and entails supporting strategic

roadmaps for NAPs on YPS in West Africa.¹⁰⁰ One interviewee also highlighted the relevance of increasing coordination on YPS implementation in times of reducing budgets among donor countries.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, the radical spending reductions for development cooperation and humanitarian aid in the German federal budget from 2025 and the proposed budget for 2026¹⁰² can be expected to negatively affect YPS implementation.

YPS made in Germany: Recommendations for domestic policy

A significant portion of the 12 million young people between 14 and 27 years old in Germany (more than 14 per cent of the population) feels that their opinions are not relevant for politicians and that they are not taken seriously.¹⁰³ While the YPS agenda plays only a marginal role in Germany's foreign policy, it is entirely invisible in its domestic politics. Yet, Germany should champion the YPS agenda for at least two reasons. First, domestic implementation is important for legitimate and credible partnerships and to counter claims of Western double standards. One interviewee emphasised the need to clean the own home before cleaning the neighbourhood.¹⁰⁴ Second, YPS provides German policy makers with a promising approach to address domestic threats to democracy and, in fact, peace and security in Germany, such as increasing social polarisation and institutional mistrust. Right-wing extremist attitudes and disenchantment with democracy are rising among youth in Germany and – as with older

98 Interviews INT-03, Peacebuilder from the Western Balkans, 31.03.2025; INT-08, Representative of an intergovernmental organisation from the Western Balkans, 10.04.2025.

99 Interviews INT-08, Representative of an intergovernmental organisation from the Western Balkans, 10.04.2025; INT-12, Youth peace advocate from Colombia, 26.05.2025; INT-13, Young women peace activist from Eastern Africa, 27.05.2025.

100 GIZ EPSG Team (2025). [EU Support to ECOWAS in Peace, Security, and Governance](https://www.giz.de/sites/default/files/media/pkb-document/2025-10/en-eps-g-factsheet-final.pdf) (EPSG), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, <https://www.giz.de/sites/default/files/media/pkb-document/2025-10/en-eps-g-factsheet-final.pdf> (last access 10.11.2025).

101 Interview INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025.

102 VENRO (2025). [Bundeshaushalt 2026](https://venro.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Dateien/Daten/Publikationen/Stellungnahmen/2025/VENRO_Stellungnahme_Bundeshaushaltentwurf_2026.pdf), https://venro.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Dateien/Daten/Publikationen/Stellungnahmen/2025/VENRO_Stellungnahme_Bundeshaushaltentwurf_2026.pdf (last access 10.11.2025).

103 Deutscher Bundestag Wissenschaftliche Dienste (2024). [Aktueller Begriff: Staatliche Angebote politischer Beteiligung von Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen](https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/1016610/579119ce3ec870a3a7a081ea041ec6b5/Beteiligung-von-Jugendlichen-und-jungen-Erwachsenen.pdf), <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/1016610/579119ce3ec870a3a7a081ea041ec6b5/Beteiligung-von-Jugendlichen-und-jungen-Erwachsenen.pdf> (last access 10.11.2025).

104 Interview INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025.

generations – an increasing number of young people, particularly young men, are voting for the far-right party Alternative for Germany.¹⁰⁵ While there is not *the* pathway for Germany to implement YPS, political stakeholders need to partner with young German peacebuilders in advancing the agenda (sub-)nationally. As Germany serves as a role model for many countries around the world, a meaningful process for implementing the agenda in Germany would send a strong signal to other countries to do the same. The following steps would be relevant for German stakeholders to advance YPS in Germany:

Joint ministerial approach: Germany requires a joint approach involving different ministries to implement the agenda. Currently, responsibility for YPS is situated in the Federal Foreign Office and thus associated with foreign policy. As mentioned above, this represents a limited understanding of the agenda, undermines credible foreign policy and disregards Germany's own challenges. Therefore, education and awareness about the agenda and its relevance for all federal ministries would be needed in the first place for them to take ownership of YPS and drive forward its implementation. Rather than 'another issue' to cover, YPS offers an additional lens, perspective and tool to more inclusive and effective policy responses. Beyond the usual suspects such as the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, BMBFSFJ), recognising the importance of YPS and its applicability in the daily work of the Finance Ministry, the Defence Ministry and the Interior Ministry, among others, is overdue. Knowledge exchange and comprehensive data gathering on the

existing efforts of each ministry to promote YPS (or the lack of) is necessary.

An interministerial working group could help to coordinate efforts of different ministries. Although YPS experts stressed during the workshop and in interviews that YPS is a cross-cutting issue and thus relevant to all ministries, there must also be clear responsibilities for which ministry drives the issue forward abroad and in Germany.¹⁰⁶ Thus, an interministerial working group co-chaired by the Federal Foreign Office and the BMBFSFJ to ensure an international and domestic component in Germany's approach would be a promising way forward. Regarding the domestic component, dealing with YPS in the BMBFSFJ also provides an entry point for synergies around intergenerational exchanges and education goals. In addition, YPS could be discussed as a regular agenda item in the interministerial working group on youth as well as in the National Security Council that was established in 2025. Hosting a high-level YPS event in Germany co-chaired by different ministries, as proposed by workshop participants, could be a good opportunity to underline a joint ministerial endeavour to advance the YPS agenda nationally and internationally.

Policy integration: The YPS agenda needs to be embedded into existing and upcoming policy strategies and frameworks. Ongoing processes to update the National Security Strategy and the Government Guidelines: Preventing Crisis, Resolving Conflicts, Promoting Peace and to further develop the Youth Strategy and the NAP for Child and Youth Participation as well as a next NAP on WPS offer the chance to integrate the YPS agenda. Furthermore, workshop participants proposed "youth checks" for all policies, i.e., an assessment of the impacts of the

105 Mullis, Daniel (2025). Die Popularität der extremen Rechten unter jungen Wähler*innen. Entwicklungen, Ursachen und was Bildung tun kann, In: *Die Deutsche Schule* 117 1/2, 44–59.

106 Interview INT-10, Independent YPS expert, 08.05.2025.

respective policy on youth. To ensure a cross-cutting and holistic approach to YPS that is embedded across policy sectors, YPS experts stressed the need for more awareness raising and capacity-building among public officials within the ministries as well as members of parliament and their staff. While an increasing number of political stakeholders have heard about the YPS agenda, detailed knowledge on what it actually means to realise the YPS agenda in a certain context seems incomplete. The guide for public officials to implement the YPS agenda at country-level as well as trainings from the UN System Staff College and the Folke Bernadotte Academy, including on YPS in-country implementation present low-threshold services to start with.¹⁰⁷

Structural participation mechanisms: A coordinated and structured approach to including youth in a meaningful way in the political process in Germany is needed. One point that was frequently raised directly or indirectly in interviews was that individuals within institutions played an important role in pushing YPS forward within the system.¹⁰⁸ While those allies are important, a more structural approach is needed, given that YPS may lose relevance again if the person changes positions. Therefore, each ministry should have explicit YPS focal points (not covering ‘youth’ as one issue among many) to ensure a sustainable approach to implement YPS. Coordination mechanisms among those focal points as well as close partnerships with diverse youth (networks) are crucial. In addition, workshop participants stressed that regular youth participation mechanisms are needed in the political process at all levels to create accountability. A common theme in expert discussions was the inclusion of youth in all policy discussions, not

just on ‘youth topics’, and the recognition of their contributions as expertise.

Possible pathways for youth participation brought forward by YPS experts included youth quotas in parliaments as well as a regular involvement of youth briefers in (public) committee sessions. There are different German youth delegate and observer programmes, which should be closely connected and ensure knowledge transfer across different generations of participants. Youth parliaments and similar structures exist on local and federal states levels. On the federal ministerial level, there are different platforms for youth engagement, such as youth advisory boards, including in the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the BMBFSFJ and the Environment Ministry. These are needed across all federal ministries and, for instance, project funding for the working group youth and climate foreign policy must be reinstalled. Nonetheless, the German Federal Youth Council underlined the complexity of the endeavour to ensure the participation of individual youth at the federal level via anchoring in sustainable structures and feedback mechanisms to youth on the ground.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the Youth Council is calling for lowering the minimum voting age in Germany: While the minimum voting age for European elections was lowered to 16 in 2022, this is not yet the case for elections at federal level or for elections in many federal states and municipalities.¹¹⁰

Youth advisory boards or similar structures need to be involved in political processes in a meaningful way and not to tick-the-box. Ensuring meaningful youth participation includes adhering to the ‘do no harm’-principle and avoiding youth-washing as well as tokenistic inclusion. YPS experts stressed the

107 Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security (2022). Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level: A Guide for Public Officials. New York: Office of the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth; [UN System Staff College](https://www.unssc.org/courses/youth-peace-and-security-primer-country-implementation) (n.d.). The Youth, Peace and Security Primer on In-country Implementation. <https://www.unssc.org/courses/youth-peace-and-security-primer-country-implementation> (last access 10.11.2025).

108 Interviews INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025; INT-12, Youth peace advocate from Colombia, 26.05.2025; INT-14, YPS activist from the DRC, 03.06.2025; INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025; INT-18, YPS practitioner from Southeast Asia, 24.06.2025.

109 Deutscher Bundesjugendring (2025). [Generationengerechtigkeit neu denken](https://www.dbjr.de/fileadmin/Positionen/2025/2025_Position_Generationengerechtigkeit_final.pdf) – Für eine Politik der intergenerationellen Solidarität, https://www.dbjr.de/fileadmin/Positionen/2025/2025_Position_Generationengerechtigkeit_final.pdf (last access 10.11.2025).

110 Ibid.

need to provide youth with transparent information before and after their involvement, including the outcomes of their participation. Experts stressed the need to account for adequate protection measures, not least regarding increased risks related to increased participation. One interviewee noted that the meaningfulness of youth engagement is also impacted by the experience of those that include youth, such as decision makers. Their view of whether the inclusion of youth provided meaning to the process will define their future engagement with youth.¹¹¹ Thus, meaningful youth participation also requires careful preparation among young and non-young people.

Strengthened peace education: Knowledge and tools for conflict transformation, on intersections of youth, peace and security and on the YPS agenda must be strengthened among a broad range of young people in Germany. In this regard, many interviewees raised the importance of integrating peace education into formal and nonformal education systems.¹¹² As education lies in the jurisdiction of federal states in Germany, this requires close coordination and cooperation among different stakeholders. The federal state of Baden-Württemberg provides a positive example in the area of peace education: its constitution entails the goal of educating young people to love peace, and it set up the servicepoint peace education that aims to strengthen peace education in schools across Baden-Württemberg.¹¹³

YPS civil society: A youth-driven approach to implementing YPS in Germany requires a strong youth civil society that owns the YPS agenda. Therefore, youth-led and youth-serving organisations in Germany working on youth, peacebuilding and security need support, particularly financial resources. They can play an important role in building knowledge and capacities

to advance the YPS agenda among a broad range of youth. An overview of and coordination between small and often singular activities, initiatives and processes set up by different stakeholders across the youth, peacebuilding and security spheres is lacking. Existing actors need more financial support from the government to create spaces for exchange and develop joint endeavours.

YPS experts made clear that German civil society needs to take more ownership of the agenda. For instance, youth working in climate, human rights activism or democracy education do not necessarily understand themselves as peacebuilders and do not consider the YPS agenda as a relevant framework for their work. Additionally, the silos between the German youth, peacebuilding and security sectors need to be broken down to move forward with YPS implementation. A lack of strong alliances among relevant and diverse actors from those sectors and the fragmentation of youth voices weakens advocacy efforts and makes it harder for the government to identify legitimate partners in driving forward the agenda. YPS implementation in Germany needs to be rooted in broad support among diverse German youth.

The way forward for Germany: NAP or no NAP?

Given that, at the moment, NAPs are the most common instrument to implement the YPS agenda on a national level, the question whether Germany should develop a NAP on YPS is an obvious one. However, the answer is not as clear cut. NAPs can be important tools for advocacy, to recognise already existing actions and initiatives of youth and to establish coordination mechanisms between the public and the non-public sectors. Yet, several

111 Interview INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025.

112 Interviews INT-02, Chairman of an international peace organisation, 28.03.2025; INT-03, Peacebuilder from the Western Balkans, 31.03.2025; INT-08, Representative of an intergovernmental organisation from the Western Balkans, 10.04.2025.

113 Verfassung des Landes Baden-Württemberg vom 11. November 1953.

Meaningful youth engagement – What to keep in mind?

During the interviews and workshop discussions, YPS experts emphasised the following points regarding meaningful youth engagement:

- **The antithesis:** Tokenistic/performative/youth-washing/tick-the-box/symbolic inclusion of youth, e.g. inviting young people only for a photo, is not meaningful and at worst, harmful.
- **Personal & context-dependent:** Meaningful inclusion depends on personal experiences. It entails being treated respectfully and at eye-level. At a briefing engagement, it can include the amount of time youth are being granted to speak.
- **Intentionality & transparency:** The purpose of including youth needs to be clearly communicated from the outset. Youth need to be involved at a stage when it is possible to influence a process, e.g. not when the document is already finalised.
- **Full-cycle process:** Youth need to be included throughout the entire process of a policy process, a programme or an event, i.e. in planning, implementation and evaluation. They must get relevant information before and after being involved.
- **Evidence & feedback:** Stakeholder that involve youth need to collect more disaggregated data on youth inclusion beyond the number of those included. This feedback needs to result in improved practices.
- **Doublecheck:** The checklist for meaningful youth engagement of the United Network of Young Peacebuilders and the German quality standards for children and youth participation provide important information. Ensure to do no harm.¹¹⁴

interviewees and workshop participants pointed to the risk of using NAPs as a tick-the-box and “feel-good exercise” to “join the [NAP] club”¹¹⁵ without political will and funding attached, which results in a lack of NAP implementation.¹¹⁶ Overall, however, many workshop participants and interviewees agreed that Germany should develop a NAP on YPS.

Before starting the process, German stakeholders should account for some key learnings from NAP experiences. YPS experts emphasised that the focus should not be on the product, the NAP document, but its impact. In this regard, the process of developing a NAP contributes to its outcome. A common point among experts was the need for an inclusive, participatory and empowering process of diverse young people in genuine intergenerational partnership. For example, an interviewee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo elaborated on broad consultations with young people, including youth from rural areas and youth with disabilities.¹¹⁷ This affects the duration of the NAP process. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to NAPs on YPS, and while interviewees suggested a time of around 18 months to ensure wide participation, workshop participants stressed that the process should be efficient and as fast as possible.¹¹⁸ An inclusive process is further important to localise the YPS agenda. According to experts, this not only relates to contextualising the pillars but making sure that the NAP responds to the different realities of youth in a certain country. In addition, given that a NAP is a government document, workshop participants stressed that both, the youth and the government must take ownership, highlighting that without political engagement, youth-led initiatives remain symbolic. Genuine partnerships can also be important to (re-)build trust. While strong ties with the government are considered key, one interviewee noted the inherent trade-off of youth and government ownership of a NAP and the

114 UNOY (n.d.). Checklist for Meaningful Youth Engagement, <https://unoy.org/downloads/mye-checklist/> (last access 10.11.2025); BMFSFJ & Deutscher Bundesjugendring (2023). [Qualitätsstandards für Kinder- & Jugendbeteiligung](https://standards.jugendbeteiligung.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Broschuere-QS-DBJR-web.pdf), <https://standards.jugendbeteiligung.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Broschuere-QS-DBJR-web.pdf> (last access 10.11.2025).

115 Interview INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in Conflict Studies, 02.04.2025.

116 Interviews INT-01, Researcher, 26.03.2025; INT-05, YPS practitioner, 02.04.2025; INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025.

117 Interview INT-14, YPS activist from the DRC, 03.06.2025.

118 Interview INT-06, Ph.D. candidate in conflict studies, 02.04.2025.

irreconcilable tensions that evolve given the different mandate and goals of the government and young peacebuilders in this process.¹¹⁹ YPS experts emphasised a holistic approach that involves different policy sectors to ensure a whole-of-government approach in advancing YPS.

Once a NAP has been developed, it must be translated into reality – the launch of the NAP document is only one step of the process, rather than the final one. YPS experts emphasised shifting from output-oriented NAPs towards focusing on the envisioned impact and societal change. A common theme raised in workshop discussions and interviews was the need for clear indicators and regular stocktaking of the NAP process to recognise progress and gaps and hold the responsible stakeholders accountable. Given that the first NAP on YPS was adopted by Finland in 2021, lessons about the impact of NAPs on YPS are only now emerging. There is no commonly agreed time frame for the duration of NAPs, and the existing ones cover different periods. One interviewee reflected that it should not be too short given the necessary time to make some progress in implementation.¹²⁰ Overall, interviewees and workshop participants agreed that a NAP is not the only and not always the right instrument in every context. Some noted that too much focus on NAPs risks neglecting other mechanisms. Based on experience with the ongoing difficulties in securing funding for the implementation of the existing NAPs on WPS, one interviewee stressed not to “fetishise” NAPs.¹²¹

Conversations with experts about different YPS efforts made clear that whether through a NAP or alternative approaches, YPS implementation must be a co-creative process with youth. If the German government together with a broad base of young people in Germany decide to develop a NAP on YPS,

the above-mentioned lessons should inform the process. First, in addition to capacity-building among youth and political stakeholders, they should gather learnings and experiences from NAP processes in other countries. YPS experts agreed that a German NAP would need to have a foreign and domestic component. They stressed the importance of building on, connecting and strengthening existing initiatives, movements, organisations and individual actors in Germany rather than trying to reinvent the wheel from scratch. Existing infrastructure and expertise not only regarding German NAPs on WPS but also on the youth-inclusive process around the Youth Strategy, the NAP for Child and Youth Participation and the 17th Children and Youth Report can be built upon.¹²² The inclusive and participatory process should involve youth with different socio-economic backgrounds, youth from different parts of Germany (rural and urban areas, from all federal states), youth with migration backgrounds, young refugees, youth with disability and youth from the queer community, among others.

One interviewee emphasised the need to ensure open consultation processes to avoid instances of gatekeeping in NAP processes: voices that disagree with those leading the process should not be excluded.¹²³ This ensures the support of a broad base of youth and not just selected individuals, not least in the subsequent implementation of the NAP. Workshop participants highlighted to recognise the limits of volunteerism and stressed fair (monetary) compensation of involved youth throughout the entire process. Structured coordinated mechanisms are needed for a coherent NAP process, not least given the transitionality of youth. While there are different structures of stakeholder coordination – such as through technical working groups or steering committees co-chaired by youth and

119 Interview INT-17, YPS practitioner, 13.06.2025.

120 Interview INT-16, Young peacebuilder from West Africa, 05.06.2025.

121 Interview INT-07, Director of children and youth programs at an international organisation, 03.04.2025.

122 Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 20/12900, Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung 17. Kinder- und Jugendbericht und Stellungnahme der Bundesregierung; [Jugendstrategie der Bundesregierung](https://jugendstrategie.de/) (n.d.), <https://jugendstrategie.de/> (last access 10.11.2025).

123 Interview INT-04, YPS officer in government agency, 28.03.2025.

government actors – workshop participants emphasised a transparent process that must remain based on human connection. They stressed that young people need to know the key person that is in charge of the NAP. Beyond strengthening already existing efforts on YPS, new elements and additional resources would need to be attached. Also, clear tasks and indicators for each ministry, follow-up mechanisms and accountability measures need to be defined.

Conclusion: The YPS agenda is too effective to ignore and worth to invest in

Germany must leverage young people's potential as partners for preventing conflicts and building sustainable peace and security. It should assume a stronger role in advancing implementation of the YPS agenda, both nationally and internationally. To this end, Germany should support efforts to fill gaps around the awareness of the agenda, lacking political will and funding and ensure the physical and psychological safety of young peacebuilders. While the YPS agenda is needed now more than ever, it is politically and financially sidelined in the context of a changing security context and the crisis of the UN. Germany should build upon and sustain the current momentum, particularly around this year's 10th anniversary of the UNSC Resolution 2250 that established the YPS agenda and underpin rhetorical commitment with decisive action to advance YPS internationally and nationally.

This requires strategic framing of YPS as essential rather than optional for sustainable peace. German decision-makers should recognise that empowering and engaging youth as true partners benefits their strategic interests to promote sustainable peace

and security – at home and abroad. This requires sustained political advocacy and strengthened funding at the UN, the EU and in bilateral engagement with partner countries. Germany needs to harness the expertise of youth, engage in coordinated action with other partners to effectively support YPS efforts around the globe, facilitate knowledge transfer and take on best practices to inform own implementation pathways. The YPS agenda is universally relevant and must be advanced also domestically. Strong domestic commitments to implement YPS underpinned by concrete actions are crucial to ensure that supporting youth in external action and pushing for YPS implementation on regional and global levels is considered legitimate and credible. Germany should enter an inclusive and participatory process to pursue a context-sensitive NAP on YPS that has interministerial political buy-in, adequate resourcing and follow-up mechanisms. Assuming a more active role in YPS implementation is key for inclusive and effective policy responses to domestic crises.

German policy makers must understand the transformative power of youth as partners for peace. The YPS agenda is an intergenerational agenda that must be advanced through strong cross-generational alliances. Young peacebuilders around the world, including in Germany, are tirelessly and sometimes under risky circumstances working to build and sustain peace and security – not just for them, but for entire societies. Youth are leaders of tomorrow and leading change in the present.¹²⁴ Germany must translate rhetorical commitment to the YPS agenda into tangible political and financial support to advancing it nationally and internationally. As one interviewee put it, while acknowledging what young people around the world are already achieving without support – imagine what they could do adequately supported and in genuine partnership.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Leclerc, Katrina; Bulan Yague, Erika Isabel & Berents, Helen (2025). *Youth Leading Change: Emerging Sites of Knowledge in Peace and Conflict*. Palgrave Macmillan Cham.

¹²⁵ Interview INT-15, Policy officer working on YPS in an international peacebuilding organisation, 04.06.2025.

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