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MEANINGFUL INCLUSION? ENHANCING THE YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Introduction

The active role of young people as agents for peace has gained recognition over the last decade. This departure from the traditional international security narrative, which often casts young people as victims or perpetrators in conflict-affected regions, represents a significant shift. The passing of the United Nations Security Council Resolution [UNSC] 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security, and its subsequent resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) later referred to as the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda (YPS), stand out as a landmark in moving forward this fresh conception of the youth (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2250). As the first international policy framework recognising the youth's positive role in upholding and advancing international peace and security, the YPS Agenda takes a comprehensive approach, going beyond the tendency to view youth solely through a security or victimhood lens. To do so, this approach identifies five key pillars to act on: participation, protection, violence prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration (UNSC, 2020a).

In particular, the pillar of participation underscores the importance of involving young people¹ in the peace-making process. Recognising that the enduring success of a peace agreement hinges on its acceptance or rejection by the succeeding generations, their socialisation during the peace process, and their perceptions of its achievements (McEvoy-Levy, 2001: 5), youth engagement becomes key for sustaining peace (UNSC,

¹ For the purpose of this policy brief, the term "youth" aligns with the definition outlined in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSC 2250), referring to individuals aged between 18 and 29 years old.

2020a). Recent research emphasises that “the inclusion of young people during all phases of peace processes likely increases the sustainability of the agreements” (Altiok & Grizelj, 2019). However, despite their evident stake in these processes, the formal participation of young people in peace negotiations remains strikingly limited (Simpson, 2018).

This paper examines the YPS Agenda’s call to enable youth engagement in peace-making architectures. It directs its focus to Euro-Mediterranean conflict settings, specifically on the post-Arab Spring scenarios in Yemen and Libya, both characterised by unsuccessful political transitions to democracy (Szmolka, 2017). The central theme revolves around the active participation of young people in the respective peace-making processes within these conflict-ridden countries. After having mapped out their level of engagement, a critical dimension of the analysis involves the examination of the European Union’s (EU) institutionalisation level of the YPS Agenda. Given the EU’s prominent role as a YPS global advocate, the brief aims to formulate targeted policy recommendations to enhance the integration of the YPS Agenda, particularly in relation to youth participation in the Euro-Mediterranean conflict settings.

To do this, I first outlined youth formal engagement in conflict-resolution efforts in Yemen and Libya by analysing how the youth is being integrated into relevant peace-making documents and initiatives. Later, I assessed the level of YPS institutionalisation under the EU framework by meticulously mapping events and policy developments specifically connected to the YPS Agenda between the years 2015 and 2023. Finally, in recognition of the EU’s significant influence and its collaborative engagement with the United Nations (UN), a primary mediator in the region’s peace-making efforts, the formulation of final recommendations targeting the EU’s architecture seeks to contribute to a more effective and comprehensive approach to youth involvement in conflict resolution initiatives in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Locating the gap: an inspiring narrative shift in the absence of formal youth inclusion in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

Despite the historical oversight of marginalised communities by the UN and other international institutions, young people have actively participated in local peace-building efforts (Altiok & Grizelj, 2019; Berents & Mollica, 2022). Policy-making has frequently overlooked youth’s contributions to peace and often relied on limited and gendered stereotypes that overshadowed their participation, especially at the institutional level (Altiok et al., 2020; McEvoy-Levy, 2006). Indeed, young women are often portrayed as helpless victims, while young men are traditionally cast as violent actors with the potential to ruin a peace process (Altiok, 2021; Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Simpson, 2018; Berents & Mollica, 2022). These narratives were reinforced due to the securitisation of the youth after the “war on terror” in the 2000s and the emergence of the issue of violent extremism (Altiok, 2021). As such, there has been a longstanding (mis)perception of young people as a security threat or as violent criminals to be feared within the state-society relationship (Altiok, 2021). These oversimplified and limited characterisations overlook the reality that most young people do not engage in violence and forget their contributions to peace-building (Simpson, 2018; Berents & Mollica, 2022). The vast majority of the approximately 1,800 million people aged between 10 and 24 years old are neither involved in violence nor at risk of participating in it (Simpson, 2018: 13) and instead “are focused on education, employment, care work and productive lives” (Berents & Mollica, 2022: 2).

Consequently, it is crucial to sidestep these misrepresentations of youth at the institutional level, fostering a more accurate and nuanced appreciation of their vital contributions to

peace and security. The passing of the groundbreaking UNSC 2250 on YPS formalised a step in the direction of shifting this narrative. For the first time, it acknowledged young people’s contributions to peace-building and firmly positioned youth within the broader discourse on peace and security by advocating for increased youth representation in conflict prevention and resolution (UNSC, 2015).

Within this narrative shift, the resolution delineates five pillars (Figure 1)² to act on: protection, prevention, participation, partnership, and disengagement and reintegration. These pillars intersect to form a cohesive framework for addressing the intricate challenges related to youth and peace-building. Participation emphasises involving young people in decision-making, while protection ensures their safety in conflict areas. Prevention addresses root causes, advocating education and economic opportunities, and partnership underscores collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders. Disengagement and reintegration focus on supporting youth involved in conflict to transition positively. As such, these pillars recognise the multifaceted roles of young people, promoting their agency and inclusivity, which are crucial for the holistic effectiveness of the YPS Agenda in fostering sustainable peace.

Figure 1. YPS Agenda Pillars

| Protection | Prevention | Participation | Partnership | Disengagement and reintegration |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| <p>The YPS Agenda emphasizes the protection of young people in the face of violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.</p> <p>This includes addressing the specific challenges faced by youth, such as recruitment by armed groups, displacement, and the impact of violence on their well-being. It also implies ensuring protection of young civilians’ lives and prosecute those responsible for crimes perpetrated against them.</p> | <p>The YPS Agenda underscores the importance of preventing the involvement of young people in violence and conflict.</p> <p>This means encouraging the development of programs and initiatives that address the root causes of conflict, enhance capacity-building, and promote social cohesion and intercultural dialogue. Ex. employment opportunities, inclusive labour policies, and education.</p> | <p>The YPS Agenda highlights the need for the meaningful inclusion of young people in all stages of peace processes, from conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction.</p> <p>This involves recognizing and supporting the active role that youth can play in decision-making, policy development, and implementation.</p> | <p>The YPS Agenda calls for collaboration between governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders to effectively implement its principles.</p> <p>It recognizes the need for a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach to address the complex challenges of peace and security.</p> | <p>The YPS Agenda asks for strategies and interventions aimed at addressing the process of young people disengaging from involvement in violence, conflict, or extremist activities, and supporting their successful reintegration into society.</p> |

Source: Prepared by the author

Despite the positive narrative shift facilitated by the YPS Agenda, translating this change into tangible formal youth inclusion in peace processes remains to be achieved. While the YPS framework has successfully contributed to altering the discourse around youth contributions to peace, the practical implementation on the ground demands more effort. This is particularly true in the Euro-Mediterranean conflict scenarios. In Libya, out of the 46 agreements reached at both national and local levels, only nine contained references to youth. This signifies a relatively low level of inclusion or recognition of youth perspectives and participation within the content of these agreements. Nevertheless, the participation pillar stands out as the most frequently cited, accounting for eight out of the 16 total references to youth. This highlights that, despite the limited number of references within the generic frameworks for conflict resolution in Libya, the youth-participation pillar remains highly relevant (Table 1).

² I have operationalised the YPS pillars by providing clear definitions, and in the subsequent analysis, I utilised these definitions to classify references within documents and events. This approach allows for a structured and systematic examination, enabling a nuanced understanding of how the YPS pillars are reflected in the materials under analysis.

Table 1. YPS penetration in relevant peace-making documents in Libya³

| Timing | Agreement | Reference | Accentuated pillar |
|----------------|--|--|---------------------------------|
| August, 2011 | Constitutional Charter for the Transitional Stage | "...The State shall take care of children, youth and the handicapped." | Protection |
| December, 2015 | Libyan Political Agreement | "Expressing their determination to engage the youth in peace-making, promote their role in the political process..." | Participation |
| | | "...strengthen them so as to confront all forms of terrorism." | Protection |
| | | "...Government of National Accord shall give... air representation of women and youth." | Participation |
| | | "...Provide short-term employment opportunities, especially for youth." | Prevention |
| March, 2016 | Humanitarian Appeal for Benghazi | "...providing education for all Benghazi's children and youth is critical." | Prevention |
| April, 2016 | Joint declaration (...) in supporting the (...) the Government of National Agreement | This Declaration was directly issued by the National Movement of the Touareg Youth in the South. | Participation |
| June, 2016 | Agreement to stop the bloodshed and open the door to dialogue in the Western Region | "...resolve the unresolved issues between the people of Libya, including returning the youth who had joined one of the two sides of the conflict." | Disengagement and reintegration |
| February, 2018 | Reconciliation Charter between Tebu and Zway Tribes from Kufra | "Women and youth have a key role to play in reconciliation (...)" | Participation |
| | | "(...) To promote sustainable development and economic opportunities to protect our youth." | Prevention |
| | | "prevent their recruitment by armed groups or radical movements." | Protection |
| November, 2020 | Roadmap "For the Preparatory Phase of a Comprehensive Solution" | "...the importance of real representation of women and youth." | Participation |

³ All these documents were retrieved from the Peace Agreement Database (PA-X). PA-X provides a comprehensive dataset of all peace agreements in the selected cases.

| | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---------------|
| November, 2021 | Declaration of the Paris International Conference for Libya | "...full, equal and meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of youth." | Participation |
| June, 2021 | Second Berlin Conference for Libya | "We call on (...) meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of youth." | Participation |
| | | "We encourage the full, effective and meaningful participation of women and youth in all activities relating to Libya's democratic transition, conflict resolution (...)" | Participation |
| | | "We support the efforts of the interim Government of National Unity to diversify, develop and open up its national economy (...) which will effectively contribute to stability, institution-building and the integration of youth into economic activity." | Prevention |

Source: Prepared by the author

Following the 2011 uprising, the National Transitional Council (the de facto government and recognised opposition body) sought to incorporate youth into the interim Constitutional Declaration, emphasising that the state should attend to the needs of youth.⁴ Although there are no public policies specifically addressing young people in Libya, consecutive transitional governments have established a Ministry of Youth (Khalifa, 2022). This Ministry appears to be widely perceived as ineffectual and lacking significant influence due to limited funding, a lack of vision for Libyan youth, and control over minimal resources. Moreover, the scope of its programmes seems confined primarily to larger coastal cities (USAID [United States Agency for International Development], 2020). This once more underscores the filtration of a youth-inclined narrative without tangible implementation. However, this lack of translation ignores the fact that Libyan youth have been actively engaged in various capacities, either peacefully shaping civic spaces, or participating in combat roles within the multiple armed factions in the Libyan conflict (Khalifa, 2022).

As the conflict intensified, civic spaces diminished, leading the youth to perceive politics as an unfavourable avenue for engagement and, instead, they gravitated towards civil society-led humanitarian work, culture and art, as it is perceived as less politically controversial and safer for public engagement (Khalifa, 2022). Indeed, civil society has emerged as a platform for the younger demographic to actively channel their engagement in the public sphere. However, the entrenched exclusionary, exclusive and masculinised dynamics in the realm of Libyan politics dominated by older generations still represent an obstacle for youth seeking increased political involvement. This intergenerational gap in political representation is acute in the whole Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: while young people represent nearly a quarter of the MENA region's population, people under 40 years of age represent only 16.4% of members of parliament on average (OCDE, 2022). As the political space is limited, the youth perceive civil society as a more operative alternative space through which they can become politically active.

⁴ Constitutional Charter for the Transitional Stage, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b645f5d4.pdf> (10 November 2023).

This gap has also filtered into the UN-led peace process dynamics since 2014 with the notable exception of the UN-facilitated 2020 Libya Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) (UNSMIL, 2020). The LPDF adopted a multi-track approach to peace-building translated into several sub-tracks, including those for women and youth, to inject specific recommendations directly into the main political dialogue. The dedicated youth track convened 40 participants, encompassing diverse political, ethnic and tribal backgrounds, and yielded recommendations that touched on key aspects such as transitional justice, the rule of law, combating corruption, institutional unification, and national reconciliation, among other topics (UNSMIL, 2020). These efforts were additionally complemented by regional consultations within the framework of the Youth Political Consultations (YPC) 2020 that also produced final recommendations on the Libyan political landscape (YPC, 2020).

Although these initiatives have not changed the broader picture of limited formal youth representation in conflict resolution efforts, they point in the direction of some potential avenues for change: third parties' strict commitment to go beyond ensuring representation and actively broadening platforms for participation in conflict resolution efforts (Nilsson et al., 2023). This highlights the significance of third-party actors creatively integrating youth into peace processes and finding alternative ways to engage when direct, formal participation is challenging.

In Yemen, despite the innovative efforts pushed forward by the National Dialogue Conference (NDC)⁵ in 2013, there has been a notable lack of substantial youth representation in subsequent peace-making endeavours. In Yemen, youth played a key role in mobilising the population during the Arab Spring and, as such, were later present during the NDC via a 20% youth quota for all stakeholders attending and 40 seats reserved for independent youth representatives (Altiok & Grizelj, 2019). Through this strategy, young people actively participated in various committees within the NDC (Altiok & Grizelj, 2019). Independent youth representatives, operating as a cohesive bloc with a few exceptions, strategically engaged in voting processes, formed alliances with women and other civil society groups, and exerted a considerable impact on decision-making throughout the conference (Altiok & Grizelj, 2019). Consequently, the NDC produced outcomes that prominently highlighted the importance of addressing the essential needs of youth and bolstering their capabilities to empower them as agents for positive political change in Yemen.⁶

However, youth participation in formal peace-making has degraded since then. This discrepancy is evident in the peace agreements achieved (Table 2). These agreements carry significant importance as they establish the political and social parameters for how conflicting parties agree to interact with one another. Despite the crucial role of these agreements and the large youth segment in the Yemeni society, the inadequacy of youth representation is apparent. Out of the 56 peace agreements attained in the Yemeni peace process across various levels, including local and national, only five incorporated references to the youth. Nevertheless, if focused more closely, amid the limited number of references (11 in total), five were directed towards the participation pillar, stressing the significance of the meaningful inclusion of youth.

The notable prevalence of the participation pillar, even within this restricted number of references, contrasts with the actual dynamics of peace talks in Yemen from 2014 onward. In 2015, the UN aimed to revive inclusive national-level talks that had stalled in late 2014 and, as such, mediation efforts focused on the national elites: the internationally recognised

⁵ The NDC was a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue process aimed at addressing the political, social and economic challenges facing the country. It emerged in the context of the Yemeni uprising and the broader Arab Spring movements. The NDC brought together a diverse range of Yemeni stakeholders, including political parties, civil society groups, youth, women, and other factions, to foster national reconciliation and draft a new constitution.

⁶ NDC Outcomes Document (2013-2014), available at: <https://shorturl.at/kstF0> (10 December 2023).

government and the Huthi rebels (International Crisis Group, 2021). As of 2023, the continued reliance on this two-party approach in negotiations persists, contributing to a settlement characterised by exclusionary, exclusive and male-dominated peace-making efforts (International Crisis Group, 2021). Specifically, young activists are not formally granted a role in the negotiation process (Alsakkaf, 2021). Even in instances where Track 2 initiatives established parallel spaces for their inclusion, participants expressed dissatisfaction, noting that they are often isolated from actual negotiations and their contributions overlooked (International Crisis Group, 2021; Kronich et al., 2023).

Table 2. YPS penetration in relevant peace-making documents in Yemen⁷

| Timing | Agreement | Reference | Accentuated pillar |
|----------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| December, 2011 | Decree No. (184) to Form a Government of National Reconciliation | Establishment of a Ministry of Youth | Generic |
| December, 2011 | Agreement on the implementation mechanism for the transition process in Yemen | "Our people, including youth, have legitimate aspirations for change" | Generic (youth as agents for change) |
| | | "The government of national unity and the Vice-President shall immediately establish a liaison committee to engage effectively with youth movements... and involve youth in determining the future of political life." | Participation |
| | | "...a comprehensive Conference for National Dialogue for all forces and political actors, including youth" | Participation |
| December, 2013 | Outcomes of the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference | "Establishment of welfare and rehabilitation centers for... the youth" "to establish a consolidated fund for the welfare of the (...) wounded of the youth revolution." | Protection |
| | | "Representations shall be the same representation implemented in the NDC with respect to the South, women, and youth." | Participation |
| | | "...empowerment of youth, educationally, professionally, politically and economically and the provision of suitable conditions for the utilisation of their energies (...)" | Prevention |
| | | "Move juveniles who were convicted by court to juvenile detention centres... in a manner that ensures rehabilitation and reintegration into society." | Disengagement and reintegration |
| | | The principle of partnership is present transversally in all the document. | Partnership |

⁷ All these documents were retrieved from the Peace Agreement Database (PA-X). PA-X provides a comprehensive dataset of all peace agreements in the selected cases.

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---------------|
| September, 2014 | The Peace and National Partnership Agreement | "... ensuring representation of women and youth." | Participation |
| April, 2016 | Terms and conditions of the cessation of hostilities in Yemen | "Local Committees are to actively engage with civil society, including women's and youth groups..." | Participation |

Source: Prepared by the author. The Outcomes of the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference included multiple references to the youth. The overview included in this policy brief is not exhaustive. Only references to exemplify the YPS pillars have been included.

Mapping YPS substantive integration in the European Union

The EU has long engaged in conflict resolution within the Euro-Mediterranean region, including in the cases of Yemen and Libya (Herrberg, 2021).⁸ Within its longstanding collaboration with the UN, the EU has contributed to shaping peace processes and policies (Hussain & Hussain, 2017; Bergmann, 2021). Moreover, it has underscored its commitment to the YPS Agenda, emphasising the importance of youth inclusion as articulated in the participation pillar.⁹ As such, there emerges an imperative to examine the integration of the YPS Agenda into the EU's institutional framework, shedding light on the status and potential improvements in fostering youth participation within the broader framework of conflict resolution initiatives.

After mapping relevant EU policy documents and events (Table 3) and examining prevalent YPS pillars (Table 4), several key conclusions emerge:

- The EU has embraced the narrative of the YPS Agenda, recognising the pivotal role of young people as agents for change. However, while the EU's commitment to the YPS Agenda has progressively increased, there is an **asymmetry** in the development of its pillars. In this vein, the EU has emphasised clearer lines of action within the violence prevention pillar, which typically involves investments in education, economic opportunities, or the labour market. This suggests that the EU shows more creativity in preventing youth violence through substantial investment in capacity-building. However, there is a need for better coordination between capacity-building initiatives and other YPS pillars. This involves allowing these capacity-building efforts to connect among themselves and spill over into other YPS pillars, participation in particular, serving a broader purpose in promoting the meaningful participation of young people.
- The EU also emphasises the participation pillar. However, unlike the prevention pillar, which establishes several better-defined lines of action, the participation pillar lacks clarity on how these references will be operationalised. There are no clear guidelines on how these references will translate into concrete actions, especially concerning

⁸ For example, in Libya, the EU channels support to civil society with the aim of strengthening their capacities and advancing gender equality within the Libyan context. Additionally, it recognises the significance of empowering Libyan youth, contributing to their development through targeted programmes that enhance skills essential for the labour market. Beyond this, the EU also contributes to UN-led conflict resolution initiatives. (European External Action Service [EEAS], 2022). In Yemen, the EU also plays a role in mediation support among other development-oriented lines of action and humanitarian assistance (EEAS, 2020).

⁹ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU External Action 2022 – 2027. Promoting meaningful youth participation and empowerment in EU external action for sustainable development, equality, and peace. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/mnFIQ> (13 November 2023).

the EU's external action in conflict settings. While the 2023 EU Peace Mediation Guidelines stand out, they fall short as a comprehensive mainstreaming tool within the EU's peace mediation and conflict resolution architecture. Clearer steps are imperative to integrate YPS implications effectively, ensuring a systematic understanding and implementation of meaningful youth participation in conflict resolution efforts.

- Acknowledging the dangers of youth civic involvement in conflict settings, the EU must prioritise strengthening mechanisms for youth protection. The escalating risks associated with the suppression of dissent faced by youth activists pose a direct threat to youth participation. However, the protection pillar receives less attention. There is a need for more concrete steps and specific measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of youth, especially those involved in participation efforts in conflict settings, emphasising the need to create an environment that not only supports but actively protects the rights of young activists.
- The integration of the YPS Agenda into the EU architecture omits references to the disengagement and reintegration pillar, leaving a gap in addressing post-conflict challenges from a youth perspective. Equally significant is the absence of guidance on aligning this pillar with established EU frameworks on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), such as the 2006 EU DDR Concept. This would allow a cohesive response.
- The EU's references to partnerships are primarily concentrated on collaborating with other international organisations like the African Union (AU). However, there seems to be a missing vertical approach, which implies connections both with EU member states and with existing youth movements and organisations in conflict settings.
- The EU is still in the early stages of incorporating the YPS Agenda, as there is a lack of mainstreaming across policies and events. While there have been individual EU-funded initiatives addressing youth-related issues, these efforts are standalone and not broadly connected to each other and the YPS pillars. This fragmented approach hampers the establishment of robust, cohesive and enduring synergies. This results in missed opportunities to build stronger, far-reaching and long-term connections, hindering a systematic implementation of the YPS Agenda.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Drawing on the current integration of the YPS Agenda in the EU, there is potential for further reinforcement. The following policy recommendations are tailored for the EU in its role in conflict resolution as a third party or supporter of mediation efforts in conflict settings. They are designed to address specific areas within the participation pillar of the YPS agenda-building on identified needs in previous sections in this policy brief and considering the broader intersections with other pillars for a holistic approach.

1. **Leverage previous initiatives.** Build upon existing youth initiatives and capitalise on established capacities among young people. Strengthen the link between prevention and participation by ensuring that skills developed in capacity-building initiatives intersect effectively with the participation pillar. Connect these capacity-building efforts to create a cohesive framework that serves the broader purpose of enhancing youth participation in conflict resolution.
2. **Broaden notions of participation.** Move beyond the notion of *parallel* "participatory mechanisms"¹⁰ to Track 1 processes or high politics and embrace meaningful youth

¹⁰ See Council conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/CSW03> (19 November 2023).

involvement at all phases and tracks in a peace process. This implies the EU, along with other mediators and EU member states, must ensure a unified and politically coherent approach to collectively raise awareness and advocate to mediators and negotiators in conflict settings.

3. **Intergenerational facilitation to promote direct incorporation of youth within negotiating delegations.** Insist on the direct incorporation of youth within negotiating delegations. To mitigate potential intergenerational tensions and stereotypes, the implementation of facilitation and dialogue techniques is advised. These techniques should be designed to foster open dialogue, understanding, mentoring, and collaboration among members of different age groups within the negotiating teams. As such, delegations could become spaces for intergenerational cooperation and create an environment where diverse perspectives and experiences are respectfully exchanged.
4. **Prioritise cross-domain transfer among spaces and forge alliances.** In cases where youth participation occurs through parallel mechanisms, underscore the importance of forging connections among these mechanisms with other youth-specific, women-oriented, and civil society-focused spaces to foster potential collaborations among pertinent stakeholders. Facilitate upward transfer to political forums to ensure dissemination of insights and recommendations across diverse domains, including Track 1 actors.
5. **Invest in context-sensitive participatory space designing.** The configuration of these spaces is crucial; it is essential to avoid replicating existing societal power dynamics that exclude specific societal segments from public forums, especially in conflict settings. This pertains not only to women but also to other marginalised groups with limited access to public platforms.
6. **Promote an adaptive design of youth-dedicated spaces in peace processes.** Advocate for the flexible design of spaces, ensuring adaptability to accommodate the multiple stages and changes in the conflict dynamics and peace processes. Empower participants with agency in shaping these spaces, allowing for successive feedback loops and updates to objectives, design, and participation criteria, thus mitigating potential frustrations among them and ensuring relevance to these spaces.
7. **Support youth-inclusive practices:** Integrate YPS, especially the participation pillar, into the European External Action Service (EEAS) architecture through training for EU mediators. Develop toolkits to guide effective youth-inclusive practices. Conduct youth-sensitive conflict analyses, considering existing youth groups and initiatives, and mapping potential resistance to inclusion on an actor-based analysis. In addressing this resistance, involving affected youth in devising strategies is key.
8. **Allocate resources to enhance data collection efforts** and delve into the **intersections between the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the YPS Agenda.** This exploration will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these agendas intersect, allowing for more informed interventions.
9. **Favour horizontal and vertical partnerships.** Expand the concept of partnerships beyond horizontal collaboration among international organisations to include vertical engagement. Strengthen collaboration between EU and youth, youth-dedicated civil society, and grassroots

organisations to foster a comprehensive and inclusive approach to conflict resolution. Additionally, it is crucial for the EU to emphasise national integrations of the YPS Agenda. This entails ensuring a coherent policy marked by unity of action among its member states. Each member state should actively engage in the integration of the YPS Agenda to collectively strengthen its impact.

10. **Advance explicit guidelines to complement youth participation with protective measures.** This involves incorporating safeguards to ensure the safety and wellbeing of young participants, acknowledging the potential risks they face in conflict settings, and implementing proactive measures to mitigate these risks.

Table 3. European Union. YPS policy-related documents and events¹¹

| Timing | Event | Policy development | Coordinated events (with UN and/or AU) | Coordinated policy developments (with UN and/or AU) |
|-----------------|---|--|---|--|
| March, 2017 | Young Med Voices Plus Initiative | | | |
| September, 2017 | | | Youth consultation as a contribution to the Progress Study "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace & Security" * | |
| November, 2017 | | | | African Union – European Union Summit: Investing in Youth for a Sustainable Future – AU-EU Youth Plug-In Initiative Follow-up initiative: AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub |
| April, 2018 | | | | UN SC Open Debate on YPS |
| May, 2018 | EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security: Promoting Youth in Peace-building | EU Council Conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe | | The release of "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace & Security" * |
| November, 2018 | | EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and EU Youth Goals | | |
| April, 2019 | | | | AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub |
| June, 2020 | | Conclusions on "Youth in external action" | | |

¹¹ This mapping was refined to encompass only those initiatives that explicitly view youth as active agents of peace, moving beyond a passive beneficiary perspective. Moreover, it applies a stringent conceptual framework, excluding any events or policy initiatives related to youth predating the adoption of the first YPS-dedicated UNSC resolution in 2015.

| | | |
|----------------|--|---|
| June, 2021 | Conclusions on “Strengthening the multilevel governance when promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes” | |
| December, 2021 | | Launch of the AU-EU Youth Lab (Lab 3.0) (2022-2025) |
| January, 2022 | The EU’s Implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda: Gathering Young Experts’ Recommendations | |
| October, 2022 | Youth Action Plan in EU external action for 2022- 2027 | |
| August, 2023 | Establishment of the Youth Sounding Board to implement and disseminate the Youth Action Plan | |
| October, 2023 | EU Peace Mediation Guidelines | |

Source: Prepared by the author.

*As a component of the UN-backed report “The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace & Security,” the EU conducted regional youth consultations for data collection. While the report and its associated events have been acknowledged in the analysis, their exclusion is justified as this consultation’s primary objective was to focus on data collection to allow an overview of the YPS Agenda’s implementation rather than directly influencing its further development under the EU framework.

Table 4. Level of YPS integration. Accentuated pillars in policy developments¹²

| Timing | Policy element (documents and events) | YPS pillars addressed | Level of integration |
|----------------|--|-----------------------|----------------------|
| March, 2017 | Young Med Voices Plus Initiative | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Participation | + |
| | | Partnership | + |
| November, 2017 | African Union – European Union Summit: Investing in Youth for a Sustainable Future | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Protection | ++ |
| | | Partnership | ++ |
| | Africa Union – European Union (AU-EU) Youth Plug-In Initiative | Participation | ++ |
| | | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Partnership | ++ |
| May, 2018 | EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security: Promoting Youth in Peace-building | Participation | + |
| | | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Protection | + |
| | EU Council Conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe | Participation | ++ |
| | | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Partnership | ++ |
| | | Protection | + |
| April, 2019 | AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Participation | ++ |
| | | Partnership | ++ |
| June, 2020 | Conclusions on “Youth in external action” | Protection | ++ |
| | | Participation | ++ |
| | | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Partnership | ++ |
| October, 2022 | Youth Action Plan in EU external action for 2022-2027 | Prevention | ++ |
| | | Participation | ++ |
| | | Partnership | ++ |
| | | Protection | ++ |
| October, 2023 | EU Peace Mediation Guidelines | Prevention | + |
| | | Participation | ++ |
| | | Protection | ++ |
| | | Partnership | ++ |

Source: Prepared by the author. I identified the pillars by categorizing the primary lines of action emphasised in the referenced policy document or event under these specific pillars.

¹² I assessed the integration of the YPS pillars in identified events and policy documents using a notation system. A single plus sign (+) signifies a sparse presence or indirect references within the identified policy-related element, while a double plus sign (++) indicates a much stronger presence of the given YPS pillar, with the presence of at least more than one direct or indirect reference. This approach provides a clear and concise representation of the varying degrees of integration observed in the analyzed materials.

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