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UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS & THE FIVE PILLARS OF ACTION FOR YOUTH, PEACE & SECURITY



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Introduction

UN peacekeeping operations have long recognized the significance of engaging youth in host countries and territories. Experience demonstrates that youth engagement has been critical when working with national authorities to promote and build more effective, responsive and accountable institutions in accordance with human rights standards. The marginalization of young people catalyzes human rights grievances and often fuels violence. For UN peacekeeping operations, there are numerous opportunities and entry points for working with youth when implementing a wide range of priorities such as community engagement; gender equality; human rights; access to justice; support to political processes; conflict management; community-oriented policing; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; mine action; security sector reform; community violence reduction and reconciliation. Youth inclusion in decision-making and political processes as key stakeholders, promotes sustainable peace and development.

After decades of experience engaging youth, this area of UN peacekeeping was elevated to a strategic priority following the establishment in 2015 of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda by the Security Council through Resolution 2250 (2015). In doing so, the Council defined youth as persons between the ages of 18 and 29 and identified five pillars for action: prevention, protection, participation, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. It also requested the Secretary-General to submit a progress study on youth's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution. In 2018, "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security" was published to wide acclaim, further propelling the international community's interest to consider youth in the maintenance of peace and security.

Two subsequent YPS resolutions were adopted by the Security Council – S/RES/2419 (2018) recognized the important role of youth in solving and preventing conflicts and called on all relevant actors to include young people in all aspects of peace processes. S/RES/2535 (2020) affirmed the commitments made in UNSCR 2250 (2015) and UNSCR 2419 (2018), but also for the first time acknowledged young people's positive contributions to the "sustainability, inclusiveness and success of UN peacekeeping and peace building efforts." It also recognized the challenges faced by youth "including gender inequalities that perpetuate all forms of discrimination and violence, and persistent inequalities that put young women at particular risk." Resolution 2535 urged UN peacekeeping operations to implement context-specific strategies on YPS. In keeping with this mandate, several strategies that address YPS priorities have been developed and vary from facilitating inter-generational community dialogue in South Sudan, to encouraging recruitment of young people into the police force in Darfur, to initiating projects to decrease the effects of climate change in Cyprus.

The importance of youth engagement in mission mandates and the institutionalization of the YPS agenda are on the rise in most missions, although more work is needed to fully integrate YPS as a priority. Out of the twelve UN peacekeeping operations, seven mission mandates include reference to the significance of the YPS agenda¹ and three missions (UNMISS, UNMIK and UNFICYP) have policies and planning frameworks that feature YPS.² Furthermore, YPS coordination mechanisms have been established at UN Headquarters and in eleven missions, comprising a

¹ [MINURSO](#), [MINUSCA](#), [MINUSMA](#), [MONUSCO](#), [UNFICYP](#), [UNISFA](#) and [UNMISS](#).

² UNMISS integrates YPS into its three-year mission vision, UNMIK maintains a mission-wide framework strategy and UNFICYP integrated YPS in its intercommunal strategy and work.

global network of YPS focal points for UN peacekeeping. Technical guidance tools have been developed to support UN peacekeeping staff in implementing the agenda, including: the [YPS Programming Handbook for UN practitioners](#)³, [Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards' module on youth](#), [DPKO/DFS Guidelines on Engagement with Civil Society](#), the [Peacekeeping practice note on community engagement](#) and the [United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#). These documents coherently stress the importance of including all segments of society in mandated activities and join a body of resources commonly used by both uniformed and civilian UN peacekeeping personnel to guide their work.

In 2022, the second Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the YPS agenda was published.⁴ To complement the Report, the UN Secretariat produced several thematic papers. As one of them, this paper provides a snapshot of UN peacekeeping *activities* undertaken within the context of the five pillars for action, as identified in SCR 2250 (2015). More work is still required across the Peace and Security Pillar, as well as with other stakeholders working on YPS, to effectively articulate what are the expected outcomes of implementing the YPS Agenda in peacekeeping settings and what kind of indicators would need to be tracked to measure progress and impact. This work will allow follow-up reports to focus on results achieved towards the broader goals of the YPS Agenda itself.

Integrating the five pillars of action for the youth, peace and security agenda

i. Participation

UN peacekeeping operations actively work to enhance youth empowerment, to develop political space, and generate opportunities for formal and informal engagement of young people to participate in decision in political, peace and security processes. For example:

- At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNMIK re-aligned its efforts to support community resilience and municipal emergency response by empowering youth. This was part of UNMIK's work to foster inclusive youth participation in local governance processes. UNMIK facilitated 16 local and regional online platforms, involving municipal officials across Kosovo⁵ and 750 youth from various communities in a discussion on how to strengthen the rapport between municipal authorities and youth, particularly youth from minority and marginalized groups.
- In DRC, MONUSCO supports the inclusion of youth into local peace agreements and conflict-resolution platforms. In 2020, the Mission and a community support programme for youth, *Programme d'Aide Communautaire pour la Jeunesse (PAC-J)*, conducted outreach activities in the five territories of the Kasai Province. PAC-J consulted young people, registered their needs, and encouraged them to participate in the peace process. As a result, 40 young people were represented in the peace process and in decision-making through the signing of the Acts of Commitments in the five territories, while 41 youth were integrated into the Intercommunity Platform for Permanent and Inclusive Dialogue set up to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts.
- UN peacekeeping operations with a security sector reform mandate support national efforts to identify and address barriers to the meaningful participation of young people and their

³ The "Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook" was developed by the United Nations with the generous support of the Folke Bernadotte Academy and the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development.

www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/yps_programming_handbook.pdf

⁴ [S/2022/220](#)

⁵ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

organizations in decision-making and negotiations of peace agreements, national security policies and military expenditures. Youth are represented and participate in most key peace implementation mechanisms. For example, MINUSMA supports the meaningful participation of young people in security sector reform through the establishment of a youth engagement forum, *Plateforme pour l'Engagement des Jeunes dans la RSS et le DDR*, that engages hundreds of young people in the implementation of the peace agreement as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism. The Platform is operational throughout the country and has organized multi-disciplinary events to raise awareness of security sector reform.

- In South Sudan, UNMISS organizes several workshops bringing together youth representatives in various regions of the country to discuss issues affecting them. These forums provide an opportunity to improve collaboration among youth from diverse communities and encourage local efforts in early warning and mediation. For example, in June 2022, UNMISS, in coordination with the United Nations Population Fund and UNDP, supported the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the parliamentary specialized committee on youth, sports and culture in holding public consultations on pending youth-related legislation and policies, including the draft national youth development policy and the ratification of the African Youth Charter, both of which are now before parliament for consideration. In December 2021, UNMISS organized a political parties' forum in Juba on the role of youth in peaceful political transitions in South Sudan. The discussions were focused on understanding the role of youth in political transitions, transitional justice, accountability, political participation and decision-making.

ii. Protection

Protection is a key pillar of the YPS agenda as well as a central tenet in UN peacekeeping operations. Protection within the YPS agenda is defined as “Ensuring the protection of young civilians’ lives and human rights and investigating and prosecuting those responsible for crimes perpetrated against them.”⁶ Security Council resolution 2535 (2020) emphasizes the importance of protection of young peacebuilders and the “civic and political spaces” in which they operate. In peacekeeping, protection mandates include the protection of civilians (POC) mandate, as well as the mandate to promote and protect human rights, and specialized mandates on child protection and conflict-related sexual violence. To address the complexity of protection challenges in these peacekeeping settings, these complementary and mutually enforcing mandates are advanced through collective efforts, underpinned by guiding principles. Effective implementation of protection mandates requires strong partnerships and coordination, as well as a whole-of-mission approach.

- UNMISS regularly organizes civil-military forums, workshops, community dialogues, capacity-building programmes and activities to address protection issues at state and local levels, leading in particular to the adoption of several measures aimed to protect civilians, including young people, against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The Justice and Corrections Service of the Mission in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), supported the renovation of the first juvenile reformatory centre in Juba in March 2018. The Centre provides safe and secure housing for young offenders, separate from adult inmates, while they await trial or serve their sentences. It also provides a more conducive environment for juveniles to receive support to successfully reintegrate into society.

⁶ [YPS Programming Handbook for UN practitioners](#), page 4

- As a result of two coup in 2020 and 20201, Mali witnessed a shrinking civic and democratic space. MINUSMA engaged with Malian authorities on the protection of rights and fundamental freedoms to create an enabling environment in which youth and others could freely assemble to petition the authorities on important issues. The Mission also scaled up its efforts to build the capacities of security institutions to mainstream gender and youth in their security operations by delivering training and establishing dedicated gender expertise across the security chain.
- In CAR, MINUSCA supports youth participation in local committees that are instrumental in identifying and selecting Community Violence Reduction projects and works with young people in community alert networks and early warning mechanisms.
- In Kosovo, UNMIK both trains and raises awareness among youth workers and activists on human rights standards and mechanisms. The training programmes empower youth to stand up for the human rights of their peers from different communities, thus contributing to broader trust-building and reconciliation efforts.
- As part of security sector reform, UN peacekeeping operations support national security sector institutions in Mali, South Sudan and Central African Republic to coordinate the delivery of adequate security services to youth by ensuring that the governance structures and institutional capacities of institutions such as police, armed forces, and immigration services are responsive to the rights and needs of young people and protect them from all forms of violence.
- Explosive Ordnance Risk Education facilitated by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is tailored according to age and context, often with creative approaches taken to engage young people, including through social media campaigns. In 2020, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, UNMAS delivered life-saving explosive ordnance risk education to over 3.5 million beneficiaries.

iii. Prevention

In implementing the prevention pillar, UN peacekeeping operations work to engage young people to promote tolerance and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and support youth-inclusive policy processes to tackle inequalities. Combined, these efforts aim to foster an enabling environment for youth-led peacebuilding.

- In 2021, UNMISS facilitated a Youth Forum in Upper Nile State, for youth representatives from 13 counties, Malakal town and the protection of civilians site in Malakal. This provided an opportunity for the youth to improve collaboration among themselves. As a result, the youth developed an action plan to promote their role to encourage social cohesion and reconciliation. Follow-up meetings are organized for youth to review the implementation of the plan.
- UNFICYP supports the PeacePlayers, a bi-communal youth sports organization that promotes social cohesion, fosters trust, and reverses prejudices through basketball tournaments and social interactions. The Mission also supported the establishment of the Youth Champions for Environment and Peace, a network of young activists collaborating on environmental campaigns and building peace from the bottom up, to support community dialogue and confidence building.
- In 2021, MINUSCA conducted workshops for youth and other local peace actors who work to prevent and manage inter-community conflicts and support the implementation of the National Plan for the Prevention of Hate Speech. Among these, the workshops for youth in the fight

against dis/misinformation on social media aim to reduce the risks of dissemination of hateful messages or communications among youth.

- In 2021, MINUSMA implemented youth programmes on national and local television and radio stations across Mali to prevent and mitigate conflict and election-related violence. The Mission also established a network of human rights organizations, including young human rights defenders across central and southern Mali, that contributed to the early warning mechanism in areas where the Mission does not have a physical presence.

iv. Partnerships

- Peacekeeping operations have found creative ways to support youth by joining multi-stakeholder coalitions/networks and coordinating with UN Country Teams (UNCT), international organizations, local authorities, youth groups and civil society organizations. Such frameworks have been established in UNMISS, UNMIK, MONUSCO, MINUSMA, and MINUSCA to collaborate on activities that support youth and strengthen collaboration on the implementation of the YPS agenda in mission settings. Partnerships are key for enhancing information sharing and advocacy, capacity development, reinforcing local ownership and preventing duplication of activities.
- In 2021, MINUSCA supported the Ministry of Youth in organizing workshops to validate and disseminate the National Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and the Operational Plan 2021-2022 for youth promotion in CAR. Moreover, the mission collaborated with youth and their organizations to strengthen governance and civilian oversight of the security and defense sector at national levels.
- In 2021 and 2022, UNISFA partnered with youth networks and civil society institutions in northern and southern Abyei, as well as with the University of Juba and Search for Common Ground to support the implementation of the YPS agenda. Several workshops have been conducted through these partnerships, including a high-level symposium that brought together local authorities, youth and the UN, which resulted in the development of a five-year Abyei Youth Strategic Plan.
- UNIFIL, with its longstanding partner Tiros Association for Arts, implemented a large number of civic education-related activities and created a safe space in Tyre for youth from different areas to build social cohesion.
- UNMIK works with the NGO “YMCA Movement” to promote the YPS agenda through piloting a youth-led TV show called “Youth Heroes: United in Diversity.” The show features an ethnically mixed team of young men and women change-makers who travel to various parts of Kosovo to launch youth-led community actions addressing thematic topics such as: ‘Environmental protection’, ‘No hate speech in our streets’, ‘Inclusive youth participation in local decision-making’, ‘Equal education for all – navigating the pandemic situation’ and ‘Gender equality and empowerment of young women’. The initiative promotes the positive role of young people by engaging them in constructive collaboration with their peers from different communities.

v. Disengagement and Reintegration

Resolution 2250 encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the needs of youth affected by armed conflict. UN peacekeeping operations have been proactive in meaningfully including young people in disarmament,

demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts as beneficiaries, partners, and actors in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of DDR processes. For example:

- MINUSMA's 2021 mandate requests the Mission to ensure that 3,000 members of the signatory armed groups are integrated into the Malian Defense and Security Forces (MDSF). To date, 1,006 ex-combatants of the *Mécanisme Opérationnel de Coordination* have been integrated into the MDSF – 80% are youth. The Mission has also been supporting the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Culture and Customs in the implementation of the National Strategy on Preventing Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism as well as its action plan through the completion of the construction of two regional offices and two youth community training centers in Mopti and Gao.
- In September 2021, MINUSMA and the Permanent Secretariat for Small Arms and Light Weapons counter proliferation conducted a series of outreach activities in five regions of Mali. This caravan 'Défense des Droits' worked primarily with youth, but also supported other stakeholders including religious and community leaders, hunters, and traditional weapons producers. It was an opportunity to encourage the youth to contribute to the security of their respective communities and to support the peace process in Mali. About 1,500 people participated and are expected to disseminate key messages of the caravan to their communities.
- In MINUSCA, community violence reduction activities have offered economic opportunities for youth, with the aim of preventing their recruitment by armed groups. Since January 2016, more than 22,000 beneficiaries in nine priority locations across the country have been supported with 14,145 weapons collected. Examples of successes include implementation of income-generating projects by beneficiaries in agriculture, transport, sewing bakery and mechanic projects.
- UNMISS, in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners, has been supporting the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission on the development of a nationally led pilot community violence reduction project. The project is focused on the reinsertion and reintegration of ex-combatants and is aimed at preventing and further reducing violence within and among communities, including armed youth at risk of violence. Relatedly, on 18 July 2022 the Mission, in partnership with UNDP, commenced a community violence reduction programme in Tambura to train more than 300 young people on livelihood skills.

Conclusion

Youth constitute the most significant demographic group in most peacekeeping settings and UN peacekeeping operations are well placed to support the implementation of the YPS Agenda in challenging environments. Resolution 2535 (2020) has served to increase the momentum of engaging youth along the five priorities of the YPS Agenda, but more work is needed to better articulate expected outcomes of this work, both to advance the implementation of missions' mandates and to fully promote the YPS Agenda in host-countries.

The role of youth in the maintenance of international peace and security needs to be more explicitly acknowledged and reflected in mission mandates as recommended in the 2022 SG Report on YPS. Referencing YPS in mission mandates paves the way for mission leadership to own the agenda but must also translate into the mobilization of financial and human resources required for effective implementation of the agenda, including data-driven and gender-sensitive approaches across mandated tasks and priorities.