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## Strengthening the role of young people in the prevention and resolution of conflicts

### Report<sup>1</sup>

#### Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

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#### A. Draft resolution<sup>2</sup>

1. Europe has several active and protracted conflicts on its soil, which deprive generations of young people of the opportunities for a better future. No lasting peace agreement can be reached without the positive involvement of the youth, yet the potential and contribution of young people to effective conflict regulation and peacebuilding has received little attention and support.

2. Often simplistically stereotyped as villains or victims, their true potential as agents of peace is largely unused. Data are scarce on how many young people are engaged in direct peace-making, peacekeeping or peacebuilding activities. Peace talks rarely focus on how to channel youth into productive processes.

3. Many youth initiatives operate at grassroots levels. However, young people face multiple barriers when trying to reach out and impact policies: lack of recognition and of meaningful inclusion, limited funding and the shrinking civic space are all hindering the work and outreach of youth organisations, networks and initiatives.

4. Peace and security mean much more to young people than just the absence of violence or the end of violent conflict: they require positive visions of free and democratic societies that support development and dignity and address social, political and structural inequalities. Involving youth merely in peace processes is thus not enough; they should be actively engaged in all political processes and decision-making that affects them and the society at large, in particular when it comes to the global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic – by which they have been particularly hard hit, climate change, human rights or the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) set for 2030.

5. In this context, the Assembly deplores that the share of young people in the legislature has decreased over the years. Only 3.9% of national parliamentarians in Europe are under 30 years old. This is partly linked to negative attitudes towards the capabilities of young people but also to various structural, individual and organisational barriers to getting into the system. Consequently, young people are seeking alternatives to participation, such as taking to the streets or engaging through social media. To engage young people, political leaders should make use of existing instruments, such as the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and create structures with possibilities for a real impact. Encouraging participation of youth in local and regional decision-making through youth councils and parliaments is an important step towards the inclusion of young generations into mainstream politics.

6. At the same time, the Assembly wishes to make sure youth-led organisations, networks and initiatives and young peace builders are given the space and opportunity to be more active, claim greater ownership and leadership roles and conduct more audible advocacy for a stronger involvement in political processes. The establishment of local, regional and global youth mediation networks to increase youth participation and inclusion in peace processes should be supported to this end.

<sup>1</sup> Reference to committee [Doc. 14494](#), reference 4377, dated: 27 April 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 12 April 2021.

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7. The Assembly commends the active role the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has played in promoting the inclusion and participation of youth in peace processes. Its successive Resolutions 2250 (2015) 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) have set out international commitments on youth, peace and security and offer a blueprint for meaningful youth inclusion, while recognising that multi-layered and integrated engagement should be the main strategy approach.

8. And yet, the Assembly deeply regrets that nearly six years after the adoption of the first UNSC landmark resolution on youth, peace and security, little progress has been made, and young peace builders find that their space for action is diminishing rather than growing. Finland is currently the only European country to have introduced an Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 2250.

9. The Assembly therefore echoes the recent call of the Secretary General of the United Nations to urgently create conditions that would enable young people to unleash their full potential, and to set up the institutions to address their needs and expectations. The new era of youth participation requires mechanisms for their continuous and meaningful engagement in making decisions, shaping policies, adopting strategies and implementing actions.

10. It is essential to ensure that young people are co-creators of the youth, peace and security blueprints, not just consultants. Their inclusion in the decision-making processes within conflict prevention and resolution should be approached as multi-dimensional, integrated and interconnected to other inclusion agendas. It requires creating spaces for their engagement in political processes and true recognition of their visions of peace, but it is equally essential to ensure their access to rights and dignified livelihoods and facilitate inter-community dialogue and exchange.

11. The Assembly is aware that the in-depth changes required will take time to be entirely achieved; but claims that they must progress speedily. It notes that the UN Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security has taken over two decades to work into national agendas. The Assembly is particularly concerned about the exclusion of young women from peace processes and insists on an immediate special focus on their inclusion in all stages of conflict regulation.

12. Quality Education and capacity building, notably on citizenship, conflict transformation and human rights are topical in developing peaceful societies. Young people must be provided with useful and concrete educational tools, in both formal and non-formal contexts, to fight violence, discrimination, hatred and extremism. In this context, the Council of Europe Competences Framework for Democratic Culture and its Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship provide a good guide among others for intercultural dialogue and learning reconciliatory skills from the early age.

13. Young people are eager to keep learning, to advocate for peace and to bring change to their societies in conflict, notably in the current Covid-19 times. Active involvement of youth will also be crucial to reach the SDGs. Transparency, accountability, inclusivity and cooperation are the key cornerstones for successful national action plans. Yet one size does not fit all; action plans and policy programmes must be localised in different circumstances with their own priorities.

14. In the light of the above, the Assembly calls upon the governments of the Council of Europe member and observer states as well as countries of democratic partnership to:

14.1. accelerate the implementation of the UNSC resolutions 2250(2015), 2419(2018) and 2535 (2020) on youth, peace and security by devising national road maps and developing comprehensive dedicated policies and programmes at local, national or regional level, with sufficient resources through a participatory process, in particular with the emphasis on constructive youth engagement as decision-makers, creating safe spaces for youth participation and the promotion of young people's rights;

14.2. regard young people and youth organisations as indispensable partners in any peace or political processes; include them as part of the response to tackling conflict situations as well as all major global challenges;

14.3. allocate adequate resources to youth-led and youth-focused organisations and networks at local and national level so as to ensure the sustainability of youth-inspired dialogue-building activities;

14.4. support the establishment of national coalitions on youth, peace, and security, bringing together youth-led and other civil society organisations, relevant government entities and other relevant partners in order to develop the national action plans not for young people but with them;

14.5. introduce, if not yet done so, democratic citizenship and peace education into the formal school curricula from the earliest age. Such curriculum should include, but not be limited to, empathy, mediation, conflict transformation, reconciliation, human rights education, peaceful political participation and inter-cultural dialogue, so that young people could be better equipped to support peace and to ensure the respect for diversity;

14.6. foster continuous inter-community dialogue and engagement between young people from different communities, and between the youth and other parts of the society with a view of overcoming the prevailing trust deficit;

14.7. consider ways of including more human rights education and peace mediation, conflict resolution and reconciliation skills into the curricula of military and police training programmes.

15. The Assembly praises the work undertaken by the various UN agencies in promoting the youth, peace and security agenda. It hopes that they could further strengthen their action to uphold a true paradigm shift in the design and implementation of youth-inclusive peace negotiations from the outset and to ensure that the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 2250 (2015) be closely linked with other democratic development and inclusion agendas. In particular, the Assembly invites the relevant agencies of the United Nations:

15.1. to reinforce independent empirical data collection efforts, in order to properly estimate the number of young people affected by the various conflicts in the world and to identify serious partners among youth organisations and young peacebuilders in conflict-affected communities;

15.2. to further reflect on how to create safe spaces of peacebuilding, democracy or human rights action for young people in non-democratic regimes.

16. The Assembly underlines that national parliaments have a significant role to play in enhancing legislative and oversight action, commissioning national road maps to implement youth, peace and security, allocating financial resources and supporting inclusive and meaningful youth participation in conflict prevention and resolution, fight against violent extremism, etc. It calls upon its member parliaments to create and/or reinforce linkages between youth and parliaments, in particular by removing the barriers to youth participation in political processes: lowering the voting and eligibility age, developing campaigns, designing new recruitment strategies, considering party specific aims or youth quotas to enhance the selection and promotion of young candidates, learning from the experience gained in advancing women's political participation, and to value young parliamentarians as mediators and promoters of dialogue in divided societies.

17. The Assembly resolves to continue its reflection on promoting meaningful and structured ways of involving youth participants in its activities, most importantly by increasing the dialogue and co-operation between the Assembly and the different youth fora already existing within the Council of Europe.

18. The Assembly encourages national delegations to consider ways of ensuring that the Assembly's voice is better heard by the youth in their respective countries and also that these young local voices are better heard within the Assembly.

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## **B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Hopsu, rapporteur**

### **1. Introduction**

1. Young people's role in preventing and resolving conflicts, violence and extremism are essential to building sustainable peace. Despite being often adversely affected by armed conflicts, young people are valuable agents of democratic change and as such should be actively solicited, empowered and engaged as part of building peaceful communities. However, their potential contribution and inclusion to effective peacebuilding has received little attention and support.<sup>3</sup>

2. Over the years, the Assembly has called on member States to improve young people's access to quality education, to offer them better job opportunities, to prevent their radicalisation and to foster youth engagement in national policies and action.<sup>4 5</sup> It has also urged member States to protect children affected by armed conflict and to end violence against children.<sup>6</sup> A report on child participation is currently underway.<sup>7</sup>

3. In recent years, awareness has significantly grown among international and some national actors of young people's positive role in promoting peace and security, which has translated into more avenues for youth political participation. The adoption of the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) (UNSCR 2250) on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) in 2015 generated a normative shift of the way young people are recognised in the international peace and security platform. Several governments, UN entities, civil society actors and others are stepping up to implement the Resolution. Some international organisations, among them the various UN agencies, the OSCE, the Council of Europe or the EU, have created their programmes for youth representatives to be involved in their work in international policymaking. Limited efforts have also been invested to systematically map and understand how young people shape and influence the sustainability of peace processes and agreements.

4. However, frustration reigns among young peacebuilders and policymakers alike in relation to how to make intentions match with the realities on the ground. The report by the UN Secretary General, issued in March 2020, points to the outstanding core challenges, including structural barriers limiting the participation of young people and their capacity to influence decision-making, violations of their human rights, and insufficient investment in facilitating their inclusion and empowerment.<sup>8</sup>

5. This report endeavours to analyse why, in over five years since the adoption of the UNSCR 2250, the publication of several ground-breaking policy papers advocating youth inclusion, and the launching of various different initiatives to co-opt youth representatives in institutional work, young peacebuilders find that their space for action is diminishing rather than growing. I will focus on the European context and examine how we could remove the obstacles and rethink the decision-making processes that would enable young people to fully play a meaningful role in the prevention and resolution of the conflicts and tensions in and between Council of Europe member States. The sudden escalation of the armed conflict in the Caucasus in autumn 2020 is a bleak reminder that peace and security should never be taken for granted, and that inclusive peacebuilding processes are key for sustaining peace.

6. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented global challenge. In this time of crisis, young people are once again being the greatest source of hope, but they are also most adversely affected by the

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<sup>3</sup> The initial motion for the resolution ([Doc. 14494](#)), emphasised that young people, who often make up a large majority of the population in countries experiencing armed conflicts or organised violence, are not given enough opportunities and instruments for exercising a wider influence in the political sphere.

<sup>4</sup> The Action Plan on 'The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism' adopted by the Council of Europe during the 125th Session of the Committee in Brussels on 19 May 2015. <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CoE-The-fight-against-violent-extremism-and-radicalisation-leading-to-terrorism-Action-Plan.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> I would particularly recall: Resolution 1930 (2013) and Recommendation 2014 (2013) on "Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge"; Resolution 1803 (2011) and Recommendation 1965 (2011) on "Education against violence at school"; Resolution 2103 (2016) on "Preventing the radicalisation of children by fighting the root causes"; Resolution 2097 (2016) on "Access to school and education for all children"; and Resolution 2192 (2017) on "Youth against corruption".

<sup>6</sup> See Recommendation 2159 (2019) and Resolution 2294 (2019) on "Ending violence against children: Council of Europe contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals" and Resolution 2204 (2018) on "Protecting children affected by armed conflicts".

<sup>7</sup> Doc. 14806, Motion for a resolution on "Giving a voice to every child: promoting child participation as a foundation for democratic societies".

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on Youth, Peace and Security, S/2020/167, 2 March 2020, <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/167>.

health crisis. Their active involvement is therefore even more important in policy making in order not to create a lost generation.

## 2. Why young people's role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts matters?

### 2.1. Demography and data

7. A wide variety of age definitions is used to define youth. For the sake of this report, I follow the definition used in UNSCR 2250 (2015), which defines "youth" as people aged 18-29 years but notes that variations exist at national and international levels.

8. Today, there are 1.8 billion youth in the world aged under 30, which is the largest number and proportion ever to have existed. On the other hand, the 2020 Global Peace Index (GPI)<sup>9</sup> reveals that the level of global peacefulness has deteriorated for the ninth consecutive year. It is estimated that 408 million youth (or 23% of the global population aged 15-29) live in a context affected by armed conflict or organised violence,<sup>10</sup> which means that 1 out of 4 young persons are influenced daily by wars or armed conflicts in some way.<sup>11</sup> Millions of these youngsters are displaced, most of them in neighbouring countries where they remain vulnerable.

9. At the same time, over 900 peace agreements have been signed globally in the last two decades, through negotiations in which the voices of young generations have been largely absent. These figures are important to understand the dynamics of youth and the need for their engagement in conflict prevention and mediation process, and their much larger involvement in political decision-making.

10. In Europe, the demographic situation as well as the rate of conflicts is in many ways different. Only some 9% of global youth aged 15-29 live in Europe and Russia-Eurasia combined. Statistically, 51 conflicts were counted in Europe in 2019, of which only one accounted for a "limited war" and 16 others as "violent crises". On the other hand, Europe has seen the largest number of protests, riots and strikes over the period of 2011-2018, totalling nearly 1,600 events. Almost 70% of the conflicts in Europe remained at a non-violent level.<sup>12, 13</sup> A few upheavals apart, this figure has been relatively stable since 2005.

11. Despite the relative positive peace in Europe, too many still grow up in areas of unresolved conflicts, which prevent their communities from flourishing economically or socially. In a number of (f)ailing democracies, young people cannot freely exercise their basic human rights of freedom of assembly, speech or association. An increasing number of young refugees who have fled wars in their home countries, are struggling with their economic survival and integration into European societies. Nonetheless, most European youth know little about the atrocities of war; they are moreover faced with bullying at school or the threats of intolerance, xenophobia, violent extremism and terrorism in their daily lives. Today, European youth are also raising their voices to prevent new potential conflicts related to new challenges such as climate change.

12. Unfortunately, we are facing a **general lack of data**, including in the European context, about how many young people are really engaged in armed conflicts or organised violence, living in sub-national regions where armed conflict is taking place or being displaced by armed conflict, killed or injured by armed conflicts or having lost family or loved ones in violent conflicts, or how many are unable to attend school or work because of conflicts. **No statistical data exists either on how many young people are engaged in direct peace-making, peacekeeping or peacebuilding activities.**

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<sup>9</sup> Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), Executive summary, p.2. The 2020 GPI reveals a world in which the conflicts and crises that emerged in the past decade have begun to abate, only to be replaced with a new wave of tension and uncertainty as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been a sharp increase in civil unrest events since 2011, with over 96 countries experiencing at least one violent demonstration in 2019. From 2011 to 2019, the number of riots rose by 282% and general strikes rose by 821%. The economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2019 was \$14,5 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms or 10.6% of the world's economic activity or \$1,909 per person. In the 10 countries most affected by violence, the average economic impact of violence was equivalent to 41% of the GDP, compared to under 4% in the countries least affected by violence.

<sup>10</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), Data for Youth, Peace and Security: A summary of research findings.

<sup>11</sup> In 2015, UNFPA and WHO reported that each year there were some 200,000 homicides worldwide among youth aged 10-29 years, which was 43% of the total number of homicides globally.

<sup>12</sup> Conflict Barometer 2019, Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC), 2020, 36, and Duffin, E., Conflicts in Europe by intensity 2019, <https://www.statista.com/262937/conflicts-in-europe-by-intensity/>.

<sup>13</sup> According to the 2020 GPI, Iceland is the world's most peaceful country, followed by Austria, Portugal and Denmark.

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13. Limited data yields limited knowledge, and limited knowledge hampers meaningful involvement or action. **Building statistical capacity is therefore nothing less than critical groundwork for peace and security**, which needs to be taken into account within the YPS agenda.

## 2.2. Youth as multi-dimensional stakeholders in the service of positive peace

14. Young people are far from being a **homogenous group**. They have diverse roles and experiences in civil, political or military conflict, and in building peace. However, they do have some collectively distinct challenges and opportunities, as well as vulnerabilities and protection needs.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2.1. Positive vs negative peace

15. Most young people do not have explicit intentions of participating in violent activities for the sake of violence – or of working to build peace for the sake of peace. However, they do share the will to live exciting and fulfilling lives, to provide for and bring up their families, and to participate in their society and culture. Whether they can fulfil their aspirations or possibly resort to violence, is conditioned by whether they live in the environment of **“positive” and “negative” peace**.

16. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) considers that peace is much more than the absence of violence. Positive peace contains “the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies”, whereas negative peace is defined as “the absence of violence or fear of violence”. Furthermore, it identifies **eight pillars of positive peace**.<sup>15</sup>

- well-functioning government;
- low levels of corruption;
- sound business environment;
- equitable distribution of resources;
- free flow of information;
- good relations with neighbours;
- high levels of human capital, and
- acceptance of the rights of others.

17. Peaceful societies enjoying “positive peace” are those that channel these positive pillars into productive activities and facilitate the achievement of these goals. Violence, on the other hand, is likely to be a symptom of under-developed positive peace. In societies where positive peace is strong, everyone’s social engagement – including that of youth – is less likely to manifest as violence.<sup>16</sup>

18. These eight pillars overlap significantly with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and also correspond to the **vision of peace and security** that young generations in modern societies wish for. An independent study *‘The Missing Peace: the Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security’* (2018)<sup>17</sup> carried out in assessment of the implementation of the UNSCR 2250, shows that for many young people, peace and security means more than just the absence of violence or the end of violent conflict. It also includes positive visions of free and democratic societies with environments conducive to development and dignity, which address social, political and structural inequalities. For the young people consulted during this study, sustaining peace required addressing the underlying causes of corruption, inequality and injustice that underpin violent conflict, as well as the immediate triggers of violence (positive peace), rather than just ending violence and addressing its symptoms and consequences (negative peace). They argued that peace and security were inextricably linked to the broader agenda of their stake in sustainable development, and in the assertion or denial of their socioeconomic and cultural rights.

19. It is therefore of utmost importance that youth peacebuilding strategies go through a **paradigm change** and address all eight pillars of positive peace and the ways that they affect the lives of young people. Youth organisations and associations can work directly on improving any of the eight pillars. At the same time, state

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<sup>14</sup> Young people over 18 years of age are not shielded by the umbrella of the rights regime that lends special status and protections to children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). However, the marginalization they experience means that there is often a gap between the formal civil, political and economic rights they should enjoy as adults and the substantive elements that, in practice, they often do not have access to. This does not imply that there is a missing rights framework or a normative gap for youth, but rather that the realisation of young people’s rights should be prioritised.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.economicsandpeace.org>.

<sup>16</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), Data for Youth, Peace and Security: A summary of research findings.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/news/missing-peace-independent-progress-study-youth-peace-and-security>

and international actors need to create an enabling environment for youth to operate productively and non-violently within each positive category within the broader peace and security agenda.

20. This expansion of the agenda is also essential to grasp when dealing with the aspirations of youth organisations, networks and youth leaders (not specifically focused on peace and security activities in the traditional sense) when they **claim in parallel for youth-inclusive peace processes and their active inclusion as stakeholders in broader decision-making in multiple policy areas at local, national and international levels.**

### 2.2.1 *Debunking stereotypes and misconceptions*

21. The political agency of young people in the context of peace processes is often associated with stereotypes and negative perceptions: they are often perceived as the main **perpetrators** of political violence, social unrest and violent extremism, or as **passive victims** of conflict who lack agency and need protection. These visions are mostly gendered: young men are seen as violent actors who can be potential spoilers and destabilisers of peace processes and dissidents to peace agreements, while young women are considered as passive victims of violence.<sup>18</sup> The dominant narratives focus on youth as “problematic” or on “at risk” instead of considering how young people are positively contributing to peace in their societies. **It is critical to explore a more nuanced understanding of how young people can shape their societies, both positively and negatively.**<sup>19</sup>

22. Another misconception that has done more harm than good in policymaking is the reference to young people as “**future generations**” or “**future leaders**”. The youth is not just the future, they are the present. As a significant part of the population, they **need to be included and embedded in processes taking place now, with proper agency and influence.**

23. Finally, a peace process can only be youth-inclusive if it recognises the diversity of youth identities. **As young people span across diverse identities and roles in peace processes, their inclusion and participation must be understood and approached as multi-dimensional, integrated and interconnected to other inclusion agendas.**

## 3. Barriers to inclusive participation in peace processes

### 3.1. Political exclusion

24. Young people see peace and security as deeply political issues, related to authorities and institutions such as governments, media, businesses and NGOs. And yet youth participation in formal political processes and institutions has been declining in all countries except in some of the relatively fledgling democracies, where young people tend to be more optimistic and confident about their ability to make a difference through voting and involvement in formal politics,<sup>20</sup> notably after “revolutions” that have been brought about by fraudulent elections.

25. All in all, young generations increasingly express their lack of trust in their governments, the international community and systems of governance, which they view as corrupt, ineffective and outdated, and which they manifest by low rates of electoral activity, political participation (only 4.1% of young people under 30 are active party members), and parliamentary involvement. Young people are starkly under-represented in institutional political processes and policymaking. They are rarely found in parliaments, public administration and decision-making committees on peacebuilding and constitution building.

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<sup>18</sup> Altiok, A. and Grizelj, I., We are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes, independent paper commissioned by the UN Office of the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, March 2019, p.9, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Global-Policy-Paper-Youth-Participation-in-Peace-Processes.pdf> .

<sup>19</sup> The Youth Café, Nairobi, 11 April 2019, <https://www.theyouthcafe.com/updates/2019/4/day-one-session-two-deconstructing-the-role-of-youth-in-peacebuilding-debunking-assumptions-the-youth-cafe>.

<sup>20</sup> Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016, The Commonwealth secretariat, London 2016, p.67.

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26. Despite the fact of the youth making up over 20% of the eligible voting age of the population, their voice in mainstream politics is very small, **Only 2,2% of national parliamentarians worldwide are under 30.**<sup>21</sup> In the Europe of 47, this figure is not significantly higher - **3.9%.**<sup>22</sup>

27. Apart from the politics being traditionally seen as the domain of older, often male and wealthier citizens, significant obstacles to youth political participation occur at different levels and in different areas:

- the minimum voting age requirement set for national elections at 18 in most countries, which disenfranchises younger citizens.<sup>23</sup>
- the minimum age for eligibility to run for office, which is often set higher than the age to vote (often ranging between 25-40). The world average eligibility age is 22.2 years, i.e. 4-6 years after obtaining the voting right for the lower house and 27.9 years for the upper house.
- **increased costs** for candidate nomination and campaigning and the lack of political finance regulations make it even more difficult for youth to start a political career.
- While participation of all citizens at the local level is the cornerstone to building healthy democracies, it is often at the local level that young people are not given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.<sup>24</sup>
- Contrary to other under-represented groups, **few proactive measures** have been employed to boost young candidates. The result is an often large disconnect between political leaders and young generations.

28. **Young women are in many countries subject to “double discrimination”** based on their age and gender. They also often experience additional obstacles compared with men.

29. When there are obstacles to participating in formal, institutionalised political processes, young people can rapidly feel disempowered and **prefer alternative modes of participation** over the more formal routes. The rising tide of protests, political consumerism and populism, and single-issue campaigns erupting everywhere all point to the increasing appeal of non-traditional and informal modes of participation to a youth population that is better educated, more aware and – for the first time in history – has the tools to mobilise and organise at short notice, thanks largely to the low-cost and high-speed connectivity provided by mobile phones, the internet and social media. When it comes to challenging institutions or an issue close to their hearts is at stake, young people are at the forefront of movements.

30. To enhance young people’s involvement in politics, governments across the world have tried a number of measures including awareness campaigns, compulsory voting, youth quotas, lower age requirements, establishment of youth councils, and citizenship education. Evidence suggests that while **citizenship education can improve young people’s personal social development and their participation in more individualised and informal forms of engagement, compulsory voting and youth quotas can partially help address the youth participation deficit in formal politics.**<sup>25</sup> So far, no European country has introduced youth quotas at national level by legislation. However, in nine countries political parties have set quotas.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Youth participation in national parliaments: 2018, IPU publication,

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-12/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments-2018>

<sup>22</sup> The Nordic countries lead much of the world in electing younger MPs: the share of MPs under 30 in single or lower chambers **exceeds 10% in 4 countries:** Norway (13.61%), Sweden (12.32%), San Marino (11.67%) and Finland (10%). Seven other CoE member States have over 5% of MPs under 30. Azerbaijan and Monaco have none.

76% of upper chambers of parliament worldwide have no MPs under 30. In Europe, 5 upper chambers have 1-3% and 11 have none.

<sup>23</sup> In recent years, several European countries have lowered the voting age to 16, mostly at local and regional level. In Austria and Malta, young people can vote at national level at 16, also in Bosnia and Herzegovina, if they are employed. The proponents of lowering the voting age note that 16-year-olds participate in political debates on social media and events, work, pay taxes, rent houses and join armed forces in some countries. Consequently, given their contribution to society, they should also be eligible to vote. The main arguments raised by the opponents are that Young people lack the maturity to grapple with complex political processes. For further reading: <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt20/lowering-the-voting-age>

<sup>24</sup> The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt10/yt210/young-people-in-political-decision-making>

<sup>25</sup> Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016, The Commonwealth secretariat, London 2016, p.67.

<sup>26</sup> IPU report [Youth participation in national parliaments: 2018](#), table 5, p.26. Age groups and quota percentages, as well as the concrete impact, differ from country to country..



### 3.2. Limited outreach, spaces and funding

31. It is not easy either for the youth to have their voices heard through informal channels. Most youth organisations and networks in Europe share similar **hurdles of lack of recognition, meaningful inclusion, funding and support**. Their voices are not strong, partly because their activities are relatively unknown and have little outreach. Most of them attach only a fragment of their focus and projects on peace and security issues. Besides, the YPS agenda is inherently intersectional: it must complement aspects of gender, peace and security while considering the various factors of marginalisation of young people that need to be tackled to achieve positive peace.

32. Despite there being more **spaces** created and dedicated for young people working for and in peacebuilding, these spaces appear not to be linked to decision-making but rather proposed as separate spaces dedicated to youth only, such as youth parliaments<sup>27</sup> or youth conferences, rather than real inclusion on young people in negotiation processes. The rare initiatives that aim at including young people in these processes, mostly remain tokenistic or ad hoc, targeting small groups of educated elites, while the peacebuilding efforts on the ground seldom have a youth lens.

33. **Funding constraints** play a significant role in determining the types of activities that youth led organisations can undertake. They operate on very limited funding, the annual budget of the organisations working in conflict prevention and resolution in Europe amounting to an average of 174 219 EUR<sup>28</sup>. This makes them rely heavily on voluntarism (reportedly 97% of the staff). The inability to access even small amounts of seed funding or grants impairs many programmes from reaching wider audiences and having greater impact.

34. The various institutional and capacity-based obstacles to receiving, managing and accounting for external funds leave youth led organisations heavily dependent on local donations and contributions of their own members. However, in some countries, youth organisations are prohibited from registration or barred from the formal recognition that might enable them to access funding. On the other hand, international donor organisations function on supporting short-term, one-off, small civil society projects that do not enable systemic change. In addition, membership turnover in youth organisations is very fast, which does not facilitate establishing long-term projects or institutionalised partnerships, which participation in peace negotiations would require.

35. Access to relevant and adequate funding is however fundamental to the work of young people in conflict. **Funding opportunities must be sufficient, sustained and appropriate** to young people; and be administratively relevant to their reality (flexible eligibility criteria for instance).

36. Finally, even if the role of youth in peacebuilding processes is being increasingly recognised, the lack of support is also partly due to the **limited evidence based on what works or not in youth peacebuilding strategies and programmes. As such, identifying and measuring what initiatives have positive impact on the lives of young people and their communities is vital to scaling up effective support to youth around the world.**<sup>29</sup> At the same time, monitoring and assessing the impact should not put an extra burden on the organisational capacity and programme implementation.

### 4. Overcoming barriers

37. In trying to address the various barriers and ways as to how to improve meaningful youth participation in peace and security matters, I would apply the concepts used by the IEP, approaching the question from two directions:

- **Explicit engagement:** initiatives run by youth or that serve youth and directly apply their skills and time to problem solving and peacebuilding in their communities and countries (directly engaging youth in shaping their world);
- **Implicit engagement:** creating the enabling environment for youth to avoid situations of violence, access peacebuilding opportunities and participate in highly functioning societies that allow human potential to flourish.

<sup>27</sup> According to the IPU 2018 report, 72 countries organise youth parliaments as a means to educate and engage greater numbers of young people in parliamentary work.

<sup>28</sup> UNOY Peacebuilders: "Annual Review", 2020.

<sup>29</sup> The Youth Café, online consultation on Youth and Peacebuilding, Session One: Youth Peacebuilding in Practice: Exploring Approaches, Tools and Interventions, <https://www.theyouthcafe.com/updates/2019/4/day-1-deconstructing-the-role-of-youth-in-peacebuilding-youth-peacebuilding-in-practice-the-youth-cafe>.

38. Both engagements must be seen at local (community), national and international levels.

39. The key to any success in conflict regulation and peacebuilding is building trust – both horizontally among youth themselves and across generational divides within their communities, and vertically in the relationships between young people and social institutions, their governments and international stakeholders.

#### 4.1. Explicit engagement

40. Around 400 youth organisations operate around the world that are in one way or another involved in peacebuilding. These range from specialised organisations gathering large numbers of young peacebuilders such as the UNOY Peacebuilders that have successfully lobbied for the adoption of the UNSCR 2250 and its follow-up resolutions and helps keeping YPS issues on the UN agenda, to the European Youth Forum, which has only recently started to focus on this thematic but is becoming increasingly stronger, to regional peacebuilding initiatives such as the Youth Initiative for Human Rights – a network of Balkan youth civil organisations that won the PACE Václav Havel Prize in 2019, to name but a very few examples.

41. The strength of the various forms and layers of youth-led organisations is that they often build relationships between the formal and informal realms of peace negotiations, which may contribute to the legitimacy of peace processes among the wider society. Youth power may be best found in mass protests or special online media activism for peace. Young people's contributions to influence peace negotiations through creative and alternative avenues, often considered informal, need to be recognised as a critical bridge that shapes and supports formal processes.<sup>30</sup>

42. Recent efforts by civil society organisations and youth experts have helped the understanding of youth peacebuilding in the field. The UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) Working Group developed a Practice Note highlighting promising practices in policy and youth programmes around the world. Likewise, the UNOY Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground developed The Global Survey on Youth, Peace and Security to map out the activities of youth-led organisations working globally on peace and security. In turn, many of these initiatives helped feed into the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, which has helped to define a strategy for the implementation of UNSCR 2250.

43. These studies have highlighted many examples of different approaches, tools and interventions that young people use to contribute to peacebuilding in their communities, among them:

- Strengthening community cohesion and reconciliation through intercommunal, religious and ethnic dialogues and events (e.g. exhibitions, plays, sports, concerts);
- Building civic awareness through debates and public campaigns;
- Engaging in community entrepreneurship and livelihood programmes through capacity building and training;
- Establishing alliances, networks, councils and clubs to connect young peacebuilders, build their capacity and leadership, and promote their participation in peacebuilding frameworks.<sup>31</sup>

44. I would add to this list development co-operation, international cooperation, volunteer programmes created and participated in by young people, the actions of diaspora youth and nexus thinking.

45. Young people also play a critical role in supporting the disengagement of their peers from violent groups, and their reintegration. Through their presence on the ground and their better understanding of the needs and local realities of disengaging youth, they may serve as a bridge between disengaging youth and the community.

46. Much of the value of this work lies in youth's ability for outreach and mobilisation, reaching young people that governments and international organisations often fail to reach. They are very much at the frontlines of peacebuilding in their community, acting as the 'eyes and ears' of their youth constituencies. However, their contribution is more geared for conflict prevention (in all pillars of positive peace) and post conflict reconciliation rather than a negotiating force in peace processes.

47. That said, young peacebuilders have the legitimate right to demand being more involved in political processes and decision-making, and should be encouraged to take greater ownership and leadership roles to

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<sup>30</sup> Altiook, A. and Grizelj, I., We are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace process, Executive Summary.

<sup>31</sup> Idem.

build partnerships, conduct advocacy, and undertake participatory research to strengthen youth inclusivity in peace processes. However, there is still a **need to map out the innovative ways in which youth peacebuilders can operate within their context, in order to demonstrate that investing in youth peacebuilders is key to building resilience among their communities and countries**. Considering that one in three internet users is a young person, there are so many opportunities for youth-led movements to significantly influence ongoing peace-making efforts.

#### 4.2. Implicit engagement

48. To support young people working in peacebuilding in overcoming the above-mentioned challenges, local, regional and international **authorities have the responsibility to guarantee enabling environments** for young people. The creation of an enabling environment passes through education (including civic and conflict resolving education, history and religious education, media reading), health and well-being, employment and training opportunities, political and civic participation, including in inclusive participation in peace processes and political decisions, but also through fostering the respect towards human rights, equal opportunities, protection of the vulnerable, accessibility to justice and resources, and changes in perceptions about young people.

49. Implicit engagement requires governments to aspire for positive peace through investing in young people's capacities, agency and leadership and facilitating the engagement of youth organisations and initiatives through substantial funding support, network-building and capacity-strengthening. This approach recognises the full diversity of youth and the ways young people organise. It prioritises partnerships and collaborative action, where young people are viewed as equal and essential partners for peace.

50. In this context, national and local governments should make use of existing instruments, such as the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and create structures that allow real engagement of young people in decision-making through youth councils and parliaments.

51. Implicit engagement is also relevant in preparing young people involved in the state structures of peacekeeping and peace building, notably in armed and police forces. It is of utmost importance that the young recruits receive human rights education as well as training in peace mediation, conflict resolution and reconciliation within their training curricula. This would positively impact on the future of the defence and law enforcement forces and would also provide useful skills to all those enrolled in military and police training.

#### 5. Challenges of implementing the UN Security Council resolutions on youth, peace and security

52. The UNSCR 2250 can be considered as the first ever resolution to explicitly recognise the positive role that young people play in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, asking for the establishment of "integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution". It identifies five pillars for action: **participation, protection, prevention, partnership and disengagement and reintegration**.

53. The subsequent UNSCR 2419 (2018) and UNSCR 2535 (2020) reaffirmed commitment to the full implementation of UNSCR 2250. UNSCR 2419 has an additional focus on the inclusive representation of youth for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements. All three resolutions urge member States to consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels, including possible integrated mechanisms for youth to participate meaningfully in peace processes and dispute resolution. The UNSCR recognised the critical need to engage young people not as a security threat, but as partners in key decision-making efforts including in political negotiations that have a direct impact on their lives today and in the future.<sup>32</sup>

54. In September 2018, the UN launched the **United Nations Youth Strategy 2030**, which provides an internal road map for the organisation. While holistic in nature, it includes a specific priority on peacebuilding and resilience-building, directly aligned with the YPS agenda. Under its provisions, the UN is committed to recognising and supporting the positive contributions of young people to development, peace and security; social justice, the prevention of violence; disaster and risk reduction; and humanitarian and climate action.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> The First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, 5-6 March 2019 Helsinki, Summary Report p.4.

<sup>33</sup> Report of the UN Secretary-General on Youth and peace and security, UN Security Council, S/2020/167, 2 March 2020, p.13.

55. The UNSCR 2250, 2419 and 2535 must be seen closely inter-related with the **UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. Although the 17 Sustainable Development Goals do not specifically mention young people, the needs and role of youth are addressed in some of the targets and indicators that underpin the SDGs, and the Agenda includes a commitment to ‘the full realisation of [young people’s] rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend’. It creates the framework for moving towards more prosperous, equitable, inclusive and peaceful societies, the building of which rests on the shoulders of young people. The SDG 2030 will certainly help the issue of YPS to be kept on international and national agendas for the coming decade.

56. The UNSCR 2250, 2419 and 2535 collectively offer a **blueprint for meaningful youth engagement in youth-inclusive peace processes**, which are expected to create cascades of policy responses at international (in this report’s context European) level. Indeed, there seems to be a growing recognition of young people’s essential role in peace and security. However, until today, most responses to translating the recommendations to policies are fragmented, small-scale and operating in bubbles, without opportunities for wider outreach. Many intergovernmental and civic organisations appear to struggle with creating a more systematic inclusion of young people in peace agreements that would guarantee their sustainability.<sup>34</sup>

57. This is a challenge also within the **Council of Europe** where the outcomes of youth programmes are not always visible or sustained across its various institutions and member States, even if programmes and projects evolve well in the pace of expected innovative solutions.

58. Thus, for example, in reaction to the first review of UNSCR 2250 in 2018, the Council of Europe North-South Centre focused immediately its annual Lisbon Forum on identifying strategic approaches that connect the implementation of the YPS agenda with the mission and mandate of the Council of Europe. The Forum emphasised that the building of democratic security, the fight against violence and radicalisation, the promotion of human rights, social justice and social cohesion, could not be disconnected from the issues around YPS, and concluded that shared responsibility, reciprocal trust, multilateral cooperation, and political involvement through inclusive and comprehensive mechanisms of governance were the objectives that should be pursued both by youth and political representatives to ensure democratic processes aiming at a sustainable peace.

59. The Lisbon Forum’s **recommendations** consequently highlighted three main areas:

- the cross-cutting nature of the YPS agenda, which is key for a successful and effective support of young people in the construction of peace;
- the need for partnership at the different levels of governance and the importance to monitor the progress at these levels; and
- the meaningful and systemic inclusion of youth-led organisations, including at grass-root level in decision-making and policy processes, which must be accompanied by adequate funding to sustain their operation and structural development.

60. The priorities and expected results of the youth sector for 2022-2023 will operate within the wider context of the **Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030**<sup>35</sup>, which will be the framework within which the next five biennial “Youth for Democracy” sub-programmes will be implemented. Under the thematic priority of “**Living together in peaceful and inclusive societies**”, the activities planned will focus on enabling youth workers and young people to gain the knowledge and skills to work on peace-building and intercultural dialogue to prevent and combat discrimination, exclusion and violent extremism. They aim to provide young people with opportunities to play an active role in intercultural dialogue; peace-building and conflict transformation; co-operation with neighbouring and other world regions, specially through youth mobility programmes and opportunities for intercultural learning; convening institutions, representative bodies, community groups and

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<sup>34</sup> Grizelj, I. & Altiock, A. (2019) *We Are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes*.

<sup>35</sup> The Council of Europe youth sector strategy was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in January 2020 and is to be found in the Committee of Ministers’ Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680998935>. The emphasis of the thematic priority “Living together in peaceful and inclusive societies” will be on: building inclusive societies through policies, programmes and projects that embrace diversity and effectively monitor and counter discrimination, violence and exclusion; allowing young people, including those experiencing any form of discrimination and exclusion, to benefit from opportunities that develop their commitment to and exercise of democratic citizenship; embedding key foundations, such as European unity, global solidarity, peace, diversity, intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and environmental sustainability, more prominently in policy, practice and research within and beyond the youth sector; strengthening young people’s capacities, agency and leadership to prevent violence, transform conflict and to build a culture of peace through substantial support for funding, building networks and recognising the full diversity of young people and their ways of organising themselves.

the wider society for dialogue; volunteering and solidarity actions at local and international levels. A key emphasis will be on mainstreaming inclusiveness, equality and intersectionality.

61. For over a decade, the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe has initiated various projects and activities and developed educational materials and training courses for youth in conflict-affected areas.<sup>36</sup> One of its flagship projects is the **Youth Peace Camp**, which has been operational since 2003 and has brought together young people (aged 18-25) from a number of Council of Europe member States and beyond.<sup>37</sup> These Peace Camps allow young people across conflict divides to engage in exchanges, learn to talk and listen to the others. Their aim is also to have an impact on the work of public institutions and support young people to work in their communities.

62. While it is important to invest in young people to lead peacebuilding work, impact must be ensured beyond a selected few. For this reason, in 2019 the YPC alumni were supported in planning and implementation of the follow-up activities organised in their communities and allowing to impact young people at the local level. Supporting young people with resources at the local level seems to be crucial in order to ensure the sustainability of the dialogue building activities. The participants are lacking not only understanding, support and outright backlash, but also resources for sustainable engagement in the peacebuilding, such as funding and information on where to get support.

63. The youth sector of the Council of Europe pioneered, with the **Youth Peace Ambassadors**, a project implemented between 2011 and 2014. The project promoted and supported the role of young people in peacebuilding activities that contribute to living together in dignity and dialogue. It was based on human rights, intercultural dialogue, youth participation and the idea of young people being ambassadors of the Council of Europe's values in their local communities. One of the main planned outcomes of the project is the Youth Peace Ambassadors Network (YPAN), gathering over 80 young people active in peace education, intercultural dialogue and conflict transformation. The YPAN creation stands as an example of sustainability in which young people receive institutional and financial support while remaining fully autonomous and independent. YPAN currently has a seat in the Advisory Council on Youth, another example of good practice in youth participation and partnership.

64. The experiences of the Council of Europe Youth for Democracy programme and youth-led projects across Europe show that **non-formal education and youth work** are particularly effective and relevant for peace and human rights education. **Education about, through and for human rights is central to peacebuilding, reconciliation and approaching historical injustices.**

65. The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights education supports the formulation of the **Council of Europe Reference Framework of competences for Democratic Culture** (RFCDC).<sup>38</sup> This competences framework provides educational materials for education systems to equip young people with competences to: defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law; participate effectively in a culture of democracy; and to live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies. The framework emphasises intercultural dialogue as a guiding principle<sup>39</sup> to be implemented in the national curriculum of primary and secondary schools, vocational training and higher education across member States.

66. Young people do not need institutions to give them a voice. However, institutions should work harder to amplify their voices. In this spirit, several international organisations, including the UN itself have initiated the participation **Youth Delegates** in their work as a key priority of their agenda on youth. All national delegations are encouraged to involve youth delegates who would participate – for one year – in their country's official delegation to the United Nations General Assembly and various functional Commissions of the Economic and Social Council.<sup>40</sup> I deem it important that there could also be Youth Delegates to the UN Security Council in order that their voices be heard on a more permanent basis when it comes to building and sustaining peace.

67. The EU, which has been another frontrunner in implementing the youth, peace and security agenda, has also several projects for amplifying youth voices. Its **Young Political Leaders Programme** aims at fostering peaceful dialogue, promoting long-term confidence building and cooperation between leaders in third

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-peace-dialogue/home>.

<sup>37</sup> Armenia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia (including Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Israel, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, the Palestinian Authority, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine.

<sup>38</sup> Reference framework of competences for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue; <https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/context-concepts-and-model>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/education-policy-advisers-network-epan->

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/what-we-do/what-can-you-do/establish-a-youth-delegate-programme.html>.

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world countries. The **Young Mediterranean Voices** initiative connects civil society, educational institutions and policymakers across the Euro-Med region to promote mutual understanding and to foster youth engagement and leadership in view of shaping solutions to common challenges. **The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange** connects youth in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean in a meaningful intercultural on-line experience to enhance dialogue, media literacy and active citizenship. The network of **Young European Ambassadors** fosters cooperation and sustainable links between young people and youth organisations from the EU and the Eastern Neighbourhood countries. The EU has also supported the **One Young World Peace Ambassadors** initiative, dedicated to preventing and countering violent extremism, promoting peace-building efforts and conflict resolution through youth-led initiatives in vulnerable communities.<sup>41</sup>

68. However, more crucial to the accomplishment of the YPS agenda than empowering a limited number of youth leaders is **to make a difference to all young people on the ground in conflict zones**. Presently, the EU is conducting close to 30 crises prevention and response actions on four continents to strengthen youth resilience and to promote youth-led peacebuilding.<sup>42</sup>

69. At the national level, Finland appears to be the only European country that is developing its national road map for YPS and is developing a national Action Plan on YPS. An action plan is being drafted in collaboration with a network of youth organisations that could serve as a blueprint for the development of action plans by other states. Finland was also the country to host the 1<sup>st</sup> International Symposium on Youth Participation and Peace Processes in March 2019 in Helsinki and has been a major donor country since.

70. This lassitude by most other Council of Europe member States as regards the implementation of the UNSCR resolutions may be explained by their high degree of internal positive peace and the low societal priority given to YPS issues (with the exception of terrorist threats). Twenty-four Council of Europe member States are among the 50 top countries of the 2020 Global Peace Index (GPI). Also, many EU countries contribute to external development aid and conflict regulation in the third world countries through the EU institutional structures. On the other hand, the conflict-ridden member States at the bottom end of GPI almost exclusively represent floundering democracies, the governments of which do not aspire for positive peace solutions, nor for giving dissenting voices a more prominent place around the negotiation table or a greater participatory role in the society as a whole.

## 6. Further steps: rethinking decision-making processes and strengthening enabling factors

71. Meaningful inclusion of young people in the decision-making processes within conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation is undeniably **a complex matter** that should be understood and approached as **multi-dimensional, integrated and interconnected to other inclusion agendas**. Enabling young people's participation means supporting their visions of peace; creating spaces for engaging in political processes; facilitating and supporting dignified livelihoods; supporting education and capacity-building for peace; and facilitating inter-community dialogue and exchange.

72. Every new process takes time to root, and a degree of perseverance from the proponents and policymakers to keep it on track. The YPS agenda has the chance to get inspiration and learn from the lessons of the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. However, differently from the gender issues, the youth act both on the side of the villains and the victims and the entire spectrum in between, which adds complexity to the matter when compared to other vulnerable groups.

73. Many fragmented initiatives have been taken in the past years by governments and international bodies. They look positive on the surface, but often lack the substance required to turn young people into real actors of peace. Best-practice examples from real-life situations are still to a large extent missing.

74. As regards the UNSCR 2250, I see **two intrinsic weaknesses** in their implementation: first, **the missing data**. The resolution was probably launched too prematurely on political grounds, without much empirical groundwork done on data collection. Thus, it is still difficult to estimate how many young people are really affected by the various conflicts and how many young people are participating in peacebuilding. This is being done now, but data gathering needs far more investment as the world embarks on the Sustainable Development Agenda and seeks to operationalise UNSCR 2250.

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<sup>41</sup> Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States by Ha Mr Olof Skoog, Head of the EU Delegation to the United Nations, at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Maintenance of international peace and security: Youth, Peace and Security, 27 April 2020, [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/78041/eu-statement---united-nations-security-council-open-debate-youth-peace-and-security\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/78041/eu-statement---united-nations-security-council-open-debate-youth-peace-and-security_en).

<sup>42</sup> Idem.

75. Second, there is a clear **mismatch of positive peace strategies being proposed for negative peace contexts**. The various recommendations in the UNSCR resolutions on YPS address democratic societies. However, violent or armed conflicts are also a problem for countries with autocratic and/or corrupt regimes where there is usually no trust in politics, the army or the law enforcement. Though youth inclusion policies might (one day) see daylight in paper in those countries, they are not likely to be executed. It is of no surprise that only five countries around the world are in the process of developing national road maps for YPS. There needs to be a much **stronger down-push from the UN agencies** and reflection on how to make youth involvement work in negative environments. In fact, the question of how young people in the conflict zones could be effectively included and participate in peace processes, has not been fully answered in the UNSCR 2250 context, and must be given adequate attention. An example of this could be the engagement of young people in any peace negotiations based on the use of quota.

76. We also need a fundamental paradigm shift to **design and implement peace negotiations that include young people from the outset**. Upon the adoption of UNSCR 2535 in July 2020, the UNSC called on all relevant actors, *“to consider ways to increase the inclusive representation of youth for the prevention and resolution of conflict, as well as in peacebuilding, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements”*. However, very little has been done to assess how young people engage before and during peace negotiations to shape a peace agreement. The processes themselves need to become ‘youth-inclusive’ as opposed to including youth in peace processes as an add-on or tick box.

77. It seems impossible to work on the YPS agenda without working on the **democracy agenda** and on the young people’s **participation in governance and political processes**.

78. **National parliaments** can play an important role in ensuring the implementation of the YPS agenda by adopting relevant legislation, commissioning national road maps for YPS, allocating financial resources and supporting inclusive youth participation. But first of all, our parliaments need to open up to young generations. Improved youth representation can strengthen the legitimacy of parliament, achieve greater fairness in access to political decision-making, contribute to better policymaking and generate important symbolic effects for youth and the political process.

79. The only quick fix to resolve the flagrant underrepresentation of youth is through the use of **quotas**. **Quota schemes** have helped other disadvantaged groups, including women and ethnic minorities, to increase their shares in parliament and they could also help young candidates. IPU data shows that while a lower minimum age has not resulted in a significant increase in the share of young people in parliaments, introducing youth quotas has led to an increase in the number of young parliamentarians. Therefore, not only would a youth quota of 10 or 20% directly boost representation, it would also signal to young people in general that they have a place in shaping politics and policies. All the same, rather than imposing arbitrary figures on all countries, the targets should be realistic and adjusted according to country contexts. Half the proportion of the youth population under 30 appears to be a fair target.

80. Along the same logic, I strongly hold that young people should be much more involved in the work of international parliamentary bodies such as the IPU, PACE, OSCE PA or the European Parliament as well. Just as the last decades have called for the gender balance in national delegations, there should be an **age balance** or **generation balance** introduced as well.

81. Having started in politics at a young age myself, I feel it is essential that meaningful youth participation should be promoted at all levels when building and sustaining peace, security and stability. Similarly to the United Nations Youth Delegate programme, I deem it important that youth led organisations should participate on a permanent basis in the work of the Assembly’s committees. At the moment, it would not be realistic in the Council of Europe context to have all delegations send their youth delegates, rather I would see a great benefit from working with the Council of Europe Advisory Council of Youth (CCJ) and enabling a **meaningful and systematic participation of youth representatives in the work of our Assembly committees**, and I am glad that our committee members upheld this idea at our last meeting on 26 March 2021.

82. One of the easiest ways to have an impact would be to **introduce a form of a youth partnership upon the analogy of the partnership for democracy with the Assembly, with participation and speaking rights within the committees**, which would allow young people to also have a say on matters that are not only focused on youth issues but still impact them. I would also like to urge national delegations to take into account, and relay to their parliaments, the youth representatives’ expertise and opinions on the role and activities of the Council of Europe, but also to ensure that the voice of young people in their respective countries is heard in the Assembly.

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83. As regards policy action, of the multitude of recommendations that have been made by policy analysts, civil society organisations or youth-led peacebuilding organisations on inclusive peacebuilding policies, I find one particularly worthy of considering in this report's context – that of **establishing global and interconnected young mediation networks to increase youth participation and inclusion in peace processes**.<sup>43</sup> Collaboration and partnerships between actors working at different levels should be considered as a principle in designing and implementing such networks. Training opportunities (possibly online) focussing on developing competences on mediation, conflict transformation, leadership and peaceful political participation are needed; pilot initiatives could be developed within the Council of Europe youth sector.

84. As importantly, we should **create spaces** where young people can freely express their voice and debate not only with their peers but with policy makers, thus influencing behaviours, ideas and policies. 'People to people' contacts and networking between peers are important. All spaces for young people to express their voices should focus on understanding the needs of young people, so that the solutions to address the youth issues would be tailored specifically for youth. **The consultations** run with young people should become a widely used tool to map the needs of young people, so that the policies designed by decision makers address the root causes of the problems. It would be worth considering creating more spaces at the Council of Europe and its member States level to ensure a co-management system of decisions on youth policies (taking as a role model example the Advisory Council on Youth and the Joint Council on Youth).

85. Next to participation, the **role of education** remains key in the development of core competences for the construction of peaceful societies. Young people should be provided with useful and concrete educational tools to fight violence, hatred and extremism. The Council of Europe Competences Framework for Democratic Culture provides a best guide for member States on the key competences required and to enable intercultural dialogues and to encourage member States governments to include learning of reconciliatory skills already at an early age, as this has been proven to be effective later on. The need for quality education and its contribution to achievement of peace is stressed in all the UNSCR YPS resolutions. Member States should include peace education in the formal curricula of the schools, peace education being an important dimension in the Competences Framework and is particularly suitable to develop skills on empathy, mediation, conflict transformation, reconciliation, and human rights.

86. The role of **non-formal education** needs to be equally recognised and supported. The experience of the youth sector on human rights education with children and young people deserves being further disseminated and promoted at national level, notably through the Compass training courses. All areas and sectors of education should contribute to the development of a culture of peace and human rights in the spirit of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.

87. Last but not least, enabling the engagement of youth in formal political mechanisms does increase the fairness of political processes by reducing democratic deficits, contributes to better and more sustainable policies, and also has symbolic importance that can further contribute to restore trust in public institutions, especially among youth. Moreover, the vast majority of challenges that humanity currently faces, such as the Covid-19 outbreak and climate change require concerted global action and the meaningful engagement and participation of young people to be addressed effectively. It is clear that the crisis will only be surmounted through long-term responses looking to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability. **It will therefore be critical for youth to have a seat at the table and contribute to global action towards challenges that will determine their future.**

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<sup>43</sup> Suggested by Ali Altioik and Irena Grizelj in the recommendations of their paper "We are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes".