

## Operationalising the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

### What does YPS mean for work in the field?

This guidance note for seconded personnel in civilian crisis management offers suggestions for implementing Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) in daily work.

[UN Security Council Resolution 2250 \(2015\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) recognise youth as essential partners in peace and security. Resolution 2535 (2020) further calls on Member States and regional organisations to strengthen YPS implementation in missions and to ensure dedicated capacities for youth engagement. While ‘youth’ may be defined differently across international organisations and national entities, the resolutions mainly focus on young adults aged 18-29. Together, they form the YPS Agenda, which establishes youth participation both as a normative commitment and an operational imperative.

This clear mandate reflects the conditions in many contexts: Youth constitute a large proportion of the population in many conflict-affected countries and are disproportionately impacted by conflict. Despite their widespread exclusion from formal political processes, many young people actively work towards peace and contribute innovative solutions to the challenges their societies face. Recognising their agency and supporting their meaningful participation is therefore a prerequisite for harnessing these contributions towards sustainable peace and more resilient societies. All mission personnel should thus be able to identify and address barriers to participation and integrate youth perspectives into their activities.

This guidance note is targeted at secondees and mission personnel across functions and areas of work. It draws on good practices from a range of international organisations that have begun implementing YPS in their work, experiences shared by ZIF and CMC Finland secondees, and publicly available guidance materials. It proposes a set of principles which could guide mission personnel’s engagement with young people and provides recommendations for youth-responsive work in three broad areas:

1. **Knowledge Creation**, to ensure activities are based on youth-sensitive analysis.
2. **Engaging Young People**, outlining good practices for directly interacting with young people and youth-led civil society organisations (CSOs).
3. **Extending Your Impact** and going beyond individual activities to create a mission culture that champions youth voices.

The note uses a continuum to encourage reflection on mission activities’ impact on youth:

Discriminatory	Neutral	Sensitive	Responsive	Transformative
Perpetuates age-based inequalities	Ignores age-based norms, discrimination and inequalities	Acknowledges age-based norms, discrimination, and inequalities	Acknowledges and addresses the specific needs of young people	Addresses the causes of age-based inequalities & works to transform harmful norms and power relations

## Principles for Youth-responsive Work

The following principles are meant to guide all work, whether it directly or indirectly affects youth.

- **Intergenerational Respect:** Young people are not only an audience but actors in their own right. They should be seen as equal partners in policy- and decision-making and engaged as such in mission activities.
- **Meaningful Participation:** Interaction with young people should go beyond a box-ticking exercise and take steps to make any participation meaningful. This requires some degree of power-sharing (i.e., influence over process and outcome) between youth and non-youth actors across the phases of collaboration.
- **Diversity:** Young people are not a homogenous group and face different barriers to education and participation. Recognise intersections with gender, disability, socioeconomic background, ethnicity or migration status to ensure that youth with diverse experiences of marginalisation are included.
- **Do-No-Harm:** In conflict settings, interacting with international organisations may expose young people to risks. Create safe and inclusive settings for engagement and discuss possible risks with young partners, enabling them to give informed consent.
- **Context Sensitivity:** Engagement with young people should account for local social and gender norms and traditions – what works in one community may not work in another.
- **Conflict Sensitivity:** Mission personnel’s activities will influence local conflict dynamics. It is important to engage youth in a way that mitigates unintended negative effects on conflict dynamics and maximises positive effects.
- **Sustainability and Accountability:** Enabling meaningful participation requires long-term partnerships and mechanisms for youth to hold stakeholders – including the mission – accountable. Projects should be regularly reviewed in collaboration with youth partners and adapted to meet the needs of the moment.

# Implementing YPS in the Work of Civilian Missions

## 1. Knowledge Creation

Decision-making often suffers from a lack of detailed information about the situation of youth. This hampers situational awareness and increases the risk that mission activities reinforce harmful stereotypes. Applying a youth lens to both the *content* and the *process* of knowledge creation efforts is thus a prerequisite for engaging youth in a meaningful way.

### Be vigilant about [policy myths and stereotypes](#) in analysis products and public media

- **Securitized narratives**, such as the “youth bulge”, draw an oversimplified causal link between youth cohorts and the risk of conflict. On the other hand, **romanticisation** of youth as “leaders of the future” downplays the agency of youth in the present. Stereotypes often also run along **gendered lines**, for example, by portraying all young men as security risks and all young women as passive victims. Relying on such faulty assumptions can lead to interventions that are not responsive to the needs of young people and reinforce harmful stereotypes.
- Challenge unsupported assumptions that perpetuate a distorted image of youth where you identify them.
- Document knowledge gaps with regard to youth that could be addressed in future analysis efforts.

### Familiarise yourself with the situation of youth in your mission area through desk research

- Familiarise yourself with the national youth laws and, where available, national action plans on YPS. They provide a framework for the existing national structures considering youth.
- Quantitative reports and studies conducted by national authorities and international organisations can, if meaningfully disaggregated, provide further information.
- When collecting your own data, ensure that it can be disaggregated to show how youth of different backgrounds (i.e., genders, disability, socioeconomic background, ethnicity or migration status) are affected by conflict.

### Supplement desk-based methods with youth voices and inclusive approaches to knowledge creation

- Consider that you can engage youth across the whole analysis process to ensure that their perspectives are incorporated. This can happen as early as initial planning, during information collection and validation exercises. It should always be accompanied by follow-ups.
- Consider that young people can take on different roles in knowledge creation. They could be interviewees, implementing partners who lead focus group discussions, and even co-lead the analysis.
- When collecting information, consult directly with diverse groups of young people to incorporate their perspectives in your situational image and gain deeper insights into their perceptions.
- Make a plan to validate your analysis with young experts to ensure that their inputs are not misrepresented in your analysis.

Include information about youth in your own reporting to highlight ongoing efforts related to YPS and push for youth-sensitive indicators in reporting to ensure that the mission's engagement with youth is captured continuously.

*Reporting guidelines of the **EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia)** include guidance for age-disaggregation to make more visible how the mission engages with young people. In 2026, the mission will conduct a first dedicated youth-focused report, aiming to increase its awareness and understanding of the situation of young people in Georgia.*

## 2. Engaging Young People

Civilian crisis management missions already conduct a number of civil society-facing activities. You can engage local young people by building on these existing activities or develop new avenues of engagement and cooperation. Make sure to communicate transparently the goals of the engagement, available support, the level of influence and possible risks, as engagement that overpromises and underdelivers can erode trust in the long term. Take the opportunity to learn from different young people because it will also make you and the mission understand the area of operation better. Remember the principles of intergenerational respect and do no harm when engaging with young people.

### Plan and conduct visits to where the youth are

- Request visits to local universities, youth-led and youth-serving CSOs, youth centres and youth groups. Plan visits also to the rural areas and those of marginalised communities.
- If you do not have contact and access yourself, go with a “backpack” approach and become part of another, already trusted, organisation’s activities, such as the local centers of international youth networks (e.g. Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and Young European Ambassadors Networks).
- Plan to talk to the youth about the civilian crisis management mission, the international organisation (e.g. the EU, UN or OSCE) and touch upon possible cooperation areas and ways.
- Be prepared to answer the questions of the youth regarding the mission and your work. It can build trust with youth in local communities. Be clear about what the mission can and can not do.
- Tailor the visit to the societal context and the possible conflict or crisis. Avoid taking sides or expressing strong opinions. For example, if there is distrust in the governmental authorities, it can be useful to talk more widely about how the local society works.
- Use language that young people understand by avoiding jargon. Make the visit interactive to create a more friendly and open atmosphere. However, do not underestimate their knowledge, and remember that some youth are experts in peace and security matters and in their own community.

*A human rights adviser in the **EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA)** began to speak to the mission’s monitors during training about reaching youth in the areas affected by conflicts. Most of the mission’s interlocutors were older and the mission therefore lacked inputs from local young people.*

*These short sessions raised awareness among monitors about how to reach young people. [A human rights adviser also met and discussed with the participants of the Young European Ambassadors Network in Armenia](#), thus using existing EU structures to work with young people.*

#### Actively approach youth-led and youth-serving organisations with relevant expertise

- Identify local youth-led and youth-serving organisations. Start by checking within your organisation if cooperation with youth groups is already done or has been done previously. You can also ask the local staff if they can help in identifying youth groups.
- If you cooperate with local CSOs, ask if they know which youth organisations to contact.
- Some countries have national Youth, Peace and Security coalitions or networks, which can be good first points of contact. Other possible ways to identify youth groups is through youth councils, youth-led peacebuilding organisations, local centres of international youth networks, larger associations or forums for CSOs and church/faith-based groups. There can also be young people in institutional structures as civil servants, council representatives and parliamentarians.
- Remain conflict sensitive by choosing whom you partner with. The most visible organisations may only represent youth from a certain, often privileged background. Consider the diversity of youth and ensure that different societal groups are represented by the youth organisations you interact with. This is especially important if you aim for collaboration with many youth organisations.
- Give sufficient information to the young people about why you want to engage them. Mention what the young people will receive from the cooperation, e.g. opportunity to contribute to the decision making, access to tools and resources, networking, etc.
- If you do not speak the same language, try to involve local staff in the cooperation. Local staff can also bring cultural knowledge. Confirm the youth's preferred language in advance of any meeting.
- Be prepared that you may need to build trust in the initial phases of contact. Manage the expectations of the young people, for example by being clear about what the mission can and cannot do. Listen to the young people and respect it if they do not want to collaborate with you.

*The Specialized Police Team on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SPT SGBV) in the **United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)** [has implemented a project](#) in cooperation with Episcopal University. A lecture series was developed for first-year students of law and theology, covering topics such as human rights, international humanitarian law, and the functioning of the UN in general. In the future, the degree participants will be working in important societal roles, either in the Rule of Law sector or as ministers and chaplains in rural areas.*

#### Include youth-led organisations and young experts in existing formats, such as CSO consultations and conferences

- Consider that youth-led organisations are often run by volunteers with limited resources. Plan with adequately long deadlines when cooperating and keep administrative requirements low. Signing a memorandum of understanding can reduce burdens in repeated interactions.

- Ask what kind of support youth-led organisations need to confidently and safely participate and provide support where possible. This could be financial support (i.e., reimbursement or up-front coverage of travel costs & data packs) but also listening, giving advice about engaging international organisations and mentoring.
- To ensure meaningful youth participation in CSO consultations, account for local cultural contexts. Consider that age-based seniority dynamics and gender relations may inhibit some young participants from speaking up even though they can have a lot of experience. Encourage an open sharing atmosphere.

*The **European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine)** has promoted standing community mechanisms led by youth, with regular consultations with police and other sectors.*

Always consider the safety of youth when connecting them to mission activities or other stakeholders

- Prior to engagement, make a point to discuss potential risks associated with engaging the mission with youth to enable them to give informed consent regarding their cooperation.
- Consider that some groups of young people, for example young women and youth belonging to certain minorities [face threats](#) from several vectors at once. These can be verbal, political, legal, financial, digital and even physical.
- Implement protective measures, such as the opportunity to participate anonymously or remotely, via secure online platforms. Plan response measures, in case a young person faces threats as a result of their engagement with the mission.
- Create psychologically safe spaces for youth. Engaging youth in conflict settings means engaging people who may carry trauma, and consultations or cooperation on sensitive topics carry a re-traumatisation risk.
- Never publish images or names of young people who have engaged with the mission without their consent.

Build meaningful cooperation together with the youth you have approached

- Plan together how to cooperate by coming up with common principles and objectives. It can be regular meetings, projects together or anything that benefits youth, the civilian crisis management mission and the community or society.
- Consider accessibility to ensure there are no barriers to cooperation. Ask the young partners where it is convenient and safe for them to meet. Remember physical accessibility for youth with disabilities. Some young people can lack financial and other resources to fully engage with activities, e.g. they can live far away or not have digital tools.
- Ask the youth when they are most available to cooperate. Many young people can generally be occupied during the day on weekdays because they could be studying or working. Others may be in the process of starting families. Accordingly, ensure that participation settings are inclusive, for example by offering flexible schedules and child-friendly arrangements.
- Always tell young partners what came of their contribution, including when you could not act on it, and why.

*Projects driven by the **OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe (POiD)** address young people across all three dimensions of security with different formats. The [Central Asia Youth Talks](#) initiative provides*

*a dialogue and learning platform for young leaders from Central Asia and beyond. It strengthens participatory skills, supports joint project development, and fosters knowledge exchange and regional cooperation. In the Human Dimension, the POiD maintains a Network of Youth for Gender Equality with 73 members which champions young women's public and political participation. Lastly, the Economic and Environmental Dimension organises a Youth Summer School on Environmental Good Governance.*

### **3. Extending Your Impact**

You may not be able to change mission-wide structures, but there are many ways to have a positive influence beyond your immediate tasks. Even small, intentional actions can gradually shape mission culture and spread YPS principles.

#### Share Knowledge and Experience

- Document and report both successful and unsuccessful approaches, and lessons learned from youth engagement in team meetings, reports or informal discussions to encourage wider adoption. Regularly ask your youth partners for feedback.
- Share practical tips or examples from your work with colleagues in other divisions, also to help peers develop their own expertise in working with young people.
- Invite colleagues to observe or participate in youth engagement activities.
- Use internal channels to raise awareness about youth engagement and YPS.
- When leaving your post, prepare brief handover notes that include youth contacts, ongoing initiatives and practical tips to ensure continuity. Consider organising brief introductions for colleagues taking over to facilitate a smooth transition.

#### Champion Youth Voices

- Find and connect with YPS-expertise in your organisation, for example by identifying the youth focal points in different departments or staff members who engage with youth actors. In some organisations, dedicated youth advisers exist. Gender and human rights advisers can also be knowledgeable about the mission's youth engagement.
- Leverage existing networks and communities of practice – local youth organisations, youth focal points, or other international organisations engaged with youth in the same context – to exchange best practices, coordinate aligned approaches, and identify partners that can support, strengthen, or scale your efforts.
- Connect young people with colleagues, youth focal points, or ongoing projects to ensure their perspectives reach decision-makers and teams beyond your immediate work.
- Encourage colleagues and young people to learn from each other through joint activities, briefings or mentoring, strengthening capacity across the mission.
- Where possible, encourage longer-term cooperation arrangements to ensure continuity beyond individual projects or personnel changes.

#### Embed Youth in Governance and Workflows

- Integrate youth engagement steps into routine project planning, reporting and monitoring processes. This could mean that checklists, templates and guidance materials reference youth engagement.

- Make youth consultations a standard part of community outreach, conflict analysis and other mission activities to create consistent channels for dialogue.
- Set up processes that allow young people to track how their contributions influence your decisions and activities and provide opportunities to comment on outcomes or suggest improvements. This is essential for building trust.
- Include or advocate for youth representatives in advisory boards, steering committees or task forces where practical, ensuring diverse and inclusive participation at all times. Be mindful that while rotation can broaden perspectives, maintaining consistent participation is equally important to enable young people to have a lasting impact and to effectively monitor the outcomes of their engagement.

*An increasing number of **EU Delegations** have set up national [youth sounding boards](#) or other youth advisory structures adapted to local contexts. These platforms enable young people to provide input, helping to make EU external action more youth-relevant. In addition, a network of youth focal points in EU Delegations worldwide ensures a coordinated approach to youth engagement, integrating youth perspectives into EU external policies.*

*The [Advisory Council on Youth](#) (CCJ) is the non-governmental partner in the co-management structure that establishes the standards and work priorities of the **Council of Europe's** youth sector and makes recommendations on future priorities, programmes, and budgets. It is composed of 30 representatives from youth NGOs and networks across Europe. Its main task is to advise the Committee of Ministers on all questions relating to youth. Specifically, the Advisory Council helps ensure that youth policies are mainstreamed into the Council of Europe's programme of activities by providing opinions and proposals to all of the Organisation's bodies.*

***EUMA** has launched its first [Youth Expert Group](#), made up of young people from Yerevan and border communities, in partnership with the Armenian Progressive Youth NGO. The group and EUMA meet quarterly to feed into the mission's decision-making, providing a platform for sharing knowledge and idea generation between Armenian youth and EUMA.*

## Further Learning Opportunities

If you would like to learn more about the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, here are links to a selection of guidance documents and checklists.

### Fundamental Readings on Youth, Peace and Security

- [The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. Simpson, Graeme. 2018.](#)
- [YPS Lexicon: Language for a New Era. Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security. Prelis, Del Felice, Upadhyay. 2026.](#)

### Comprehensive Guidance on YPS

- [Youth, Peace and Security Adviser's Handbook. FBA. 2021](#)
- [Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook. UNFPA, UNDP, PBSO, FBA. 2021](#)
- [Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level: A Guide for Public Officials. Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security. FBA, Search for Common Ground, UNOY, UNFPA. 2022.](#)

### Youth Engagement

- [Guide on Inclusive Youth Consultations. UNOY. 2024.](#)
- [Checklist for Meaningful Youth Engagement. UNOY.](#)
- [Working With and For Youth: Practical ideas to foster youth engagement in policies, processes and programs. OSCE. 2023.](#)
- [If I Disappear: Global report on protecting young people in civic space. UN. 2021.](#)

### Youth, Climate, Peace and Security

- [Beyond vulnerability: A guidance note on youth, climate, peace and security. UNDP, SIPRI, FBA. 2024.](#)

### YPS in Security Sector Reform

- [Youth, Peace and Security: ISSAT Advisory Note. DCAF. 2024](#)

## Organisational Commitments and Operational Guidance on Youth, Peace and Security

A number of organisations to which CMC Finland and ZIF second personnel have made commitments to implement the YPS Agenda in their work. The following selection is non-exhaustive.

	<b>UN Peace Operations</b>	<b>EU CSDP</b>	<b>OSCE</b>	<b>Council of Europe</b>
<b>Organisational Commitments</b> (selection)	<a href="#">UNSCR 2535 (2020)</a>	<a href="#">Youth Action Plan in External Action (2022)</a> ; <a href="#">Civilian CSDP Compact (2023)</a>	<a href="#">Ministerial Council Declaration MC.DOC/3/18 (2018)</a>	<a href="#">Reykjavík Declaration (2023)</a>
<b>Operational Guidance</b>	<a href="#">Youth, Peace and Security, A Programming Handbook (2021)</a>	Mini-concept on civilian CSDP support to host states to tackle peace and security challenges in line with principles of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda (2024, limited)	<a href="#">OSCE-wide YPS Roadmap (2025)</a>	<a href="#">Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective (2025)</a>

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