

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER:

Operationalizing a five-year
Strategic Action Plan
for youth-inclusive peace processes



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INTRODUCTION

“Just as the scope of conflicts has been fundamentally transformed since the end of the 20th century, so too has the range of actors who must be engaged in peace and mediation processes.”¹

Contemporary peace processes² have become organized multilayered endeavors to end protracted conflicts, build sustainable peace, and mend relationships between conflicting parties. **Inclusion** is an increasingly accepted norm to strengthen the durability of peace agreements and prevent the recurrence of violence.³ It aims to generate a greater collective momentum to combat exclusionary, elite-driven peace processes and enable **long-lasting, holistic peace**. Inclusivity, nevertheless, presents a multitude of practical complexities and challenges for the design and implementation of peace processes. Despite these challenges, a whole-of-society approach is fundamental to resolve conflict. **Integrating young people’s⁴ perspectives and experiences is essential in broadening our approach to inclusion as we strive towards sustaining peace.**

The **youth, peace, and security (YPS)**⁵ agenda calls for the meaningful participation⁶, representation⁷, and inclusion⁸ of young women and young men⁹ in all phases of peace processes and political decision-making. It highlights young people’s right to participate, noting their demographic presence and distinct experiences during conflict, making young people’s participation fundamental in shifting from violent expressions of conflict towards a collective journey of conflict transformation, sustaining peace, and development. The YPS agenda promotes an intergenerational, long-term approach that builds a foundation to prevent the reoccurrence of violence and divisive political conflict.

It is crucial that the participation of young people is approached through youth-inclusive practices, as opposed to simply including youth as an add-on or tick-box to an existing process. **A youth-inclusive approach emphasizes that peace processes should be shaped by the participation and representation of young people in the design and implementation of peace processes, as critical and necessary partners in conflict transformation and peacebuilding.** The meaningful participation of young people during peace processes must, therefore, be evident through a substantive impact on the peace agreement and its outcomes. This will ensure that it reflects the diverse lived realities, challenges, and needs of young people of all genders within conflict-affected societies. The three-layered model of how young people view their participation ‘in the room’, ‘around the room’ and ‘outside the room’¹⁰ can amplify this. These non-hierarchical layers emphasize the need for an integrated approach to realizing youth-inclusive peace processes.

¹ Catherine Turner and Martin Wählisch (Eds) *Rethinking Peace Mediation: Challenges of Contemporary Peacemaking Practice*, (Bristol University Press, 2021, p. 4.).

² The strategy adheres to the definition of peace process per: Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes* (2019, p.14): “There is no single definition of a peace process, which may comprise of high-level negotiations, ceasefires, national dialogues, political settlements, and encompass a ‘mixture of politics, diplomacy, changing relationships, negotiation, mediation, and dialogue in both official and unofficial arenas’.

³ See Conciliation Resources, *Inclusion in peace processes*, Accord, Issue 28 (March 2019).

⁴ The strategy defines youth per UNSCR 2250 definition of 18-29 years old, noting that “variations of definition of the term that may exist on the national and international levels”. The strategy recognizes that youth refers to a social construct defined by a transition from childhood to adulthood, which is marked by various contextually-specific rites of passage.

⁵ With reference to: United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2250, S/RES/2250 (December 9, 2015). United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2419, S/RES/2419 (June 6, 2018). United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2535, S/RES/2535 (July 14, 2020). UNSCR 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020).

⁶ Youth participation refers to having the right, the means, the space, and the support to engage and (co)take decisions to contribute to positive societal change, especially in relation to issues that directly affect young people. Youth participation can take place in formal political processes or informal ones such as campaigns. It is meaningful when youth can be genuinely heard and influence decisions.

⁷ Political representation is the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives “present” in public and political processes, and occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on the behalf of others in the political arena.

⁸ Inclusivity is an established norm in international policy. It affirms the idea that diverse groups across a broad spectrum of society should have a say in processes that affect them, with a specific focus on marginalized groups. As noted in: Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at country-level: A Guide for Public Officials* (2022).

⁹ The use of terms ‘young women’ and ‘young men’, aims to denote gender differences among youth, rather than infer adulthood through the terms ‘woman’ and ‘man’. The strategy will use ‘young people’ to encompass people of all genders.

¹⁰ Layer 1 - In the room: Youth participation within formal peace architecture and structures, inside the room during negotiations and political dialogues. Layer 2 - Around the room: Young people not directly in the room, but close to the peace agreement and connected (able to get in the room) through formal or informal mechanisms. Layer 3 - Outside the room: Young people who engage and participate through informal and alternative approaches. ‘See Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here*.’

This document presents a **strategic action plan to move from youth-inclusive norms towards youth-inclusive practices** in designing and implementing peace processes. The strategy is a key output for the High-Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Process on 19-21 January 2022, co-hosted by the Governments of the State of Qatar, Finland, and Colombia, and co-organized with civil society and UN partners.¹¹ The strategy builds on respective YPS resolutions and the global policy paper, *We are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes*¹², which focused on why youth participation and representation in peace processes are critical for sustaining peace, and the multilayered roles that young people have taken to influence peace negotiations.

STRATEGIC VISION

All peace processes are shaped by and supportive of young people's meaningful participation, contributing to more inclusive and peaceful societies.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

For governments, non-state political actors, young people, and civil society, as well as mediation units, regional and international organizations engaged in peace processes, to have the resources, capacity, knowledge, and partnerships with young people to safely implement youth-inclusive and youth-responsive peace and mediation processes at all levels by 2026.

THE CORE OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

- To establish and strengthen **political and institutional commitments** to achieve the full, effective, and meaningful participation of young people in peace processes at global, regional, and national levels.
- To develop **youth-sensitive and gender-responsive capacity strengthening resources and knowledge tools** to amplify and strengthen youth engagement in peace processes.
- To develop a **youth-led community of practice and collaborative partnerships** to coordinate, implement, monitor, and report on the progress of the strategy.
- To mobilize **sustainable resources and financing** to realize the strategic vision.

This strategy is based on interviews, consultations, and focus group discussions¹³ with over 90 mediation experts, young leaders, youth organizations, regional and multilateral mediation support units, gender experts, as well as guidance provided by the core Steering Group. **The strategy is intended to promote a holistic, long-term, gender-responsive, intergenerational, and integrated approach** that legitimizes and realizes the meaningful participation of youth in peace processes, and strengthens the mechanisms, tools, and partnerships to create a conducive environment to do so.

This **strategic framework is built on four interconnected streams**, reflecting the core objectives, which are: institutionalization and policy, capacity strengthening, knowledge solutions, and community of practice and partnerships, as interdependent pillars over the next five years. The strategy further seeks to mainstream several key cross-cutting issues that need to be addressed throughout the implementation of the action plan, which focus on protection and security, gender and identity, communication and norm-shaping, digital technology and innovation, and resources and funding.

¹¹ The *First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes* (Helsinki, March 2019) saw the launch of the first global policy paper on youth-inclusive peace processes: Ali Altioik, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* (2019).

¹² Ali Altioik, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here*.

¹³ Consultations took place in three phases: October to December 2020, February to April 2021, and August to November 2021.

The Changing Landscape of Peace Processes

” *“Once the elderly see the youth among them, they are re-energized – because they know the future is certain.”* (Proverb in Ethiopia) ”

Peace processes have seen a significant shift in concepts and design. Conflicts are increasingly fragmented, protracted, and transnational – compounded by the rising prevalence, and misuse, of digital technology¹⁴, and an escalating climate crisis in the context of a global health pandemic. This emphasizes an urgent need to redesign how peace processes are understood and executed.¹⁵

Peace negotiations, once considered the exclusive domain of mostly-male political elites striking deals behind closed doors, have turned into complex, multi-layered¹⁶ processes where a **whole-of-society approach is considered essential to bring an end to violence and build peaceful societies**. Balancing the short-term objective of ending armed violence with long-term processes of peacebuilding is a critical challenge for parties and mediators in peace processes; both must be addressed in order to achieve durable peace. This balancing act is further complicated when young people, who have sought reaffirmation of their trust in the state and other governance systems, are pushing for immediate opportunity to ensure the root causes of the conflict are addressed and that future generations are not burdened with cycles of violence and war. With increasing trust deficits, vacuums can be filled by charismatic but violent political actors that speak to the core grievances of the groups, albeit temporarily. Traditional models of conflict resolution therefore need to focus on **intergenerational and forward-looking approaches to peace process design**.

Traditionally, state-centric normative approaches to security have shifted to include a **broadened focus on human security**.¹⁷ This is centered around people, and is no longer limited to a state’s security architecture but a complex network in which a variety of actors play a significant role to realize the rights and security needs of the population. As such, parties to the conflict, especially the state, have needed to undertake more inclusive approaches to peace processes to address historical injustices, gender inequality, human rights violations, economic inequality, climate crisis, and other non-military pressing issues.

Peace processes, now more than ever, demand inclusive and transparent steps for public ownership and more durable outcomes. Novel approaches must be applied to resolve conflict peacefully, with an active peace constituency to mobilize and implement peace agreements. **Young people are, and must be, at the heart of this approach.** Young people across the world are actively working to build peace and prevent violence, with their alliances often forward-looking and seeking constructive partnerships between young people, states, and multilateral organizations.

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By using incremental approaches, governments, non-state actors, and political leaders play equally important roles to tackle the root causes of a conflict through nonviolent means. **A complete societal acceptance of young people as political agents and necessary partners for building peace is required at national, regional, and international levels**, to ensure that young people have the space and resources to safely apply their leadership and shape peace efforts.

¹⁴ This includes the increased use and dependency on digital technologies in everyday life, as well as the misuse and manipulation of new technologies, social media, and big data that can cause divisions within societies.

¹⁵ Some analytical elements drawn from The Changing Peace and Conflict Landscape: Input Paper for the International Commission on Inclusive Peace and the Principles for Peace Initiative; Principles for Peace, 2021. See <https://principlesforpeace.org/> for more information on the initiative’s problem statement.

¹⁶ Julia Palmiano Federer, Julia Pickhardt, Philipp Lustenberger, Christian Altpeter, Katrina Abatis, *Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes*, (2019).

¹⁷ Human security is a people-centered approach to address “widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood”, with dignity to people at the forefront. It calls for “context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people”. See General Assembly resolution 66/290.

The changing landscape of conflict and peace processes

A need for transformational shifts in understanding of, and approaches to, peace processes:

From elitist, male-dominated, exclusionary processes to



- Whole-of-society approaches to address violent conflict
- Inclusive, public ownership, and active peace constituencies
- Youth-sensitive and gender-responsive peace processes

From short-term focus on ending armed violence to



- Long-term intergenerational approach, (re)building societal trust
- Addressing root causes of structural and direct violence
- Reconciliation across generations

From state-centred understanding of peace and security to



- Human-centered security to address historical injustices, gender inequality, human rights violations, economic inequality
- Empowerment, protection, and dignity of all people

Against backdrop of rapidly changing contextual dynamics that affect and shape today's conflicts:

- Urgent climate crisis
- Digital technological advancements, data misuse and misinformation
- Global health pandemic
- Prevailing global economic inequalities

Why Youth? The Imperative for Youth Participation

“The logic for including youth in peace processes is inarguable: if you want young people to be engaged in a peace effort – and you do because they represent a majority of the armed actors, a majority of the wider (and peaceful) populations in conflict-affected states, and the future rests in their hands – they need to be involved early and at multiple levels.”¹⁸

‘Why and how should young people be involved in peace processes?’ is a key question that must be addressed to take this agenda forward. Often the majority demographic in countries¹⁹ with ongoing peace processes, **young people play an inherently important role in the prevention of violence, as well as in establishing and maintaining peace.**

As documented in the *We are Here* global policy paper, young people have been shown to create constructive and alternative channels to conflict resolution, have long-term mindsets on peace, and focus on just issues that underpin healthy, peaceful, and equitable societies – yet are **rarely engaged as key strategic partners in building peace and co-leading conflict resolution.** Recognizing that younger generations will ultimately inherit and face the lived realities, consequences, and implementation of peace agreements, actors engaged in the process must be accountable for the legacies they will leave behind.

¹⁸ Teresa Whitfield, *Future of Mediation: Multi-Level, Young and Digital* (2019).

¹⁹ For example, 72% of South Sudan is under the age of 30; 67% of Afghanistan is under the age of 25.

The non-linear and multi-layered dimensions of peace processes means that youth inclusion in peace negotiations have both short- and long-term implications for the sustainability of peace agreements. The long-term impacts of youth inclusion and participation in peace negotiations need to be considered from a sustaining peace perspective: **young people play a critical role in the implementation of peace agreements due to their inevitable engagement in (re)building societal trust, economic stability, social cohesion, and leading reconciliation across generations.**²⁰ There is both a demographic and political imperative, recognizing that young people are political actors who have an inherent right²¹ to participate in decisions that will affect their lives and futures.

“If youth are not there, you will never get peace – only instability. And we know this. You can sign the document, but if you do not have buy-in from young people, you will have formal peace, but not living peace.” (Interview, senior peace practitioner, male)

Young people are further disproportionality affected by, and involved in, violence and armed conflict. They often make up the majority of soldiers, combatants, and members of military groups. The understanding and inclusion of their experiences and voices is therefore essential for effective conflict resolution, including Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, and Security Sector reform processes. Utilizing a do no harm approach should, however, ensure that such processes do not exclude, nor incentivize, the vast majority of young people who do not pick up arms. **It is vital that there are authentic representatives of young people differently affected by conflict,** including youth who are; part of civil society and peacebuilders, those affected as victims of violence through forced recruitment, arbitrary arrests, physical disability, and sexual-based violence, those engaged in armed struggle and violence at the community-level, those displaced and without livelihoods, and those politically disenfranchised.²²

These diverse youth voices are key in addressing the multifaceted and interconnected issues that enable sustainable peace. **We must move beyond seeing youth as mere beneficiaries of these processes, but rather as necessary partners and co-leaders** essential in the prevention of violence, building of peace, and reconstruction of just and inclusive societies.

These experiences are also **gendered**. Addressing youth-inclusive practices must integrate a gender lens: while young men grow out of their youth and benefit from the existing gendered power structures, empowering and investing in young women can help build more equal societies in the future. This means equally engaging young women across all layers – 'in the room', 'around the room', and 'outside the room' – while being mindful to not reinforce the gendered power-dynamics of negotiations.

Building on the evolution of peace processes, the United Nations Security Council resolutions on youth, peace, and security, and subsequent international and regional instruments²³, have already established that young women's and men's participation is not simply about opening negotiation room doors. Instead, the intention is to attract the attention of policy makers to **fully implement the prevailing concepts, frameworks, and mechanisms of peace architectures with a youth-sensitive parameter**, recognizing that young people are fundamental to sustaining long-term peace. We must meet youth where they are and harness the depths of their capacities and experiences to mobilize sustainable peace.

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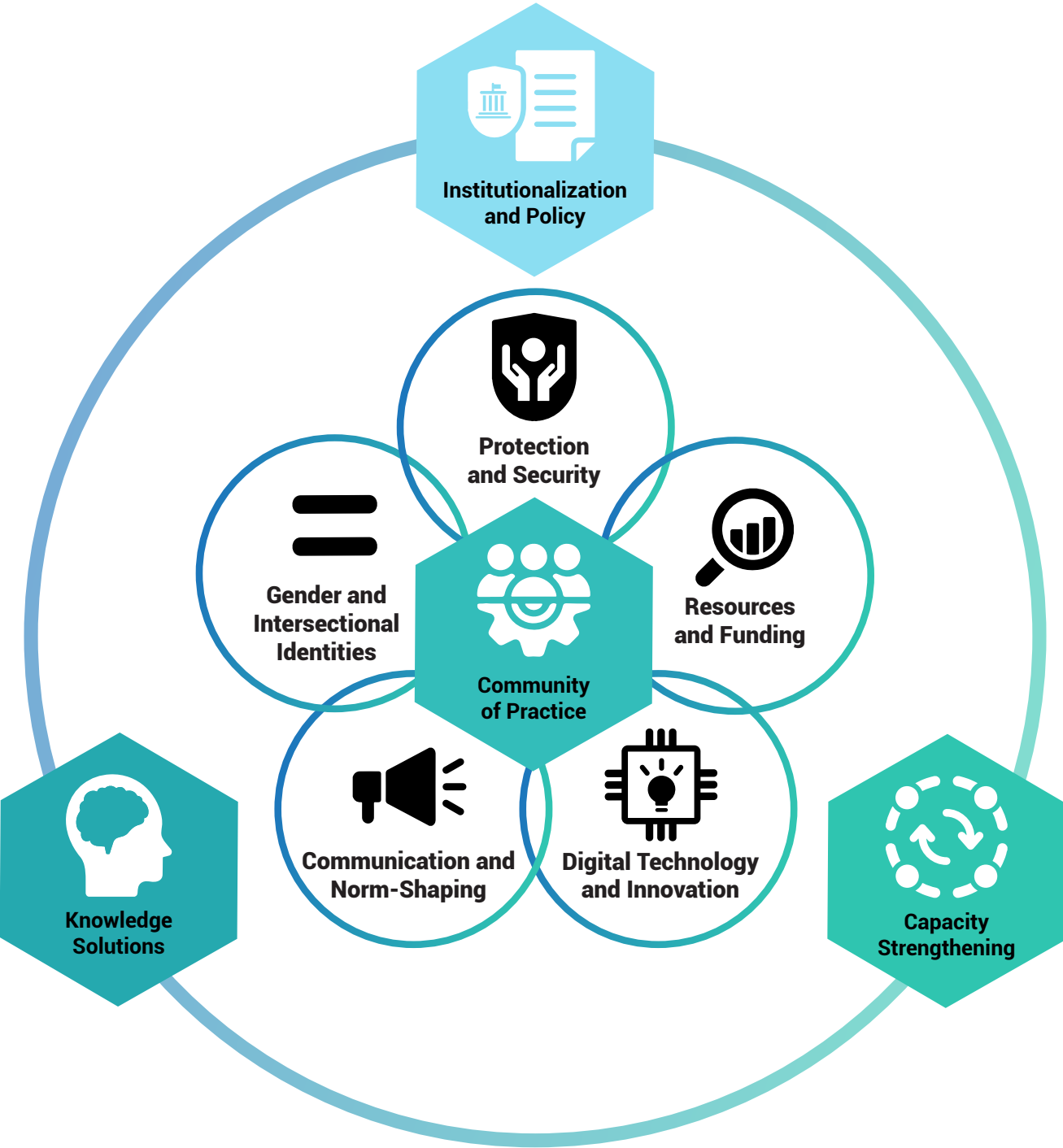
²⁰ Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* (p. 14).

²¹ Participation is a human right enshrined in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in article 25 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966).

²² Graeme Simpson, *The Missing Peace, Independent Study on Youth, Peace and Security* (UNFPA – UN/PBSO, 2018). See critically chapter 3 on addressing young people's "violence of exclusion", pg. 63.

²³ UNSCR 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), and 2535 (2020) on youth, peace and security. Regional and Subregional frameworks including: AU Youth Charter, AU Continental Framework for YPS, and EU priorities on youth.

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



Cross-Cutting Issues

The issues below are cross-cutting and should be **mainstreamed throughout the implementation** of the strategic action plan and four interconnected streams. They address key considerations for how the strategy should be operationalized to ensure **meaningful participation²⁴ of, and do no harm to, young people.**

PROTECTION AND SECURITY

” **“Youth have a right to be heard on streets, but also in negotiations.”** (Interview, senior mediation advisor) ”

Protection, safety, and security is a key concern and primary challenge for young people’s participation, with limited availability of safe spaces to discuss and engage in peace and security related matters.²⁵ Young people who have engaged or participated in peace negotiations in the room, or through alternative, yet critical channels around and outside the room, often face repercussions from the state, political or armed actors, or their communities – compounding their barriers to inclusion. Young women face threats and violence that is often sexual and gender-based, which deters them from participating in public life. Shrinking civic spaces for young people, combined with limited formal mechanisms for participation, are driving young people to the margins and increasing distrust in the state that is meant to protect them.

Building on the protection pillar of UNSCR 2250, UNSCR 2535 further calls for states’ “obligations to respect, promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms...to foster an enabling and safe environment for youth working on peace and security, including by protecting civic and political space...”.²⁶ It is a critical step for governments, international and regional institutions, and civil society to address the imminent and real challenge of protection and safety in participation, and to ensure that young people’s leadership does not result in harm.²⁷ The responsibility to protect young people lies primarily with the state and agents of the state. However, the responsibility to express public support extends to all sectors of society, including parties to the conflict and actors involved in peace processes, who should take a clear stance against violence and lack of safe spaces for youth participation. It is important that protection needs are understood and addressed across each of the streams outlined and contextualized to sub-national and local contexts.

GENDER AND INTERSECTIONAL²⁸ IDENTITIES

Young people are not a homogenous category; they are a diverse representation of society across economic, social, and political arenas, defined by a communal experience and transitional phase per socio-cultural and local traditions – a phase that everyone lives through. Young people may be leaders in civil society as peacebuilders, engaged in state-led efforts, part of armed organizations, and/or affected by conflict as victims and displaced persons. In aiming

²⁴ Visual of meaningful participation in practice in: Cate Buchanan, *Gender-inclusive peacemaking: strategies for mediation practitioners*, Mediation Practice Series, (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2021, p.16.).

²⁵ Young people face numerous protection challenges and barriers. In order of importance, the key barriers to participation, based on surveys from around the world, are sociocultural, financial, political, legal, digital, and physical. See United Nations, *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space* (2021).

²⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2535, S/RES/2535 (July 14, 2020).

²⁷ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation 16.

²⁸ Intersectionality requires consideration of how different identities intersect and influence each other, and how this may lead to multiple forms of oppression and discrimination, as well as strengths and capacities. This concept has been the basis for an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination. As described in: Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at country-level: A Guide for Public Officials*, adapted from European Institute for Gender Equality, *Glossary and Thesaurus* (2021).

for youth-inclusive practices, young people need to be considered and included without discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, race, color, religion or belief, national or social origin, class, disability, sexual orientation, rural/urban location, those forcefully displaced or migrants,²⁹ and social and political affiliations³⁰ that shape experiences, roles, and opportunities. The implementation of the strategic actions must recognize and acknowledge the vulnerabilities of the world's diverse youth population, and that some young people face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Particular attention must also be paid to the **inclusion of young women** who face discrimination based both on their age and gender. The implementation of the strategic actions must be youth- and gender-responsive and integrate women, peace and security (WPS) perspectives, so that the actions do not replicate patriarchal power structures. While acknowledging that senior women face similar gender-based exclusion and barriers as young women, young women emphasize the need to act on complementarities, rather than competition, between younger and senior counterparts. These dynamics should be strengthened through an intergenerational and intersectional approach that reinforces inclusive and participatory practices.

RESOURCES AND FUNDING

A strategy is only effective if it is **funded with sustainable resources to implement the actions** to take the strategy forward. Concerted efforts must be made by governments, donors, and international and regional organizations to commit sufficient financial and human resources in peace processes with youth-centric and youth-sensitive parameters. Sustainable financing will enable young people's co-leadership throughout this strategy and in peace processes, which will lead to stronger outcomes.

Resources and funding should be considered **across two key aspects in the short and longer term: immediate financial support for implementation of the strategic actions, and long-term political support and commitment**. First, the strategic actions outlined in the framework must be financed and resourced to ensure implementation of the strategy over the next five years. This should include concerted efforts in the form of time, funding, and human resources. Secondly, financing should support the long-term coordination, network, and partnership efforts required to realize the strategy. This should include support for youth-led organizations, civil society, and multilateral agencies to co-lead, coordinate, and track the implementation of actions within the strategic framework. Financing must be gender-responsive, with adequate resources for young women's organizations and initiatives. Coordinated efforts will more effectively drive the strategic vision forward, rather than siloed approaches that are less impactful and sustainable.

COMMUNICATION AND NORM-SHAPING

“Including and engaging youth is not just the right thing to do, it's incredibly helpful.”
(Interview, United Nations Special Envoy)

Communication is key to ensure that, at a societal level, there is broadscale understanding and buy-in to the importance of young people playing a key role in driving and sustaining peace.

The power of communication will be in shaping a new set of social norms and values essential for societal and institutional acceptance of young people as necessary agents in the prevention of violence, political decision-making, and building foundations for peaceful societies. A shared vision of the significance and legitimacy of youth-inclusive practices must be mainstreamed across the streams to influence positive behavior change. While the implementation of the strategy must be flexible and accommodating to the changing dynamics of the next five years, it should maintain the vision to affect norm shifting and acceptance of young people as political and necessary partners in sustaining peace.

²⁹ This includes young migrants, internally displaced persons, refugees, and stateless youth.

³⁰ With reference to UNSCR 2535 (2020): “...inclusivity, including by ensuring full, effective and meaningful participation of youth without discrimination of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, disability, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, is key to advancing peacebuilding processes and objectives in order to ensure that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account...”

Communication strategies should also be mindful to be accessible to reach the range of actors engaged across peace and mediation processes, utilizing youth-led communication approaches and youth-sensitive tools. Noting the language barriers that often impede participation and inclusion of diverse young people, a priority must be in translating the strategy for greater accessibility.

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Peace processes and violent conflicts are increasingly digitalized.³¹ Technology and cyberspaces have the potential to both disrupt and facilitate peace processes. Mediators, conflict parties, and supporting actors engaged in peace processes are increasingly aware of the need to incorporate digital technologies into the design and implementation of peace negotiations.³² These technologies will continue to evolve in the coming years and become ever more pervasive across societies.³³ With young people often having bigger digital footprints³⁴, the use of technology and innovative solutions can particularly be useful for enabling greater youth inclusivity in peace processes.³⁵ Digital technologies could also be beneficial to facilitate engagement and partnership-building between young people and the state.³⁶ It is important, however, that digital solutions do not further marginalize disenfranchised youth, who may not have access to the internet, electricity, or the resources for technology. Hence platforms, tools, and methods that aim for digital inclusion **must be sensitive and responsive to youth diversity**.

Innovation is where new approaches, lessons, and tools can be adopted from different sectors to strengthen communication, trust-building, inclusion, and collaboration across key actors from inside, around, and outside the 'room', supporting the success and sustainability of peace processes. Constructive partnerships and collaboration with private companies who drive digital spaces can enhance the innovation and forward-thinking designs of inclusive peace processes. In moving the implementation of this strategy forward, it is critical to be mindful and open to new innovative practices, which include online and offline spaces, that can effectively support inclusive peace processes. The strategy should embrace the creative and innovative approaches that young people take to conflict resolution and building peace.

Strategic Action Plan

The below actions are framed **as key outcomes** to be achieved by a specific year/timeline. This does not imply, however, that the actions cannot be realized sooner – where possible, they should. The actions across the streams are interconnected and therefore should take place in parallel.

The actions need not be achieved in the specific order outlined: the **strategic action plan rather provides a framework** for governments, regional and international organizations, civil society, and young people to work through incremental steps that will drive the implementation and realization of greater youth-inclusive peace processes.

³¹ Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), *Digital Inclusion in Peacemaking – Summary of Findings*, (Geneva, Graduate Institute, 2020).

³² Camino Kavanagh (Feb, 2021), *"Digital Technologies & Civil Conflicts: Insights for Peacemakers"*, *Conflict Series*, vol. 4 (Feb 2021).

³³ United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding affairs and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, *Digital Technologies and mediation in armed conflict* (2019, p. 32).





³⁴ Over 70% of the world's internet users are aged 15-24 years old. See ITU Publications, *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2020*, (2020).

³⁵ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation 17.

³⁶ See scenarios in *Digital Inclusion in Peacemaking* and *Digital Technologies and mediation in armed conflict* (accessed 30 Nov 2021).

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK

A roadmap to more youth-inclusive and youth-responsive peace processes

Year	Institutionalization and Policy	Capacity Strengthening	Knowledge Solutions	Community of Practice
				
Year 1 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Completion of baseline assessment of existing policies and guidance on peace and mediation with a youth-sensitive analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mapping, review, and integration of youth-inclusivity into existing resources/tools for capacity strengthening ✓ Mapping of youth-led initiatives and youth organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Youth-led organizations supported to produce regular evidence of their impact ✓ Diversified research on youth-inclusive peace and mediation efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Global community of practice launched through international Steering Group, and regularly convenes ✓ Working Groups on Streams established
Year 2 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Establishment of dedicated youth-inclusive and youth-dedicated focal points or committees at institutional and operational levels ✓ Development of multi-annual implementation action plans ✓ Existing policies updated to be youth-sensitive, and/or youth-inclusive policies developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Development of tailored, practical, and context-specific resources ✓ Capacity strengthening for institutionalization rolled out ✓ Capacity strengthening initiatives for young people, youth-led organizations, networks, and groups rolled out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Guidance and practical toolkits updated and/or developed for mediators and support organizations ✓ Accessible knowledge and tools developed for young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Development of regional and national strategies for strengthening institutional commitments ✓ Mapping of key actors for championing and trust building
Year 3 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Resources are dedicated and earmarked to support the youth-inclusive agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Formalized and interconnected mentorship networks established for key young leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Existing databases on peace processes integrate a youth lens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Stock taking of lessons learned and realigning strategy, led by international Steering Group
Year 4 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Development of institutional progress indicators, in coordinated global and regional efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Capacity strengthening resources pooled and shared through regular community of practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthening and maintenance of pooled resource database ✓ Establishment of long-term tracking and evidence database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Actions to be designed and informed based on lessons learned
Year 5 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Youth-inclusive policies and practices are mainstreamed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Capacity strengthening resources reviewed and updated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase in youth and gender-disaggregated data to inform practical tools on youth-inclusive practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Global reflection of strategy and moving forward in next five years



Stream 1: Institutionalization and Policy

OBJECTIVE

By 2026, all institutions engaged in peace and mediation processes have a mandate to design and implement peace processes that are youth-inclusive, respond to the needs and realities of young people, and are supported with relevant policy frameworks, organizational structures, and resources to sustain these efforts.

International and regional organizations play critical roles in shaping and supporting peace and mediation processes. The normative power of international and regional multilateral institutions, and the implementation capacity of regional institutions, is key for the operationalization of this strategy. Institutionalization and policy development involves the **systematic mainstreaming³⁷ of youth-inclusive policies and practices across organizations and states** engaged in peace and mediation processes. It should address the prevailing institutional practices and norms that hinder expanded roles and responsibilities for young women and men in peace processes.

Efforts to facilitate meaningful participation of young people should be mainstreamed and implemented as a **core and fundamental part of an institutional response** – across both technical and organizational aspects. Critically, institutions and governments must recognize the vast informal and fluid nature of the youth space, finding **youth-sensitive approaches** to engage young people in formal and informal settings where young people operate and mobilize.

To ensure youth buy-in and ownership, international, regional, and national institutions responsible for peace efforts should **reaffirm their relationship with young leaders and youth-led initiatives, as part of weaving a new social contract³⁸**. Institutionalization should be guided by a core principle of collaboration and partnership with civil society, including young people as co-leaders in these processes. The institutionalization of youth-inclusive processes would, therefore, benefit from **bottom-up and top-down approaches**, to pave the way for healthier intergenerational relationships and strengthen a new bond between the state and young people.³⁹ Young women and men should be included as partners in the internal discussions and processes on how to foster more meaningful inclusion in peace processes, and in the development of policies and guidance on youth-inclusive practices.⁴⁰

Timeline	Strategic actions for results
Year 1 2022	<p>Completion of baseline assessment of existing policies and guidance on peace and mediation with a youth-sensitive analysis</p> <p>International and regional organizations and governments should conduct a baseline review of existing peace process and mediation mandates, toolkits, guidance, and policies with a youth-sensitive lens, as well as other existing inclusivity mechanisms.⁴¹ This should assess gaps and recommended entry points for youth-inclusive practices, taking into account the organization's goal. This will support organizations and governments to mobilize institutionalization of youth participation, and to monitor progress over the next five years. The review process should include intentional dialogue spaces to discuss and address barriers, and support a conducive internal change process.</p>

³⁷ Youth mainstreaming refers to the process of analyzing the implications for youth of any planned action, including legislation, policy or programs. Youth mainstreaming requires detailed social analysis from a youth lens and highlights the importance of involving young people in that analysis and decision-making. As noted in: Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at country-level: A Guide for Public Officials*, adapted from Commonwealth Secretariat, *Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning, Transforming Young Lives* (2017).

³⁸ With reference to United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General: "Our Common Agenda"* (2021).

³⁹ See the Report of the Secretary-General: *"Our Common Agenda"*, which strives for renewed solidarity between peoples and future generations.

⁴⁰ See for example the *Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation* on how to work with young people as key partners.

⁴¹ Recommendation 3 of Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here*. For example the *UN Guidance on Effective Mediation, Concept on EU Peace Mediation, AU Mediation Support Handbook* could be updated or include an additional chapter on youth-sensitive analysis and youth-inclusive practices. See Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at country-level: A Guide for Public Officials*. Tool one 'Context analysis through a youth lens' with additional tools.

<p>Year 2 2023</p>	<p>Establishment of dedicated youth-inclusive and youth-dedicated focal points or committees at institutional and operational levels</p> <p>Organizations establish and strengthen roles of youth focal points/advisors⁴² and/or intergenerational committees on youth-inclusive peace processes. Focal points should (1) develop and ensure a strategic, institutionalized, and coordinated approach to youth-inclusive practices (2) provide policy and practical guidance and advice (3) monitor and lead regular reviews of the baseline to address emerging challenges for institutionalization. Focal persons should further coordinate with other organizations (stream 3) for shared lessons and good practice, as well as in close collaboration with relevant youth constituencies to build trust and partnerships. The focal persons should have the buy-in and engagement of the highest leadership.</p> <p>Development of multi-annual implementation action plans</p> <p>Organizations and institutions develop tailored, five-year action plans for the implementation of institutionalizing youth-responsive and youth-inclusive practices, internally and throughout the organization's work.</p> <p>Existing policies updated to be youth-sensitive, and/or youth-inclusive policies developed</p> <p>Governments and multilateral organizations involved in peace processes have standard operating procedures and/or guidelines for youth-inclusive analyses and practices. This should be part of a holistic and integrated approach towards more inclusive and representative peace and mediation processes, with gender and youth issues considered yet recognized for the specificities of each agenda. This may include updating existing – or developing new – policies, mandates, standing orders, and rules of engagement to be youth-inclusive, ensuring a youth lens is entrenched across all aspects of institutions and mainstream practices. This action could be effectively supported through multilayered collaboration between international, regional, and national organizations.</p>
<p>Year 3 2024</p>	<p>Resources are dedicated and earmarked to support the youth-inclusive agenda</p> <p>All multilateral organizations have sustainable and dedicated resources and funding to support mandates and policies for youth-inclusive peace processes, ensuring youth-sensitive practices and organizational development is effectively supported. This should include investing and partnering with youth initiatives and organizations, and creating youth-friendly, accessible funding mechanisms.⁴³</p>
<p>Year 4 2025</p>	<p>Development of institutional progress indicators, in coordinated global and regional efforts⁴⁴</p> <p>Organizations develop time and results-based indicators that would guide and track progress towards youth-inclusive policies and practices. Indicators may include inclusion of youth-sensitive conflict analysis in all operations; annual capacity strengthening programs; development of a roster of youth experts; ensuring youth consultations in mediation process design; protection indicators; and increased recruitment of young experts to advise and support thematic issues.⁴⁵ Efforts towards youth-inclusive practices should be reviewed and incorporated as part of existing indicators and mandates, as well as coordinated/aligned with global and regional efforts guided by the Community of Practice (stream 4) for collective impact.</p>
<p>Year 5 2026</p>	<p>Youth-inclusive policies and practices are mainstreamed</p> <p>Organizations engage, work with, and consult young people in designing, monitoring, and implementing practices that result in meaningful participation of young people in mediated peace processes to foster longer lasting solutions.</p>

⁴² Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendations 4 & 10.

⁴³ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation, page 38.

⁴⁴ Some organizations have already started to develop indicators to track progress towards youth-inclusive peace processes. For example, IPHRD-Africa has launched a 'Youth Peace Index', with indicators to track and evaluate youth participation in peace processes regionally.

⁴⁵ See recommendations in *We are Here* global policy paper for additional practical suggestions for operationalizing youth-inclusive peace and mediation processes.



Stream 2: Capacity Strengthening

OBJECTIVE

By 2026, governments, and international, regional and national organizations, together with young people, work towards mutually strengthening each other's capacities, skills, and knowledge on inclusive youth practices, towards a common goal of conflict resolution and sustaining peace.

Capacity strengthening efforts aim to target and address the needs, and change processes necessary, for **the multitude of actors involved in peace and mediation efforts**. The need for capacity strengthening intersects with generating greater understanding on 'how' – as well as 'why' – to implement youth-inclusive processes. While the importance and potential benefits of youth inclusion may be evident to many, significant attitudinal, knowledge, and structural barriers remain.

Youth exclusion is often underpinned by gerontocratic, hierarchical, and, when it comes to young women, patriarchal cultural attitudes and norms that inhibit the potential for long-term peace. As such, change processes require time and effective resourcing. Change must start with **awareness-raising to recognize and understand the diversity and reality of young women and men's experiences** in conflict settings, and their critical importance to maintaining peace and security.

Young people's desire to constructively contribute to peace and security efforts requires not only that young people are given the incentive and supportive environment for change, but also that **senior counterparts play a crucial role in facilitating, supporting, and championing** the meaningful engagement and participation of young people. Capacity strengthening efforts must target not only young people, but also regional and multilateral organizations, institutional leadership, politicians, policy makers, civil servants, senior mediators, and mediation support units, and civil society organizations. To do so, capacity strengthening efforts must start with a good understanding of the constraints of the different actors.

Capacity strengthening efforts must target not only young people, but also regional and multilateral organizations, institutional leadership, politicians, policy makers, civil servants, senior mediators, and mediation support units, and civil society organizations.

The framework for **capacity strengthening initiatives** can be viewed across three areas; (i) initiatives focused on individuals such as young women and men, policy makers, and political decision-makers; (ii) initiatives designed for institutional and organizational needs; (iii) initiatives designed for youth-led networks and organizations, including institutional partnerships to positively contribute to enabling wider institutionalization. Recognizing the nuance of needs across various actors and contexts, capacity strengthening resources must be **gender-responsive, context specific, and tailored to specific needs**, with identifiable indicators of change – building towards a vision of more durable peace. Capacity strengthening resources should take a **long-term approach**, and target changing **attitudes** towards youth for positive engagement, **knowledge** on approaches and mechanisms of participation, and **skills** to effectively implement such practices.

Capacity strengthening resources and initiatives could be designed and implemented in a **collaborative effort of intergenerational local, national, regional, and international stakeholders**. Tools designed to influence positive interactions, strengthen partnerships, and identify agents of change can promote sustainable, inclusive processes, and enable equitable access for young people.

Timeline	Strategic actions for results
<p>Year 1 2022</p>	<p>Mapping, review, and integration of youth-inclusivity into existing resources/tools for capacity strengthening</p> <p>In connection with stream 1, international, regional, and multilateral organizations and institutions map their existing resources and tools that support peace and mediation processes to assess entry points for integration of youth-sensitive and youth-inclusive parameters – as well as address barriers to youth engagement institutionally. Resources and processes should undertake a process of revision to incorporate youth-inclusive practices through collaboration with YPS technical experts and young people.</p> <p>Mapping of youth-led initiatives and youth organizations</p> <p>Youth-led initiatives, organizations, networks, groups (formal and informal), and youth leaders/ influencers – specific and relevant to peace processes – are mapped in respective national contexts. This will enable peace and mediation actors to understand the existing youth space, and provide a basis through which to assess opportunities and entry points for engagement and relationship-building with different youth perspectives. Existing national, regional and international mappings should be built upon. The mapping should be youth-led, in partnership with youth organizations/networks, for a holistic and realistic, and gender-responsive analysis on youth dynamics, needs, and opportunities for participation. Particular attention should be paid to initiatives in hard to reach/marginalized contexts and should include youth dissident movements. Sub-national mappings could be pooled into shared national mappings, used to define actions at the country-level.</p>
<p>Year 2 2023</p>	<p>Development of tailored, practical, and context-specific resources</p> <p>Institutions and organizations, in partnership with young people, develop a broad set of youth and gender-sensitive tools, including manuals, guides, thematic and substantive materials to support different actors engaged in peace processes.⁴⁶ Resources should focus on strengthening capacity for younger and senior stakeholders in peace processes, as well as on institutionalization of youth-inclusive peace processes, with identifiable change indicators.</p> <p>Capacity strengthening for institutionalization rolled out</p> <p>Key institutional and organizational leadership⁴⁷ and staff undertake capacity strengthening that focuses on attitudes, knowledge, and skills change towards youth participation and engagement. Institutional action plans should include mainstreaming the roll out of regular capacity strengthening for all staff, that focuses on why and how young people can be mainstreamed across the organization's mandate in peace processes.⁴⁸ International organizations, civil society, and youth could collaborate to raise awareness to institutional leadership, mediators, negotiators, and technical support teams on the positive roles and effectiveness of youth-inclusive and participatory peace processes, and the importance of working with young people equally as partners in sustaining peace.</p> <p>Capacity strengthening initiatives for young people, and youth-led organizations, networks, and groups rolled out⁴⁹</p> <p>International, multilateral, regional, and national organizations develop and roll-out capacity strengthening initiatives that target the knowledge, skills, capacity, of diverse young people to more effectively engage in and shape peace processes. Focus should be paid on increasing the number of young people with enhanced capacities in conflict prevention, mediation, negotiation, and other related technical and thematic skills for more meaningful participation.</p>
<p>Year 3 2024</p>	<p>Formalized and interconnected mentorship networks established for key young leaders⁵⁰</p> <p>To promote an intergenerational approach, where cross-fertilization, lessons learned, and experience sharing can be harnessed, mentorship networks should be strengthened nationally, regionally, and internationally – connecting young leaders in the field with senior experts, mediators, and political leaders.⁵¹ This will enhance intergenerational relationships, trust-building, and collaboration, enabling cross-learning from younger and senior counterparts. Special attention must be paid to connect hard to reach, marginalized, less 'visible' grassroots-based young peacebuilders and young women through mentorship networks.</p>

⁴⁶ This should include targeting (i) individuals such as young women and young men, policy makers, and political decision-makers; (ii) institutional and organizational needs; and (iii) youth-led networks and organizations.

⁴⁷ Training initiatives for policy makers and institutions should relate to the performance and objective of institutions.

⁴⁸ This could include understanding who youth are, why young people matter in sustaining peace, the roles that young people take, and practical approaches and mechanisms for youth engagement and inclusivity.

⁴⁹ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation 13.

⁵⁰ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation, page 38.

⁵¹ Several such networks exist and could be built upon to expand engagement with youth, including IPHRD-Africa's 'Young Women Mediators' network, the Mediation Support Network, and various women's mediation networks.

<p>Year 4 2025</p>	<p>Capacity strengthening resources pooled and shared through regular community of practice</p> <p>In connection with knowledge solutions and collaborative partnerships, organizations and institutions should form a community of practice to regularly pool, share, and collaboratively develop practical resources that target specific actors in peace and mediation processes.</p>
<p>Year 5 2026</p>	<p>Capacity strengthening resources reviewed and updated</p> <p>International, regional, and multilateral organizations regularly convene through a community of practice to share lessons learned from capacity building efforts, and ensure they are being improved based on good practice. Emphasis should be placed on documenting the impact of capacity strengthening efforts, generating evidence of 'what works' to strengthen further resources.</p>



Stream 3: Knowledge Solutions

OBJECTIVE

By 2026, substantive knowledge and evidence products are generated and consolidated that document youth participation and influence, and disseminate good practices and policies, amplifying and strengthening young people's engagement in peace processes.

"We know there is not enough evidence on youth-inclusive processes – it's because it has not been done enough yet. We must balance audacity and innovation to do so. When we do more, we will learn and know more. And do better."

(Interview, Youth, Peace & Security Advisor, United Nations)

Knowledge solutions⁵² aim to provide **an evidence base for all other streams by documenting and disseminating** best practice, lessons, and impact of youth-inclusive processes. This would support the development of capacity strengthening resources, evidence to promote institutionalization and policy, and encourage vertical and horizontal collaboration and partnerships towards a shared vision.

To improve the conditions of young people's meaningful participation, investing in knowledge solutions would encourage a diverse toolbox to support **understanding among various peace process actors, and promote the practice of youth-inclusive processes from the outset of a negotiation process.** This might include peace process strategy formulation, experience sharing on collaboration modalities, and presentation and archiving of information. The aim is to combine peace process related resources with a youth-lens to create a foundation of knowledge and good practice on meaningful youth engagement and inclusion. Knowledge solutions should support the **legitimization of youth participation and roles in peace processes**, shaping social attitudes, policies, and practice.

To meet the needs of diverse stakeholders, particular attention needs to be given to **various types of knowledge such as factual, conceptual, procedural, practical, and metacognitive.**⁵³ Knowledge solutions could be developed around the following key areas: youth-led research, policy advice, country-level analysis, thematic issues, technical assistance on various aspects of peace processes, professional and organization capacity strengthening, designing progress monitoring systems, best practices, and youth-sensitive political and conflict analysis. **Preparation and dissemination of knowledge solutions** must be an interactive process that ensures resources are accessible to different actors. Knowledge solutions, critically, should be developed through a **collaborative and partnership effort** between young people, academia, policy makers, institutions and practitioners, with a youth-led approach – focusing on gathering and consolidating information from the ground up.

⁵² Borrowed from the corporate world where knowledge solutions mean an unusual, out of the box, and bold solution to address complex problems.

⁵³ Metacognitive can be defined as 'knowledge and understanding of your own thinking'.

Timeline	Strategic actions for results
<p>Year 1 2022</p>	<p>Youth-led organizations supported to produce regular evidence of their impact⁵⁴</p> <p>Young people are technically and financially supported to document the efforts of their participation and impact on peace processes, producing lessons learned, strategies, and tools to inform political leaders, practitioners, and next generations on effective and meaningful youth engage. Youth-led initiatives should be capacitated and resourced to do so through committed institutional and donor funding and resources.</p> <p>Diversified research on youth-inclusive peace and mediation efforts</p> <p>Researchers, academics, organizations, and practitioners should collaborate with youth organizations and existing research networks to produce more diversified and disaggregated sub-national and national research on youth participation in peace processes – led by local knowledge and community voices on peace processes. Such collaboration could lead to the development of short briefs accessible to policy and political actors.</p>
<p>Year 2 2023</p>	<p>Guidance and practical toolkits updated and/or developed for mediators and support organizations</p> <p>Existing guidance are updated (in connection with stream 1 and 2) or supported with practical toolkits and guidance notes on youth-inclusive processes. The resources should be tailored for different types of institutions and practitioners (including donors, United Nations entities, Mediation Support Units, regional entities), moving away from generic to actor specific guidance, with a focus on do no harm. Knowledge and guidance toolkits should focus on practical approaches and examples of youth engagement and inclusion in peace and mediation efforts to shape policy and practice. Participatory approaches and dissemination could be supported through digital and innovative tools.</p> <p>Accessible knowledge and tools developed for young people</p> <p>Resources, guidance, knowledge, and tools on the ‘why’ and ‘how-to’ for youth-inclusive practices are tailored and made accessible to young people, youth groups and networks. These tools should be developed in collaboration with (or led by) young people and utilize platforms for dissemination that are accessible for young people.</p>
<p>Year 3 2024</p>	<p>Existing databases on peace processes integrate a youth lens</p> <p>Existing academic and institutional databases and programs that track, monitor, and assess peace agreements and peace processes integrate a youth lens and youth-focused parameters into their analysis. This would add nuance and disaggregated data for increased understanding of youth participation in peace processes.</p>
<p>Year 4 2025</p>	<p>Strengthening and maintenance of pooled resource platforms</p> <p>An online platform where resources, tools, guidance, and evidence on youth-inclusive peace processes can be uploaded and shared is made available⁵⁵, enabling international, regional, and national organizations and institutions, as well as young people themselves to have access to increased data and information. The platform should be adequately funded and maintained through joint commitment of multilateral organizations and governments.</p> <p>Establishment of long-term tracking and evidence database⁵⁶</p> <p>Governments, international organizations, and young people jointly establish and lead a mechanism to document and consolidate data, evidence, and case studies on youth participation in peace processes. The aim is to increase understanding and measure the influence and impact of young people in peace processes, and support the legitimacy of youth participation in peace and mediation efforts. This should be a long-term, well resourced evidence base that is able to document and assess the impact of youth-inclusive peace processes; self-reporting by various youth-led and institutional initiatives could make it more sustainable and efficient. Youth participatory methodologies should be ensured in documenting, monitoring, and evaluating inclusivity in peace processes. This could further support input for ongoing reporting, such as the United Nations Secretary General’s bi-annual report on youth, peace and security.</p>

⁵⁴ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation, page 38.

⁵⁵ Existing platforms that have gained traction could be strengthened with specific peace processes pages, such as [United Network Of Young Peacebuilders Resources](#), or the [Youth4Peace](#) platform.

⁵⁶ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation, page 38.

Year 5
2026

Increase in age and sex-disaggregated data to inform youth-inclusive practices

International, regional, and national organizations and institutions, as well as young people, have access to increased disaggregated data, information, and knowledge on best practices and evidence-based lessons to meaningfully advance youth-inclusive and gender-responsive peace processes.



Stream 4: Community of Practice and Partnerships

OBJECTIVE

By 2026, states, international, regional, and national organizations and institutions partner together for an effective community of practice that builds and maintains the momentum, and direction, for coordination, implementation, and monitoring of the five-year strategy for collective impact towards youth-inclusive peace processes.

The strategy builds on the principle and spirit on which the youth, peace and security agenda is founded: **collaboration and partnerships for collective impact, recognizing that collective efforts generate greater impact than working in silo**. The community of practice is the backbone through which this strategy should be implemented, where civil society, young people, and international organizations co-lead this coordinated effort.⁵⁷ The community of practice should particularly drive forward a set of shared norms and values that encourage societal-wide acceptance and space for young people as essential for shaping and sustaining peace.

The community of practice should particularly drive forward a set of shared norms and values that encourage societal-wide acceptance and space for young people as essential for shaping and sustaining peace.

Collaboration and collective impact requires both **vertical and horizontal partnerships** for meaningful youth inclusion. Given that peace processes are inherently complex, with peace architectures and contexts loaded with sensitivities, a combination of horizontal and vertical collaborative approaches would facilitate maximum buy-in and provide much needed sustainability to the implementation of this youth-inclusive strategy. This agenda must be driven by both bottom-up and top-down processes that stem from sub-national, to regional, and international cooperation that recognizes – and is sensitive – to the nuance of the youth space in local contexts.

Vertical partnerships and collaboration involves critical institutional arrangements where international, regional and sub-regional mechanisms work together with governments and youth-led initiatives to achieve peace-related goals. While vertical collaboration reinforces national ownership of attempts to improve the status of inclusion of young people, targeted supportive partnerships can help to mitigate barriers to meaningful participation. **Horizontal collaborations will ensure initiatives and synergies are developed among various partners, including young people**, to bring forward appropriate and implementable solutions, and share lessons to build on good practice. **Existing networks should be built upon**, and partners should pool resources and expertise leading to effective sharing, and enable innovation and rapid accommodation to changing contextual realities. Horizontal partnerships would further enable more effective and steadfast vertical collaborations.

The strategy would benefit from the establishment of **resourced and committed coordination mechanisms and networks** – composed of key international, regional, and national organizations – to lead, review, monitor, and sustain this strategy. This could be a hub for coordination and collective impact on progressing institutionalization, knowledge solutions and capacity strengthening. **Governments could also consider continued support and convening** of high-level leadership of inter-governmental and regional entities to be a permanent mechanism for dialogue among young leaders and states globally. The *Helsinki Symposium* and *Doha Conference* models could be considered as a recurrent event with the highest level of government and states convening to review implementation progress and reassert their support for youth-centric and youth-inclusive processes.

⁵⁷ Building on Ali Altiok, Irena Grizelj, *We are Here* recommendation, page 38.

Timeline	Strategic actions for results
<p>Year 1 2022</p>	<p>Global community of practice launched through international Steering Group, and regularly convenes</p> <p>International, multilateral and regional organizations, governments, together with youth-led groups, convene, and lead the coordination, implementation, and monitoring of the five-year strategy through a collaborative platform. This should be the foundation for a global community of practice, building on the existing Steering Group that guided the development of this strategy. The community of practice should regularly convene to review and share progress from national, regional, and international contexts, and discuss challenges, ideas, and good practice. The community of practice should include organizations and institutions focused on supporting peace and mediation processes and are interested in, or working on, youth-inclusive practices and programs. Institutionally, YPS focal points/advisors from organizations (stream 1) should be engaged for effective and interconnected cooperation. Youth-led mappings (stream 1) can facilitate hosting regional and sub-regional forums to exchange and share information, thus ensuring the sustainability of the strategy. The Steering Group could be integrated into established multi-stakeholder partnerships for collective action on the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda, and stakeholder specific groups.⁵⁸</p> <p>Working Groups on Streams established</p> <p>Sub-communities of practice and partnerships could be formed and focus on key streams and actions of the strategy, including: institutionalization and policy, norms setting; capacity strengthening; knowledge solutions, lessons learnt and documentation of progress; strategic communication, engagements, and advocacy; protection and security.</p>
<p>Year 2 2023</p>	<p>Development of regional and national coordinated strategies for strengthening institutional commitments</p> <p>Regional and national organizations and governments, together with young people and civil society, should partner to develop contextualized, practical, and safe strategies to realize the overall vision and goal of the strategy at regional and national levels over the next five years. This will demonstrate needed political commitment and sensitization to youth-inclusive peace processes. Such platforms formed at national and regional levels should feed into the international Steering Group for collective monitoring, progress, and impact.</p> <p>Mapping of key actors for championing and trust building</p> <p>Members of the international Steering Group will map out key focal points for various aspects of peace processes within government, multilateral, international and regional organizations – for relationship- and trust-building. The aim is to identify and support the network of actors and youth-inclusive champions engaged in peace processes, ensuring they are provided tools and resources for youth-inclusive approaches and practices.</p>
<p>Year 3 2024</p>	<p>Stock taking of lessons learned and realigning strategy, led by international Steering Group</p> <p>The Steering Group will lead a global review of the strategy, identifying and consolidating critical lessons learned, challenges, and opportunities in moving forward. Reporting should be aligned with the <i>United Nations Secretary-General's Global Report on Youth, Peace and Security</i>⁵⁹ for greater coherence with existing international monitoring processes. A convening intergovernmental platform may be considered helpful to fund and sustain the review of the strategy, bringing thought-leadership to the agenda, strengthening political commitment and intergenerational trust, and discussing gaps and opportunities/solutions.</p>
<p>Year 4 2025</p>	<p>Actions to be designed and informed based on lessons learned</p> <p>Years 4 and 5 will further be elaborated and identified by the international Steering Group as necessary, based on reflections and lessons learned in previous years.</p>

⁵⁸ At global level, this could be as a group under the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, and through the informal group of Member States of champions on youth, peace and security, among others.

⁵⁹ United Nations Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on Youth, Peace and Security*. S/2020/167 (March 2, 2020).

<p>Year 5 2026</p>	<p>Global reflection of strategy and moving forward in next five years</p> <p>Key international and regional organizations, institutes, and governments, including young people, join for strategic review, reflection, and evaluation of the progress of the five-year strategy, and ensure continued conceptual and practical harmony in the field. The process should highlight global and regional youth-led initiatives, with governments demonstrating commitment and track records of meaningful engagement and inclusion of young people in their respective contexts. Key questions and discussion points should focus on progress and lessons, whether these concepts are as relevant as they were five years ago, where the status of peace and mediation efforts are today, and what needs to be focused on in the next five years.</p>
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ANNEX:

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MAINSTREAMING CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES



Stream 1: Institutionalization and Policy



Protection and Security: Institutional, regional, and multilateral leadership must ensure that safe spaces for young people meaningful participation is warranted in all policies and practices - creating mechanisms to do so. Institutions should therefore develop and roll out organization-wide, gender-responsive safeguarding and protection policies and protocols when engaging youth in peace processes. These tools should be developed in close consultation with young people and civil society partners, and should include concrete steps for responding to young people's protection needs in shaping peace processes. The onus of responsibility lies with the highest level of power circles: leaders from the international, regional, and national peace architecture must acknowledge publicly the role played by young people in the promotion of peace and security, coupled with concrete actions that ensure young people's civic and political spaces are not threatened.



Gendered and Intersectional Identities: Noting the diversity and complexity of youth identities, and that no one person can represent 'all youth', policy and institutional approaches must be both gender-sensitive and responsive to the diversity of youth identities and experiences. Lessons learned and good practices drawn from other inclusion agendas, including from efforts to ensure greater participation of women in peace processes, can inform the development of meaningful policies and institutional frameworks.



Resources and Funding: Sustainable resources and funding must be allocated throughout the process of institutionalizing youth-inclusive practices. This should include earmarked, flexible, and accessible funding for youth-led initiatives, organizations, networks, and groups. Co-designing implementation modalities with young people is ideal, as opposed to the rules being developed for youth and inviting them to implement. Resourcing should further be coordinated through the global community of practice.



Communication and Norm-Shaping: A shared vision of the acceptance and importance of meaningful youth participation, representation, and influencing outcomes in peace processes must be mainstreamed across institutionalization processes. Recognizing limited trust that may be present between institutions and young people as partners in this space, institutionalization requires education and training of staff and leadership to ensure there is highest level of political buy-in for supporting young people's roles in peace processes.



Digital Technology and Innovation: Institutions can utilize digital technologies and innovation to enable more accessible and inclusive practices, mindful not to further marginalize young people who are not online. Recognizing young people tend to use more digital platforms, it is important that institutions consult young people and use youth-friendly platforms to better connect young people's work across the three layers, ensuring they can concretely shape peace processes. At the same time, it is crucial to apply innovative approaches, such as human-centered design and future thinking, for the meaningful participation of youth.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ See for example the '[Futuring Peace in Northeast Asia](#)' project, co-organized by UN DPPA and UNESCO.



Stream 2: Capacity Strengthening



Protection and Security: Safety and security training that aims to mitigate protection concerns should be mainstreamed across capacity strengthening resources and implementation. Youth-sensitive context analyses and risk assessments must be undertaken to ensure do no harm for young people engaged in capacity strengthening initiatives.



Gendered and Intersectional Identities: Capacity strengthening must be sensitive to address and target the intersectional identities and experiences of young people differently affected by conflict. Special attention must be paid to enhance capabilities of, and access for, hard to reach, marginalized young people and youth groups, including young women. Capacity building initiatives should also look beyond traditional means of capacity strengthening, such as institutional youth advisors, training, and technical advice to youth-led initiatives, and setting up mechanisms to access community of practice and mentoring networks.



Resources and Funding: Institutions and organizations need to commit sustainable resources and finances in reviewing, updating, and developing practical and effective capacity strengthening tools. Youth-led groups and organizations should be supported and partnered with to bring their expertise and experiences to shape capacity strengthening efforts, creating shared tools and joint platforms.



Communication and Norm-Shaping: Capacity strengthening resources and tools should mainstream norm shaping throughout the materials, emphasizing the participation and influence of young people as crucial to sustaining peace.



Digital Technology and Innovation: Capacity strengthening initiatives should take advantage of the vast opportunities of digital technology in developing accessible, user-friendly, and engaging material for effective change outcomes. Innovative practices can be used to strengthen the reach, resonance, and impact of resources to learn and shape future tools. Initiatives should be mindful of, and address, and potential security and protection risks, including gender-based risks, in utilizing such tools.



Stream 3: Knowledge Solutions



Protection and Security: Do no harm principles should be adhered to throughout the development and dissemination of knowledge solutions, which prioritize meaningful youth engagement and participation and do not put young researchers and participants at risk.



Gendered and Intersectional Identities: The diverse lived realities and roles of young people of all genders in conflict-affected settings should be highlighted and documented throughout this stream, legitimizing youth spaces 'in the room', 'around the room', and 'outside the room' as equally important. Knowledge solutions should be mindful of the intersectionality and inclusion of diverse youth perspectives, which require creative and concerted approaches in data gathering, disaggregation, and accessing young women and young men who are harder to reach.



Resources and Funding: Where possible, resources and funding should be pooled between national, regional, and international partners to encourage joint learning and collaboration in documenting and developing shared knowledge products.



Communication and Norm-Shaping: Knowledge products should use creative approaches to be developed and disseminated – beyond research reports and policy briefs. For example, through podcasts, radio, videos, applications, and other innovative tools to reach wider audiences and make products user and reader friendly.



Digital Technology and Innovation: Knowledge solutions could utilize the creative and innovative tools provided through digital technology to provide spaces for shared resources, tools, and networking. Innovative and cutting-edge research should also be funded focused on changing social attitudes and perceptions towards youth.



Stream 4: Community of Practice and Partnerships



Protection and Security: Communities of practice, convening spaces, and high-level forums must be mindful to address security and protection needs of vulnerable young people of all genders, who may face different repercussions or threats in their participation and engagement.



Gendered and Intersectional Identities: In moving this strategy forward, the diverse roles and identities of young people of all genders in conflict-affected settings must be put at the forefront of partnerships. Communities of practice should ensure accessibility for representation of young people engaged in different aspects of peace and security, particularly those marginalized, but also those engaged in armed struggle and not part of easily accessible civil society groups.



Resources and Funding: Governments, multilateral and international organizations must commit funding and resources to realize effective and sustained convening spaces that will ensure the meaningful implementation of the strategy.



Communication and Norm-Shaping: The Community of Practice and Partnerships is fundamental in its role to drive forward a shared set of social norms and values essential for societal and institutional acceptance of young people as necessary agents in the prevention of violence, political decision-making, and building foundations for peaceful societies. The community of practice should ensure the vision of the strategy and these values are mainstreamed in its communication and in moving this agenda forward.



Digital Technology and Innovation: Creative digital technology tools and online platforms can be used to support the establishment and maintenance of communities of practice, share resources, measure progress, and implement coordination mechanisms. Such tools can be used for greater inclusivity and participation of diverse partners, organizations, and networks from national to international levels, as well as provide spaces for dialogue and connection. Tools can also be used to support young people's access to digital technology and access to the internet, addressing barriers to participation in communities of practice that are primarily convened online. Innovative approaches such as systems and futurethinking could be practiced to ensure non-siloed and sustainable inclusive efforts.