



YOUTH
INCLUSIVE
GUIDE
TO PEACE
MEDIATION



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Young people can play a crucial role in conflict resolution. Building on the EU's support to the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, this practical and concise guide clearly sets out how young people can make a difference to peace mediation processes. It also provides inspiration to the European Parliament's Young Political Leaders programme, a beacon of the European Parliament's deep commitment to the YPS agenda.

Maximilian Schroeder

Head of Unit,
Mediation and Dialogue
Support Unit, European
Parliament

This is a very practical tool that will help raise awareness in the EU about the Youth, Peace & Security agenda and facilitate youth inclusion in EU mediation efforts.

Candida Novak

Policy Officer,
Mediation Support
Team, European
External Action
Service



FOREWORD.....

Seven years after the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, the positive role young people play in building sustainable peace is increasingly acknowledged and promoted. Young people in Europe and around the world, 1,85 billion strong, are slowly taking their rightful place in spaces where solutions to conflicts are being discussed. They are taking active roles as peacebuilders and mediators, both within and outside formal peace processes.

Evidence shows that peace processes that engage and include young people are more likely to be successful. Youth engagement on South Sudan's High Level Revitalization Forum, as described in this guide, provides one example of the diverse ways youth engage in peace processes, and the impact it has. Where youth were largely excluded from the initial 2014 peace talks, youth representatives "in the room" of the Revitalization Forum informed a better approach to disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration action. Meanwhile, "around the room", youth were building alliances with women's movements, feeding their joint priorities into the negotiations, and convincing parties to open space for refugees to speak in the talks. "Outside the room", South Sudanese youth promoted fact-based discussion on the talks through an e-delegate participation platform, which helped feed grassroots perspectives into the negotiations and prevent misinformation and public panic.

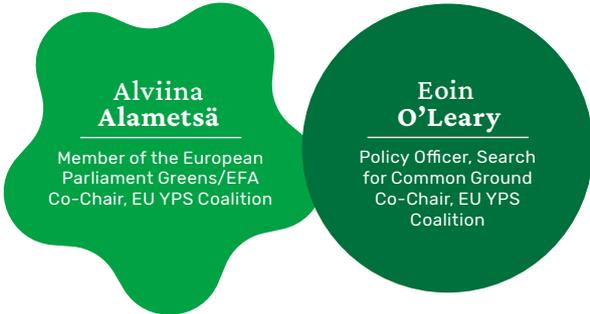
The rhetoric on the importance of youth inclusion, however, does not always live up to its promise in practice. In the 900 negotiated peace agreements signed globally in the last couple of

decades, the voices of young people have been largely absent. Too often, young people are still an add-on or tick-box exercise in peace processes. The potential they possess is too often hindered by lack of recognition, support, funding, and genuine partnerships.

The European Union has committed to work on changing this. In 2022, the EU celebrated the Year of Youth, during which it adopted its first Youth Action Plan in EU external action. In the Action Plan, the EU commits to actively and inclusively engage young people in efforts to build lasting peace and contribute to justice and reconciliation, including by developing concrete guidance and capacity building to enhance the youth dimension in peace mediation.

Developed concurrently with the update of the European External Action Service's mediation guidelines and in support of the global *5-Year Strategic Action Plan for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes* launched in January 2022, this guide is intended as a practical resource on the "how" to include youth in peace mediation. With actionable recommendations and inspiring examples of youth-led efforts, we hope it helps those leading and supporting peace processes understand not only the benefits, but also the practical feasibility of meaningful youth inclusion.

Ultimately, in a spirit of partnership and in synergy with other efforts led by young people and their allies around the world, we hope the guide contributes to the imperative of harnessing youth participation, and the capacities of YPS-supporting institutions like the EU, in realising more inclusive and peaceful societies. We are in this together!



**Alviina
Alametsä**

Member of the European
Parliament Greens/EFA
Co-Chair, EU YPS Coalition

**Eoin
O'Leary**

Policy Officer, Search
for Common Ground
Co-Chair, EU YPS
Coalition



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INTRODUCTION 1

Purpose of guide

The aim of this guide is to advance the integration of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda into peacebuilding processes led and supported by the European Union (EU), and specifically in peace mediation¹. It builds on the premise that mediation processes that systematically include young people² are more likely to generate: a better understanding of the root causes of conflicts, broader national ownership, greater legitimacy, and improved prospects of more sustainable peace.³ The guide outlines:

- › Relevant normative and operational frameworks;
- › Youth-inclusive strategies for the preparation, process design, implementation, and monitoring of peace mediation efforts;
- › Pathways for leveraging EU capacities and partnerships in support of youth-inclusive mediation;
- › Four examples of youth inclusion in peace and mediation processes.

In this, the guide serves as a useful resource to EU decision makers, experts, and practitioners involved in framing, accompanying, and implementing EU mediation support efforts, including in the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European Commission, and the European External Action Service (EEAS), with particular relevance for the EEAS Mediation Support Team, EU Special Representatives and Special Envoys, EU Delegations, EEAS Pool of Mediators, EEAS Mediation Task Force, and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

The guide can also be of interest to other stakeholders that are focused on EU policy on inclusive peacebuilding and peace mediation, such as peacebuilding civil society organisations (CSOs) and youth-led groups, as well as other national, regional, and international institutions supporting mediation efforts.

While the authority to strengthen youth inclusion in peace mediation ultimately lies with governments and negotiating parties, it is a shared responsibility of all professional sectors that support peace processes. The proposed recommendations should be considered as part of collaborative efforts with partners from youth groups, CSOs, governmental partners, and multilateral organisations.

Normative & operational frameworks

Through the years, the EU has made it explicit that it recognises young people's important role in the prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts. This is evident through the EU's support to **international frameworks** on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS), as well as through the introduction of its **own normative documents**:

EXAMPLE	TYPE	SIGNIFICANCE
<p>United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) on Youth, Peace and Security: 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020)</p>	<p>UN policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The foundational UNSCR 2250 asks for the establishment of "integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution". In 2017, the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, committed the EU's support to the YPS agenda and organised a European consultation to inform an independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security requested by UNSCR 2250.⁴ › UNSCR 2419 underlines the need for <i>"inclusive representation of youth for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements"</i>. › Both resolutions are reinforced by UNSCR 2535 which emphasises the need to operationalise the YPS agenda.
<p>Council Conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe (2018) and on youth in external action (2020)</p>	<p>EU policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The Council of the EU highlights young people's contributions to peacebuilding both within Europe and in external action, in line with the UNSCRs on YPS. › The 2020 Conclusions call upon the Commission and the High Representative, in cooperation with Member States, to <i>"support the inclusion of young people, and in particular young women and girls, and their participation in all efforts to prevent conflict, and build and sustain peace"</i>.
<p>We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes (2019)</p>	<p>Global policy paper</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › A first-ever snapshot of young people's engagement in peace mediation processes around the world, which includes recommendations to enhance youth inclusion inside, around, and outside⁵ the room of peace negotiations. › Commissioned by the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the EEAS mediation unit contributed to this independent paper.

EXAMPLE	TYPE	SIGNIFICANCE
<p>Concept on EU Peace Mediation (2020), welcomed by Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation (2020)</p>	<p>EU policy guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Concept emphasises inclusion as a key principle of EU mediation practice, drawing specific attention to young people’s meaningful participation and inter-generational dialogue. ➤ The Council Conclusions further stress the importance of including younger generations in peace mediation.
<p>EEAS Peace Mediation Guidelines (2020)</p>	<p>EU policy guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Developed in parallel with the Concept on EU Peace Mediation, the EEAS guidelines state that <i>“an integrated framework for strengthening youth inclusive peace processes provides a practical channel for recognising and engaging the positive contributions young people make to build and sustain peace.”</i>
<p>We Are In This Together: Operationalizing a Five-Year Strategic Action Plan for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes (2022)</p>	<p>Global framework for action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Outlines time-bound actions and cross-cutting priorities to enable a shift from youth-inclusive norms towards youth-inclusive practices in designing and implementing peace processes. ➤ The EEAS mediation unit was a member of a Steering Group which guided and reviewed the strategy.
<p>Youth Action Plan (YAP) in European Union External Action (2022) welcomed by Council Conclusions on Youth Action Plan in EU external action (2022)</p>	<p>EU framework for action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The EU’s first policy framework for a strategic partnership with young people in external action for 2022-2027, which fully supports the three YPS resolutions of the UN Security Council. ➤ The YAP outlines contributions to implementation of the YPS agenda, including: the development of concrete guidance on youth in EU peace mediation, integration of YPS agenda into the EU’s political dialogues, building capacity of EU staff on YPS such as in the EEAS’ conflict prevention and mediation trainings, and improving youth sensitivity of the EU conflict analysis and Early Warning System. ➤ The Council Conclusions stress <i>“the importance for the EU and its Member States of supporting inclusive, meaningful and safe participation of young people” in peace mechanisms”</i>.

PREPARATION 2

To ensure youth-inclusive approaches with youth-inclusive outcomes, peace mediation processes must be prepared carefully.

2.1

Youth-Sensitive Conflict Analysis

Conflict analysis is the starting point for effective peace mediation. Updated in 2020, the *Guidance Note On The Use Of Conflict Analysis In Support Of EU External Action* states that the views of **local civil society stakeholders including youth**, who are often the majority of a conflict-affected population, should always be considered.

- › EU mediators, their teams, and supporting organisations should **apply a youth-lens to conflict analysis** to understand how young people’s experiences and interests intersect with the overall conflict dynamics and drivers, as well as opportunities for peace. See the youth-sensitive analysis tool in Folke Bernadotte Academy’s *Youth, Peace and Security Adviser’s Handbook*, pp. 41-49.

2.2

Capacity & confidence-building

Capacity building for youth inclusion should address the needs for the multitude of actors involved in peace mediation, and therefore **not only target young people** but also policy makers and political decision-makers at all levels, senior mediators, mediation support units, and CSOs. Capacity building resources should **transform negative perceptions** of youth into seeing them as partners for peace, **produce knowledge** on approaches and mechanisms of participation, and **foster skills** to effectively implement such practices.⁶

- › EU institutions, in partnership with CSOs and youths, should **raise awareness, train, and advocate to mediators, negotiators, and technical support teams** about the positive roles of youth, effectiveness of youth-inclusive peace mediation, and the importance of working with young people as partners in sustaining peace.
- › EU Delegations, mediators and their teams, should inform and provide **technical training for youth organisations and youth on substantive issues and thematic areas**, to enable young people to meaningfully participate in the mediation process and to articulate their common interests and agendas. This may also include **providing international expert advice and exchanges with youth from different conflict settings**, held in partnership with CSOs and youth organisations.

- › EU institutions should support initiatives by CSOs and youth groups to **facilitate coalition- and confidence-building activities between youth and other stakeholders** (women, refugees, victims) and provide for technical training on coalition-building, formulating common agendas for change, and negotiation strategies.
- › EU institutions should support the creation of **intergenerational mentorship networks** between young leaders in the field and senior experts, mediators, and political leaders at all levels, enhancing mutual relationships, cross-learning, and collaboration.

Case Study
EXAMPLE 1

See example of youth building coalitions with women in Central African Republic, to overcome cultural norms and societal perceptions that limit women and young people's inclusion in decision making processes on peace and security, as well as to tackle misinformation through partnerships with traditional and non-traditional media **(page 25)**.

PROCESS DESIGN

3

Inclusive process design creates multiple entry points and mechanisms to integrate the perspectives of young people into peace mediation.

3.1

Demonstrating inclusivity in mediation teams

Youth inclusion needs to be internalised through the composition as well as the combined knowledge, skills and experience of mediation teams. This will **equip the mediator with the required expertise** to guide, navigate and monitor the process in a youth-sensitive manner and ensure mediation teams benefit from the access, skills, and expertise that youth can bring as regards particular groups, topics, technologies, or the experiences of young people on the forefront of conflict, while also **promoting the principle of inclusivity** among negotiating parties from the onset.

- › EU institutions and mediators should **provide and leverage youth and inclusion expertise within technical teams**, for example by organising context-specific youth inclusion workshops and engaging external expertise from CSOs and youth groups.
- › EU institutions and supporting organisations should invest in the **recruitment of more young technical experts** to support peace mediation as part of intergenerational teams, reinforcing the view of youth as credible experts in relevant technical and thematic issues. Mediators and supporting organisations should consider working with **young technical support staff within different negotiating parties**.
- › EU institutions, in partnership with CSOs and youth groups, should support the **establishment of conflict- and context-specific young insider mediation networks**, that are supported by mediation and preventive diplomacy training. **These networks should be connected globally** through actors that work at different levels, such as the Global Community of Practice (see section 5.2).

Case Study EXAMPLE 2

See example of the **Youth Mediation Support Team in Yemen**, supported by the EU and composed of 12 young experts that accompany local mediators in negotiations between conflict parties. Working with mediators, the Support Team helped negotiate an end to the bombing of public infrastructure in Taiz, ensure proper documentation for prisoner exchanges, and raise public awareness of the role of local mediators **(page 27)**.

3.2

Consultative mechanisms

A youth-inclusive process is likely to feature deeper consideration of the human rights, environmental, climate change, gender, psychosocial and economic dimensions of a conflict, as young people **bring different perspectives** and set of issues to the table beyond political power-sharing. It is critical to consider the mechanisms suggested below from a **conflict-sensitivity** and **do-no-harm** perspective, as youth groups may reflect the same divisions of their society and face risks resulting from their participation (see section 3.3). Specific attention should be given to the participation of **marginalised and excluded youth** such as young women, forced migrants, former combatants, youth in rural areas, young people living in poverty, and youth with disabilities.

- › EU mediators, their teams, and supporting organisations should **explore the setting up of youth advisory committees** of selected youth representatives with diverse backgrounds, who channel the realities and perceptions of broader youth groups into the mediation process. Several EU Delegations have already set up youth advisory structures that could be used for this purpose. It is important for the youth representatives to be elected by and accountable to their peers through a transparent process, and to be supported through capacity building training (see section 3.2).
- › EU mediators, their teams, and supporting organisations are advised to consider **carrying out youth-specific civil society consultations** whereby young people of all backgrounds can bring up their specific concerns and aspirations, allowing space for gendered perspectives to come in. There is no one-size-fits-all model for these consultations. An appropriate methodology should be developed for the consultations, which may include youth-led facilitation, thematic forums, and the usage of online discussion platforms. While the consultations can take place in informal settings, their outcomes must have an actual influence in the mediation process – as it might otherwise cause further frustration among politically excluded youth.
- › EU mediators, their teams, and supporting organisations should consider **soliciting position papers from youth organisations and youth networks on negotiation topics**, who may benefit from assistance from CSOs in formulating their interests and recommendations. Mediators must reserve space in the mediation process for negotiating teams to discuss and take these inputs into consideration.

3.3

Safety & protection measures

Young people who are active in peace mediation inside the room or through alternative spaces around and outside the room, often **face repression and reprisals** from the state, political or armed actors, or their own communities.⁷ While the responsibility to protect young people lies, first and foremost, with the state and agents of the state, all actors involved in peace mediation have the responsibility to actively take a **clear stance against violence** and **lack of safe spaces** for youth participation, **mitigate risks** of their own actions, and **offer protection support** within their ability.⁸ This includes the protection of youth in digital spaces. A youth-sensitive risk assessment should be followed by **safety measures** to protect young people across the three layers: inside, around and outside the formal realm of peace mediation.

- › EU institutions, mediators and their teams, and supporting organisations should **promote the protection of young people’s universal and fundamental rights of freedom of organisation, peaceful assembly, association, opinion and expression, and participation in public affairs – including their civic spaces**. This is to foster an enabling and safe environment for young people working on peace and security, and ensure that they do not face reprisals for their work.
- › EU institutions, mediators and their teams should identify the security constraints that may restrict young people from participating in a mediation process, and **provide safety and protection measures for youth representatives** in formal talks as well as consultative and technical meetings. This should include physical protection, security briefings, and the appointment of a focal point for support, including psychosocial, in all phases of the process.

3.4

Youth-sensitive public communication strategies

A youth-sensitive public communication strategy can generate more **public understanding and support** for peace mediation while increasing young people’s inclusive representation in the process. It is an important means of **building trust, social healing, stabilising, and democratising broader peace processes**. A communications strategy will also **support young people’s advocacy** in the promotion of human rights, democracy and peace messages, building public awareness and momentum through broader mobilisation efforts including campaigns, usage of online social media platforms, and non-violent manifestations.

- › EU institutions and supporting organisations should **harness the widespread use of social media and other mass media platforms as mobilisation tools for young people’s inclusion and participation in peace mediation**, shaping a new set of social norms and values essential for societal and institutional acceptance of young people’s role in driving and sustaining peace.⁹ Young people themselves are best-positioned to communicate to fellow youth, facilitating their peers’ engagement, voice, and agency in a peace process.
- › EU institutions, mediators and their teams, and supporting organisations should **formulate two-way communications strategies, whereby youth organisations and young people can systematically provide feedback** for consideration of the implementing parties – thus connecting processes inside, around and outside formal negotiation rooms.
- › EU institutions, mediators and their teams, and supporting organisations **should ensure the usage of accessible language and tools to overcome the exclusion of young people of all backgrounds**. Translation and the usage of digital diplomacy tools should be considered by mediators and their teams, see UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs’ *Digital Mediation Toolkit*.

Case Study
EXAMPLE 3

See example of young people in South Sudan who used social media and live videos as tools to create their own observation roles and to provide accurate information on the peace talks to local and diaspora communities, reducing the risk of misinformation and hate speech during the process **(page 29)**.

4

IMPLEMENTATION

& MONITORING PROGRESS

Young people have an important role to play in the implementation of a peace agreement, and monitoring progress through all its stages.

4.1

Financial and technical support for youth-led & youth-focused initiatives

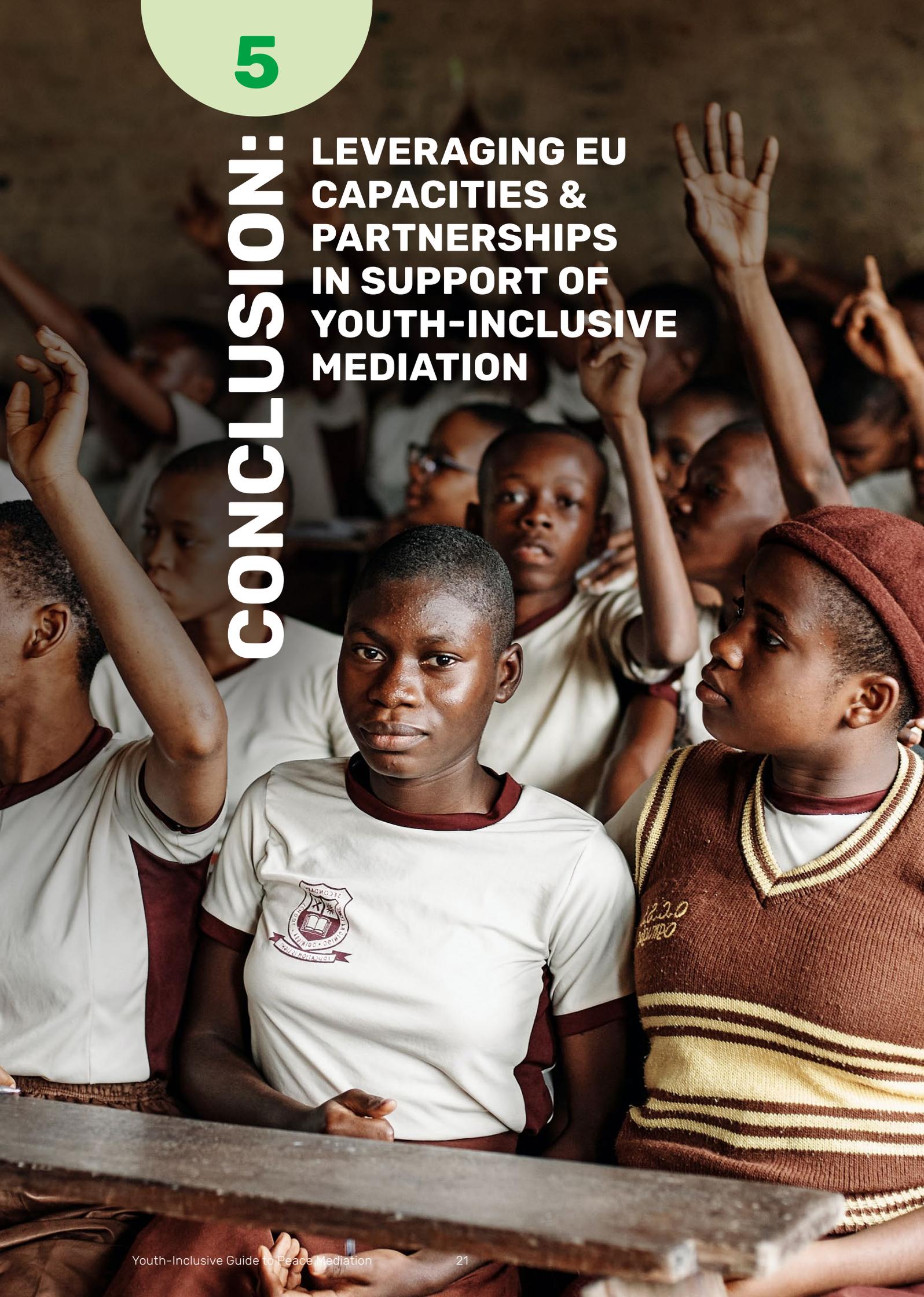
Accessible, flexible and innovative funding opportunities should be provided to youth-led and youth-focused organisations that seek to support peace mediation through peacebuilding, violence prevention, early warning and response initiatives, including the areas highlighted below.

- › EU institutions and supporting organisations should **consult, work with, and support young people as partners during the implementation of peace agreements**, including responsive programmes on security sector and criminal justice reform, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), constitutional and electoral reform, reconciliation and violence prevention efforts.
- › EU institutions and supporting organisations should **provide financial and technical support to youth-led ceasefire monitoring and civilian protection networks as agreed upon by negotiating**, as young people play instrumental roles in these processes which often goes undervalued.¹⁰ Utilising their multiple points of access across all levels of society and their communication skills, young people can support the monitoring, documentation and publication of human rights violations at sub-national and community-levels through investigative field work and usage of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Young people can help promote a community-led, bottom up approach to early warning and early action systems, and inform and protect vulnerable communities (see section 4.2).

5

CONCLUSION:

**LEVERAGING EU
CAPACITIES &
PARTNERSHIPS
IN SUPPORT OF
YOUTH-INCLUSIVE
MEDIATION**



5.1

Overcoming the gap between best-practice commitments and implementation

The EU has expressed commitment to international frameworks on Youth, Peace, and Security, and taken important steps forward by developing dedicated policy guidance. The above sections outline practical steps to realise young people's participation and to integrate their needs and interests in mediated peace processes. It will be challenging to move from the EU's existing commitments to implementation, unless the EU **leverages its political and convening power** and **develops concrete strategies** to increase the meaningful inclusion of young people in peace mediation, **supported by adequate financial and technical resources**.

- › EU institutions, mediators and their teams, and supporting organisations should **use existing normative frameworks to enhance the effective inclusion of young people in EU-led and EU-supported peace mediation processes**, in line with the practical guidance outlined in this document and the successful examples of young people actively influencing peace processes through diverse roles and initiatives.
- › EU institutions, mediators and their teams, and supporting organisations should **promote the integration of youth-inclusive and youth-specific language and provisions in all ceasefire and peace agreements**, recognising young people as key stakeholders, as well as their specific needs and unique contributions, thus increasing the legitimacy of the agreement in the eyes of young people.

5.2

Enhancing coherence, coordination and collaboration

Given the increasing complexity of contemporary conflicts and peace processes, it is important for the EU to enhance coherence, coordination and collaboration across frameworks and with key stakeholders, such as CSOs, youth groups, UN entities, and regional organisations, as an expression of the **EU's multi-dimensional, multi-phase, multilateral and multi-level approach** to peace mediation. This is also an opportunity to **improve data collection, monitoring, and evaluation** of youth inclusivity in peace mediation, bridging a persistent data gap and lack of age-disaggregated information in online databases on peace mediation processes.¹¹

- › EU institutions should support and potentially co-steer the **launch of a Global Community of Practice for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes** – initiated by the UN Office Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, UN DPPA, and Search for Common Ground. The Community of Practice will convene key stakeholders to review and share progress from national, regional, and international contexts, and discuss challenges, ideas, and good practice.¹²
- › EU institutions should **pool resources and expertise** through the Global Community of Practice for the purpose of collective knowledge production, capacity building, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to advance youth-inclusive peace mediation. The EU is well-positioned to **mobilise and convene donors as part of this Community**, for increased prioritisation and resourcing of youth inclusion in peace mediation.
- › This should include a **documentation, monitoring, and progress tracking mechanism using youth participatory methodologies**, to build an evidence base that can assess the influence and impact of young people in peace mediation.

Case Study
EXAMPLE 4

See example of the **First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes** which helped build an evidence base on youth-inclusive peace processes, and offers a model to enhance multi-level collaboration between young mediators, CSOs, regional organisations, and governments and states, in pursuit of an integrated approach to peace mediation **(page 31)**.



ANNEX:

**CASE STUDIES
OF YOUTH
INCLUSION**

EXAMPLE 1:

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Prioritising Diverse Youth Representation

Despite 70% of the population in the Central African Republic being under the age of 24,¹ there has been limited space for young people’s participation in the formal negotiations leading up to the *Political Agreement for Peace and Stability* (known as the ‘APPR’). The APPR was signed in 2019 by the national government and 14 armed groups, including a young leader of a rebel group who was accused of manipulating youth issues for political leverage in the process.² The APPR makes broad references to youth inclusion, for example by calling for the appointment of a youth civil society representative in the Prefectural Implementation Committee.

Nevertheless, young people felt overlooked in the reconciliation and peace process in the Central African Republic, with mandating entities and supporting organisations prioritising engagement of the national government, armed groups, and adult-led civil society organisations. While the inclusion of young combatants is crucial for the sustainability of peace agreements, it is equally important to prioritise the inclusion of young people who are supporting peace processes through non-violent means such as dialogue, prevention, and coalition-building activities.

1 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition.

2 Altiok, Ali and Grizelj, Irena (2019). We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes, pp. 18.

**“
As youth, we
have a different
vision and aspirations
from the government.
This needs to be
bridged.**

Young
peacebuilder
from Central
African
Republic

As one of the engaged supporting organisations, the European Union (EU) has used its first-of-its-kind Békou Trust Fund to support the government with setting up youth centres and funded work with young people as implementing partners of INGOs that lack in-depth expertise on meaningful youth inclusion. Young leaders would like to see this support expanded to youth-led initiatives aimed at preventing violence and building peace, including their efforts to establish partnerships with women-led groups and media platforms to promote safe civic space and peaceful elections.

Reinforcing Coalitions between Youth, Women & Media

Young people in the Central African Republic have been driving efforts to foster an environment that will enable their full participation in political processes. In the lead up to the general elections in 2025, youth organisations are building alliances with women-led groups to jointly promote the protection of safe civic space – both offline and online – as an important foundation for both young people and women’s political participation in the country. Employing a cultural approach, young people appeal to women leaders as their mothers who can guide and prepare a new generation to overcome shared challenges. Such challenges include cultural norms and societal perceptions that limit women and young people’s inclusion in decision making processes on peace and security, as well as misinformation which is tackled through partnerships with traditional and non-traditional media.

These coalitions are mutually beneficial as they also allow women-led groups and media to benefit from the knowledge, energy, and networks of the young people involved. For example, youth organisations have trained media representatives on conflict sensitivity and created mechanisms to report misinformation. Efforts to build partnerships like these are crucial to prevent inter-group conflicts and political violence, while integrating an intersecting youth and gender lens into political processes.

**“
We have to
think about a
movement, not
about groups.**

Young
peacebuilder
from Central
African
Republic

EXAMPLE 2:

YEMEN

Young People Providing Mediation Support

The local mediators lack capacities, which the young mediation support team could provide – especially on technical aspects

Young peacebuilder from Yemen

More than 45% of the population of Yemen is below the age of 15, and another 23.17% is between 15 and 24 years old.³ These young people are deeply affected by the eight-year-old conflict and the humanitarian crisis which is said to be among the worst in the world, due to widespread hunger, disease, and attacks on civilians and infrastructure. Yet young people are also at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts, for example by providing human resources and technical capacities to mediators.

In 2021, the EU supported the establishment of Youth Mediation Support Teams in Yemen, composed of 24 young people from different regions. These young people provided local mediators

3 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

with technical and logistical support in the negotiation, documentation, and implementation of their efforts. Support varied from documenting and reporting on agreements between conflict parties, making logistical arrangements such as for prisoner exchanges, coordinating and attending meetings with donors, reporting to the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, and producing videos to bring greater visibility to the work of local mediators among the general public.

Many successes were achieved. The Youth Mediation Support Team helped establish a national team of local mediators to ensure more coordination on interconnected issues. The young people's documentation work also enabled mediators to overcome stumbling blocks in the process, such as a missing person in prisoner exchanges, who may have already been released or deceased. Through their documentation, youth were able to retrace missing persons by interviewing their family and acquaintances. Another concrete success took place in the City of Taiz, which is divided into government and Houthi-controlled areas. Civilians face significant challenges with accessing the city's water-supply infrastructures, electricity, garbage collection and processing, and general mobility on roads. The local mediators, with the support of the Youth Mediation Support Team, were able to end the bombing of public infrastructures through negotiations and recovered citizens' access to water supplies.

Young people's role in local mediation processes did not automatically trickle down into youth-specific issues being considered and discussed in the negotiations. While having more youth as mediators and in supportive roles is an important goal, it will not necessarily result in more "inclusive substance" in mediation processes. This will require the creation of dedicated mechanisms that consult youth on their views and take their specific needs into account, as well as through the empowerment of local youth civil society.

As a young women, I could not attend some of the meetings in the zones between controlled areas or those late at night.

Young peacebuilder from Yemen

The participating young people did not always feel they were able to move beyond their supportive roles to strengthen their capacities as a future generation of mediators. For example, while some basic training was provided during the programme, many youth had to seek out technical capacity building training on mediation, ceasefire, and security sector reform through their own initiative. One member also shared that she was unable to attend some of the meetings that took place late at night in the zones between controlled areas, due to curfews and cultural restrictions being a young woman. Through her persistence and the relationships of trust she built with senior mediators, she felt she was able to make meaningful contributions to the work nonetheless. The Youth Mediation Support Team is a valuable strategy to strengthen youth inclusion in peace mediation. More in-depth training and mentoring of future members of the Youth Mediation Support Team is recommended, as well formally training local mediators on inclusive processes.

EXAMPLE 3:

SOUTH SUDAN

Youth Inclusion during Peace Negotiations

More than 70 percent of the population of South Sudan is under the age of 30,⁴ of whom many have played an important role in attempts to broker peace since the country slid into political violence within two years of its independence in 2011. Being largely excluded from the 2014 peace talks, young people became increasingly vocal in advocating for their right to participate in the South Sudan High Level Revitalisation Forum which resulted in the *Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS)* in 2018. Provisions in the R-ARCSS have ensured the creation of a Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and the representation of youth in important peace mechanisms such as the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, Ceasefire Transitional Security Arrangement, Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, Strategic Defense and Security Review Board, Economic and Finance Management Authority and National Constitutional Amendment Committee.⁵

Young people were able to exert pressure on negotiating parties by taking pictures of themselves wearing sunglasses and posting these photos on social media with the hashtag #SouthSudanIsWatching. The social media campaign amplified a unified message from South Sudanese youth, that they were

4 World Bank (2019). *The World Bank Annual Report 2019: Ending Poverty, Investing in Opportunity*.

5 Search for Common Ground (2021). *Inclusion & Participation of Youth in Peacebuilding: Exploring the Experiences of Youth in South Sudan*, pp. 6-7.

The campaign sought to make sure South Sudan knew we (young people) are watching.

Young peacebuilder from South Sudan

observing the process carefully and demanding accountability from power holders.⁶ Youth in South Sudan also used the internet and social media to provide accurate information on the peace talks and its latest developments. An e-delegate participation platform was set up by which youth representatives in the room were able to provide regular updates on the peace negotiations through 30 minute-long live videos, with constituents outside the room being able to feed into the official talks. This sparked broader public discussions and buy-in locally as well as in diaspora communities, reducing the risk of misinformation and hate speech during the process.⁷

Strengthening Young Women's Participation

Since the signing of the R-ARCSS and formation of the Revitalised Government, young women continued their advocacy and active contributions to peacebuilding — supported by an initiative led by Search for Common Ground in partnership with AnaTaban, Crown the Woman, National Women's Empowerment & Rehabilitation Organization, Catholic Radio Network, and Eye Radio. The project's overall objective is to equip young women with skills and opportunities to contribute to the peace process at local and national levels, reinforce their collective power, and challenge the social stereotypes and barriers that hinder their equal participation.

One young women mediator who has been trained through this programme expressed her increased ability to mediate tensions in her family, wider community, and on issues related to sexual and reproductive health of her peers. Another young woman is now a member of a mediation group of twelve fellow young women that meet monthly to analyse conflicts in their communities, and engage in dialogue with community elders and chiefs to find joint solutions to the identified challenges.⁸

International actors such as the EU should step up to support youth-driven campaigns, digital diplomacy efforts, and capacity strengthening programmes that are instrumental in raising the voices of youth in peace mediation efforts.

As youth, we have a different vision and aspirations from the government. This needs to be bridged.

Young peacebuilder from Central African Republic

6 Altiok, Ali and Grizelj, Irena (2019). Page 20

7 Altiok, Ali and Grizelj, Irena (2019). Page 31

8 Search for Common Ground (2022). *Youth As Mediators: A Guide*

EXAMPLE 4:

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

Building an Evidence Base & Community of Practice

The question “How can young people be effectively included and participate in peace processes?” had not been fully answered, nor given adequate attention until the first International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, which took place in Helsinki, Finland on 5-6 March 2019. The Symposium brought together over 100 participants from 45 different countries, with expertise on peace and mediation processes. Participants included young peacebuilders, senior-level peace mediators and negotiators, government ministers, United Nations, African Union, and European Union representatives. Young people’s engagement in peace negotiations was the main theme discussed at the Symposium. The global policy paper *“We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes”* was developed in conjunction with the Symposium.

We should aim for ‘youth-inclusive peace processes’ as opposed to including youth in peace processes as an add-on or tick box

Participant in the International Symposium

The Symposium was co-hosted by the Governments of Finland, Colombia, and the State of Qatar, and co-organized by the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and Search for Common Ground, in partnership with the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders.

Realising an Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Mediation

The “We Are Here” paper articulated for the first time that inclusion and participation of youth in peace processes cuts across three interconnected layers: In the Room (youth participation within the formal peace architecture and structures, inside the negotiation room during official political dialogues), Around the Room (young people not directly involved in negotiations, but close to the peace agreement through formal or informal mechanisms and who are able to potentially enter the more formal negotiation space) and Outside the Room (young people who engage and participate through informal and alternative approaches). The examples explored in the paper demonstrate that youth power and influence do not always correlate to young people’s proximity to the peace table, and that young people’s mass protests or social media activism for peace can increase the legitimacy of the process and sustainability of its outcomes.

The International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes offers a model to enhance connections, coordination, and collaboration between actors in the three-layered model, in pursuit of an integrated approach to peace mediation. A similar model of multi-level consultations with young mediators, civil society organisations, regional organisations, and the highest level of governments and states could be considered to enrich formal negotiations with creative solutions and youth-sensitive approaches.

Young people marching for peace outside the negotiation room is often more influential than having young people as passive observers inside the negotiation rooms

Participant in the International Symposium



ENDNOTES

- 1 The *EU Concept on Peace Mediation* (2020) defines mediation as “a way of assisting negotiations between conflict parties and transforming conflicts with the support of an accepted third party”.
- 2 The terms youth and young people are used interchangeably in this document. The EU states that the “period when a person is considered to be ‘young’ differs across Europe according to national context, the socio-economic development of society and time. (...) For purpose of understanding and for statistical clarity, young people are defined by the EU as people between 15 and 29 years of age”. See *EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027*, Doc. 9264/18 ADD 2 – SWD(2018) 169, 2018.
- 3 European External Action Service (2020). *Peace Mediation Guidelines*, pp. 12-14.
- 4 EEAS (2017). *HR/VP Mogherini launches pioneering ‘Young Med Voices Plus’ youth initiative in dialogue with young Mediterranean voices*, Press release of the launch event of Young Med Voices Plus Initiative. Simpson, Graeme (2018). *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*.
- 5 Layer 1 - In the room: Youth participation within formal peace architecture and structures, inside the room during negotiations and political dialogues. Layer 2 - Around the room: Young people not directly in the room, but close to the peace agreement and connected (able to get in the room) through formal or informal mechanisms. Layer 3 - Outside the room: Young people who engage and participate through informal and alternative approaches. See: Altiok, Ali and Grizelj, Irena (2019). *We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes*, pp. 16.
- 6 Grizelj, Irena and Saleem, Ali (2022). *We are in this Together: Operationalizing a Five-Year Strategic Action Plan for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes*. Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security. Pp. 16-18.
- 7 UN Secretary-General (2022). *Report on Youth and Peace and Security*. Pp. 6-8.
- 8 Grizelj and Saleem (2022). Pp. 10.
- 9 Idem, pp. 10.
- 10 See Altiok and Grizelj (2019), pp. 27-28 for examples in the Philippines and Myanmar.
- 11 See Altiok and Grizelj (2019), pp. 9. While 1,000 peace agreements have been signed globally in the last two decades, there is a lack of data and insights on whether and to what extent young people were included in processes leading up to these agreements.
- 12 For a step-by-step plan for the establishment of a Global Community of Practice, see Grizelj and Saleem (2022) *We Are In This Together: Five-Year Strategic Action Plan, pp. 20-22*.

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Lina Loos (page 2)

Vonecia Carswell (page 7)

Tuyen Vo (page 11)

Emmanuel Ikwuegbu (page 14, 21)

Avel Chuklanov (page 19)



60 rue Wiertz/Wiertzstraat 60
1047 Brussels, Belgium
www.greens-efa.eu
contactgreens@ep.europa.eu