

Youth, Peace and Security Agenda - Strengthening institutional capacity for implementation

By Erike Tanghøj and João Felipe Scarpelini



GETTY IMAGES

About the brief

This policy brief aims to support organizations working on peace and security to strengthen institutional capacity and operational readiness for accelerating the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. The policy brief aims to guide decision-makers, managers and senior officials on how to create an enabling environment within their own organization by providing tangible entry points and recommendations in six priority areas, namely:

- Mandate
- Leadership
- Operative capacity
- Culture of learning
- Partnerships
- Ownership

The brief builds on the recommendations from five years of implementation of the YPS agenda, as discussed during the high-level event to mark the 5th anniversary of UN resolution 2250 (held on December 9, 2020) and the lessons learned by FBA over the years. Partner organisations have also been part of reviewing the brief and FBA would like to extend a special thanks to UNFPA, UNDP, DPPA, DPO, OSGEY and OSCE.

Background

Young women and men worldwide are increasingly at the forefront of preventing and resolving conflict and building lasting peace in their communities. This youth-led activism for peace has been recognized by the YPS agenda.

Guided by three UN Security Council Resolutions, the YPS agenda stands for an important shift in the understanding of young women and men and their positive agency in peace and security issues around the world. The agenda emphasizes that young people's meaningful participation and influence in decision-making at all levels of society is both a right and an asset for lasting peace.

The engagement of diverse groups of young people in design, implementation and evaluation has the potential to increase the relevance, effectiveness, efficient impact and sustainability of any peacebuilding process or initiative, including programmes and policies.

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Recording of the event available at: <https://youtu.be/nkxZ40bBsrY>

United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2250 (S/RES/2250 from 2015), 2419 (S/RES/2419 from 2018) and 2535 (S/RES/2535 from 2020).

The YPS agenda has significantly gained momentum in recent years. Consequently, the number of international actors that integrate YPS related aspects into their mandates and operations has continued to increase since the adoption of the first resolution in 2015. There has also been significant progress in turning the YPS agenda into practice around the world. For example, there is a growing number of YPS-specific funding opportunities, youth participation mechanisms, programmes, and guidelines available .

However, the power dynamics and age-based discrimination structures that often neglect youth agency and exclude young women and men from decision-making have not yet been adequately addressed. Furthermore, despite emerging good practices, most efforts by the international community are still ad-hoc and limited to siloed youth specific programmes and projects.

As a next step, we simply cannot only operationalize the YPS agenda through programmes; we also need to fully institutionalize it in our organizations

Institutionalizing the YPS agenda

Individual programs within organizations will not be enough to attain the goals of the YPS agenda. To do so, it will be necessary to move beyond the implementation of ad-hoc and siloed youth initiatives and start mainstreaming a youth perspective in all aspects of organizations' mandates, structures, and operations. This means the principles of the agenda must become an integral part of decisions, practices, and behaviour across organizations.

The lack of political commitment to operationalize the agenda and fully resource its implementation and the weak institutional capacity of key actors to translate the agenda into practise are some of challenges that urgently need to be addressed to ensure the successful and sustainable realization of the goals of the agenda at global, regional, and national levels.

Senior management have an important role to play in this regard, as the YPS agenda needs to be further strengthened with appropriate levels of resources, technical capacity, and commitment. We provide below a set of recommendations on how to take important steps in this direction.

³ More information about YPS can be found at: <https://www.youth4peace.info>

YOUTH LENS

A **youth lens** (or youth perspective) is an analytical filter or tool. It helps us identify and understand age-based inequalities by asking questions about how young age intersects with issues such as access to power, social norms, (security) needs, discrimination structures etc.

A youth lens can be applied on different aspects, dimensions, processes and entities in society. For example, it can be used to analyse age-based discrimination within an organisation or to assess the youth responsiveness or inclusiveness of a project or process.

GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

A **generational perspective** is to be understood in relation to age-based power and discrimination structures as a gender perspective is defined in regard to gender dynamics. Applying a generational perspective means to look at age-based differences in e.g. power, status and influence and analyse how such differences may shape needs, opportunities and interests of various age groups.

Applying a generational perspective in peace and security entails acknowledging that sustained and inclusive peace can only be achieved if both younger and older generations are given equal opportunities to participate and influence decisions and that potential gaps or grievances between generations are bridged and reconciled.

Recommendations for Senior Management

Mandate

- Analyse your organization's mandate through a youth lens to clarify how the YPS agenda can strengthen the work and efficiency of your organization.
- Incorporate YPS principles into the core work of the organization and ensure that the agenda is recognized as part of the organization's corporate priorities in documents such as work-plans, budget allocations and strategic plans .
- Find ways to ensure that a youth perspective is reflected in any conflict/situation analysis and strategic plans. This can be done both by engaging young people in the analytical process and by applying the youth lens throughout the analyses and planning processes .
- Ensure that relevant data is disaggregated by age and sex in all reports and documents, incorporating both a gender and a generational perspective to the analytical work of your organizations.
- Proactively include YPS specific updates into all reports, to assist building momentum and sensitize donors and partners to the relevance of the agenda for the implementation of your mandate.

Leadership

- Seek ways to consistently champion the YPS agenda during meetings, speeches and reports communicating the importance and relevance of the agenda to your work and the work of your organization.
- "Walk the talk" by creating opportunities for young people to collaborate with your organization. This include actively recruiting young professionals.
- Demonstrate interest and encourage staff to explore synergies between YPS and other agendas within your organization.
- Make sure you are a reliable ally and consistently try to push the implementation of the YPS agenda forward.

Operative Capacity

- Ensure that YPS implementation is reflected in the organization's budget, with appropriate funding allocated to YPS programmes and policies.
- Assign dedicated staff capacity mandated to support YPS implementation within your organization. This can be done through the recruitment of specialized capacity such as YPS specialists and advisors or the appointment of YPS focal points.
- Establish a network of YPS focal points and encourage coordination and collaboration within those peer-networks.
- Develop organization wide YPS strategies, guidelines and policy briefs.

⁴ NB. YPS principles can be mainstreamed in your mandate even without specific references to YPS documents and/or frameworks

⁵ See pages 41-50 in 'Youth, Peace and Security Adviser's Handbook'. Folke Bernadotte Academy (2020) for guidance on how to carry out a youth sensitive conflict analysis. <https://fba.se/om-fba/publikationer/youth-peace-and-security-advisers-handbook/>

Culture of learning

- Encourage innovation and risk-taking to develop and test new approaches to the implementation of YPS.
- Proactively monitor, document, and evaluate YPS experiences, to identify lessons learned and opportunities for scaling up and replication.
- Promote learning exchanges and training opportunities for staff working or interested in YPS.
- Commission YPS-specific research and studies that can help gather more evidence and better inform programmes and policies.
- Promote learning exchanges among partners and relevant stakeholders and encourage the establishment of a YPS community of practice.

Partnerships

- Seek ways to partner with and support like-minded actors that are trying to implement and advance the YPS agenda.
- Establish and/or join forces with multi-stakeholder YPS coalitions at different levels.
- Support existing youth-led initiatives and seek ways to meaningfully collaborate and partner with youth-led movements and organizations.

Ownership

- Seek opportunities to “localize” the agenda within your organization and context, adapting the different aspects of the agenda to your reality.
- Engage and/or establish YPS coalitions and alliances with local and international partners, including youth-led organizations.
- Help national and local authorities to understand the relevance of the YPS agenda and strengthen their capacity to implement the agenda in country.
- Empower partners to own the agenda with you and to share the responsibility for its implementation.

Call for action

Senior management has an undeniable role in strengthening institutional capacity and creating an enabling environment for the operationalization and institutionalization of the YPS agenda.

Institutional capacity to effectively implement the agenda requires a combination of knowledge about YPS, a genuine organizational commitment and a comprehensive mandate to prioritize implementation that provides a favourable environment to turn the agenda into practice.

Governments and international organizations must do more and do better to support youth participation and leadership. This requires self-reflection to assess and rethink institutional priorities, practices, behaviours, and attitudes.

*Walking the YPS talk
is the only way for
institutions to become
relevant, meaningful
and sustainable part-
ners to youth*

ABOUT FBA

The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development.

The Agency is named after Count Folke Bernadotte, the first UN mediator.

FBA supports international peace operations and international development co-operation. The Agency conducts training, research and method development in order to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding in conflict and post-conflict countries. FBA also recruit civilian personnel and expertise for peace operations and election observation missions led by the EU, UN and OSCE.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

- **United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021)**. 'Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook', 2021. Available at: <https://www.youth4peace.info/YPSHandbook>
- **Tanghøj, E. and Scarpelini, J. F. (2020)**. 'Youth, Peace and Security Adviser's Handbook'. Folke Bernadotte Academy (2020). Available at: <https://fba.se/om-fba/publikationer/youth-peace-and-security-advisers-handbook/>
- **African Union Commission (2020)**. "AU Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security". Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39150-doc-continental_framework_on_youth_peace_and_security_-_english.pdf
- **United Nations (2020)**. 'Secretary-General Report to the Security Council on Youth, Peace and Security' (S/2020/167), 2020. Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/167>
- **Altiok, A. and Grizelj, I. (2019)** 'We are here: an integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes', United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on youth. Available at: <https://www.youth4peace.info/node/348>
- **Simpson, G. (2018)** 'The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security'. Available at: <https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy>