POLICY PAPER

european
youth forum

YOUTH, &
PEACE
SECURITY

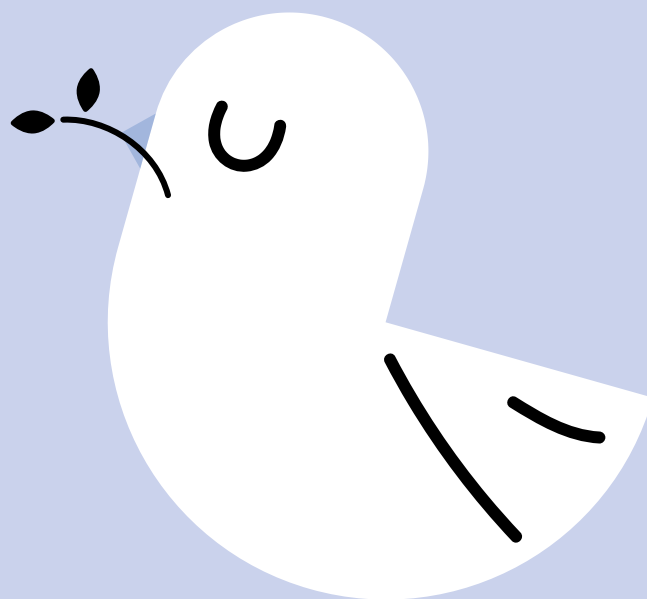european
youth forum

# Executive Summary

Living in peaceful societies is a right for all young people in Europe and beyond. Political, economic and social crises, racism and discrimination reinforce inequalities and tensions in society, which can potentially lead to or reinforce conflicts. Young people have always been contributing to building peaceful and inclusive societies, but only with the adoption of the UNSCR2250 and consecutive resolutions their role has been formally recognised as actors in preventing conflict and in building peaceful societies.

This policy paper frames the European Youth Forum's perspective on the role of young people in preventing conflicts and building peaceful societies by providing recommendations on how to support young people and youth organisations in the process of building and sustaining peaceful societies. Built upon a rights-based approach, the paper identifies five paths leading towards more peaceful societies: youth participation, human rights, social cohesion, climate justice and education- which should be fostered to ensure progress towards a peaceful present and future.

Youth organisations have played an important role in advocating for their recognition as actors in promoting and building peaceful societies. This process led to the adoption of the UNSCR2250 and the UNSCR2419, and the UNSCR2535 which recognise the role of young people as an actor in preventing and resolving conflicts and in building peaceful societies. However, the right of young people to live in secure societies is not yet met.

The policy paper builds upon existing positions of the European Youth Forum, including on sustainable development[1], youth participation, youth rights[2], social and economic inclusion[3], interregional cooperation[4], non-formal education[5] and shrinking space for civil society[6]. The policy paper does not aim to be a comprehensive approach to the topic of peace and security as it requires a tailored and multidimensional approach.

This paper is a commitment of the European Youth Forum to engage in advocacy processes to reinforce the recognition and the role of young people and youth organisations as actors in building peaceful societies. It provides the following recommendations for governments and institutions to ensure peaceful societies through youth-inclusive policies and rights-based approach to peace and security.

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1.    For more see: European Youth Forum, Policy paper on Sustainable Development, 2018.
2.    European Youth Forum, Policy paper on Youth Rights, 2012
3.    European Youth Forum, Policy Paper on the Future of Work, 2019
4.    European Youth Forum, Policy paper on United Nations and Global Youth Work Development, 2012
5.    European Youth Forum, Manual on Quality assurance of non-formal education: A Framework for youth organisations 2013
6.    European Youth Forum, Safeguarding civic space for young people in Europe, 2020.

*In this policy paper,*
*we recommend governments*
*and institutions to:*

### 1. Overcome the lack of recognition of the role of youth in building peaceful societies

- Implement the EU Council Conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe in cooperation with youth organisations[7];

- Recognise the role of youth organisations as actors building peaceful societies, and their role in promoting a culture of peace, tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue that aims at discouraging their participation in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination capable of pursuing NGO diplomacy;

- Include youth organisations and National Youth Councils in the decision-making process of policies affecting peace and security. Youth organisations need to be included at all stages of policy-making from preparation to evaluation in peace and security processes;

- Promote youth-led initiatives, counter-narratives, stories, examples, and voices of young people related to the agenda on youth, peace and security.

- Take a gender-sensitive approach when taking into account the participation, views and needs of youth when negotiating and implementing peace agreements;

- Acknowledge the risks taken and threats faced by young peace activists and effectively protect youth led peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts as well as young peace activists and human rights defenders;

- Protect youth from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence by eliminating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

### 2. Improve the quality of participatory mechanisms for the inclusion of youth organisations

- Develop, implement and evaluate tailored national action plans on the implementation of UNSCR2250 in co-decision with youth organisations and involving relevant ministries, institutions and stakeholders engaging in peacebuilding at local and national level;

- Support the creation of quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in relevant bodies engaging in peacebuilding work and on youth policies;

- Appoint a special representative on the youth, peace and security agenda to coordinate its implementation at national level and to ensure a meaningful engagement with civil society.

- Support quality education for peace to enable youth to engage constructively in civic structures and inclusive political processes; educating young people in human rights and active citizenship, and promoting youth activism and engagement, e.g. through policies strengthening extracurricular learning and youth work.

- Better understand the needs of youth and civil societies affected not only by conflicts but also by violent crime, gender-based, political and domestic violence, and extremism by focusing on "human security" instead of "state security";

- Promote synergies between the Youth and Women, Peace and Security agenda and use their alliance as a tool to integrate the perspectives of key stakeholders;

- Invest in intergenerational partnerships, for everyone to learn from each other and to allow dialogue and common problem-solving.

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7.   For EU Member States- For non-EU Countries, inspiration can be drawn from these conclusions.

### 3. Overcome legal barriers in building peaceful societies

- Remove any legal barriers affecting the work of youth organisations and other civil society;

- Establish a specific mechanism to protect youth rights, this can take the form of an Independent Expert or Special Rapporteur. The specific form established in every country should be identified in co-decision with young people and youth organisations.

- Foster an enabling and safe environment for youth work on peace and security. Protect civil spaces and educational institutions as spaces free from all forms of violence and ensure accessibility to all youth, including marginalised youth; and to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict; and to investigate thoroughly and impartially threats, harassment, and violence against them, to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

### 4. Tackle the lack of financial resources for youth organisations

- Dedicate specific funding schemes, which are easy to apply for and report on, for youth organisations for the implementation of the UNSCR2250 and consecutive resolutions on youth, peace and security at national and local levels;

- Ensure sustainable structural funding for youth organisations to allow them to participate in peace and security processes;

- Include youth organisations as co-decision-maker in the conception, implementation and evaluation of funding schemes and programmes on peace and security;

- Ensure that existing funding schemes, such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and EU development programs allocate funding for projects on sustaining peace and human security at EU, interregional and global level contributing to a better interregional and global cooperation in the youth sector.
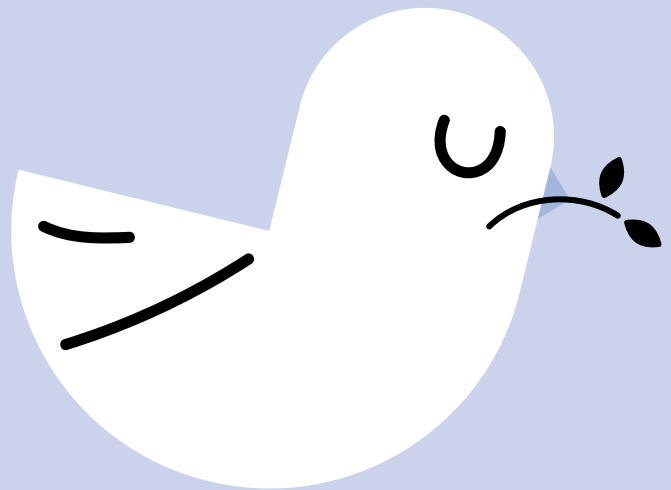
# *Explanatory Note*

## *Youth peace and security in the European Youth Forum*

The European Youth Forum has a long-standing history of contributing to building peaceful societies. It is at the core of its mission and it has been reiterated in its Strategic Plan 2020-2023. For decades, youth organisations have been demanding more just, peaceful, equitable, progressive and sustainable societies. Our Member Organisations have been at the forefront of these fights and these demands were eventually included in a formal policy agenda, the United Nations Security Council resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) on Youth, Peace and Security), the UNSCR2419 and the UNSCR2535.[8]

Building from these successes and the recognition on the highest level of the global agenda, the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations decided to further develop their views and policy demands in the field of "Youth, Peace and Security", leading to this policy paper.

## *Development of the policy paper*

This policy paper is the result of exchanges with the Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum. Three consultations were organised leading to the development of the policy paper. An initial policy commission was held during the Council of Members (COMEM) in April 2018 to identify the actions and needs of our members on the peace and security agenda. Discussions on the scope of the paper were held during a second policy commission organised in COMEM in April 2019 followed by an online consultation held in May 2019. The outcomes of the policies commissions and the online consultation were integrated into the draft of the policy paper.

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8.   United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2250 (2015), available from https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015)

# 1. Introduction

This policy paper frames the European Youth Forum perspective on the youth, peace and security by providing recommendations on how to build and sustain peaceful societies. It also outlines the roles and obstacles faced by youth organisations and young peace activists in building and sustaining peaceful societies.

From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[9] to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights[10], ensuring peace and security must be seen not only as a common objective and a shared value, but also as a fundamental human right. In line with this, more is needed to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies than the traditional focus on the judiciary, police and army forces. Policies on peace and security are too often short-sighted and fail to address the root causes of conflicts. To this end, a more holistic approach is required to navigate the complexities of our modern societies and democracies. The struggle of our economic systems, the impact of climate crisis, the overexploitation of natural resources, the housing and job crises, the negative impact of globalisation, shrinking civic space and lack of respect for the rule of law, the prevalence of antisemitism and all forms of racism and discrimination represent some challenges we are confronted as young people in Europe and beyond. Those challenges are affecting the security of our societies, negatively impacting living standards and growing inequalities. All of this has been exacerbated by the current COVID-19 crisis and by how governments are responding to it.

Rarely considered as rights-holders, young people are disproportionately affected by the aforementioned challenges. We are often discriminated against when accessing decent housing and other fundamental rights. We are often left out from decision-making processes. Therefore, from the environment to the economy, we end up having to bear the consequences of the decisions taken by older generations. This has a direct impact on the security of the lives of young people as well as our societies as a whole. The current political situation is resulting in the questioning of our democracies and the way they function.[11]

Talking about peace in Europe has a particular resonance as our continent has been ravaged by war over the past century. From the hashes of World War II, European integration has been an inspiring project geared towards peace and youth organisations were on board since the beginning.

As the need for reconstruction was beyond infrastructures, youth became a subject in the institutional discussions representing hope and a source of development for countries. The role of youth organisations after the war was from mobilising their networks in the reconstruction by providing supplies and clearing debris to participate in the rehabilitation of educational and cultural infrastructure.[12] Despite the fact the European project was initiated with the objective to end persisting conflicts in the region and to increase cooperation, our society in Europe is still facing serious security challenges today, including armed conflicts, terrorism, extremist and violent acts. Governments are lacking to provide adequate responses to those security challenges, failing to ensure peace and the full respect of human rights.

The European continent is not spared from conflicts or frozen conflicts that remain unsettled. Like others, our societies are also facing additional challenges including the climate crisis, demographic changes, rising antisemitism and racial discrimination and the risks linked to technological advancements. The full recognition and enjoyment of youth rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural), meaningful youth participation, policies fostering social cohesion ensuring climate justice and quality education are key drivers for developing more peaceful societies. When these issues are not addressed by institutions and decision-makers, the consequences include rising populism and socio-economic disparities, directly affecting the level of security of our societies and the enjoyment of human rights.

While clarifying the role of young people, youth organisations and national youth councils in contributing to build peaceful societies, the paper defines the concept of "Youth, Peace and Security" from the perspective of youth organisations and national youth councils. It then outlines clear recommendations to decision-makers to implement policies aimed at building peaceful societies where the rights of every young person are met, and where every young person has the possibility to contribute towards positive change.

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9.   UN General Assembly. "Universal Declaration of Human Right." United Nations, 217 (III)A, 1948, Paris, art.1.
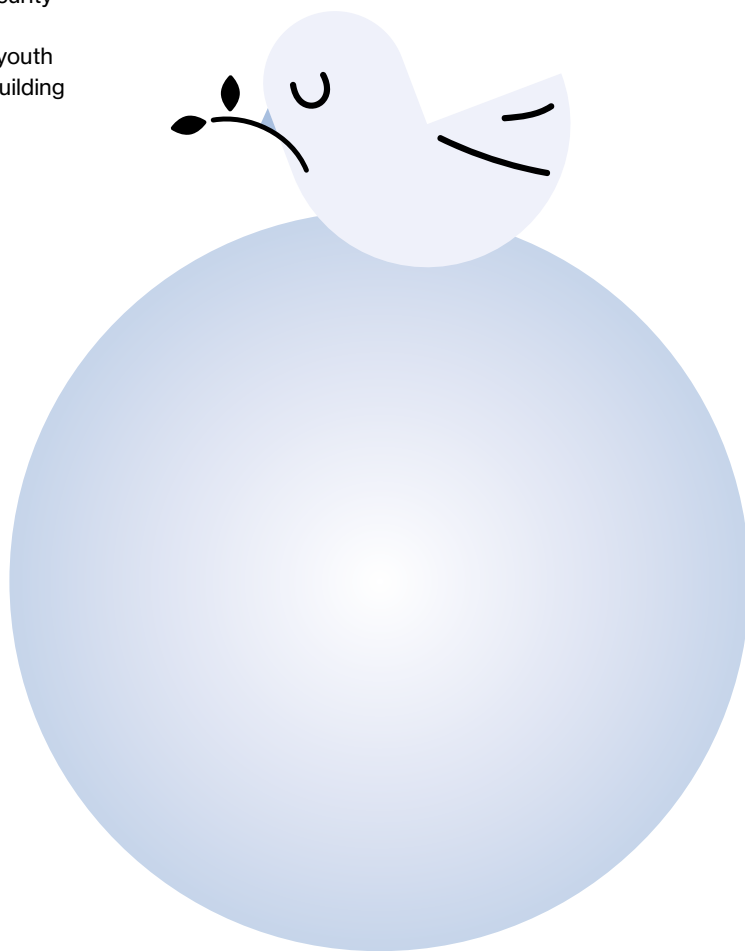10.  Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union
11.  Gagnon J-P, Beausoleil E., Son K-M, Arguelles C., Chalaye P., Johnston C., What is Populism? Who is the Populist?, Democratic Theory, December 2018
12.  D. Christine, B.Kieran, Restless Youth- Growing up in Europe 1945-now, European Union 2019, pp.35-45

# 2. Objectives of the policy paper

This policy paper aims at **defining what peace and security means from the perspective of youth organisations in Europe** and at **identifying the role of and challenges faced by youth organisations** in contributing to peaceful and inclusive societies and to **engage in the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda,** as defined by the UNSCR2250, UNSCR 2419, UNSCR 2535, and the Sustaining Peace twin Resolutions from the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council[13]. This paper **provides recommendations** to national governments and institutions on how to implement this agenda.[14]

The topic of peace and security is context-specific and every step taken towards a more peaceful society needs to consider linking the positive role that young people bring into the political, social and societal context. This policy paper on Youth, Peace and Security aims at providing a policy framework supporting the strengthening of the role of young people and youth organisations in institutional processes aiming at building peaceful societies.

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13.  More information is available here.
14.  The Youth, Peace and Security is an institutional process led by the United Nations that recognises the role that young in maintaining and building peace and security.- See more about the institutional context in the annex I.

# 3. What do we mean by "peace and security"?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union[15] do not only protect an individual's right to liberty and security, but they also unequivocally state that human rights and peace are mutually reinforcing:

*"the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".[16]*

Strengthening the rule of law and fostering the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights are therefore essential steps to ensure that peace and security do not remain mere aspirations, but become a reality for everyone. As a consequence, the understanding of peace and security goes well beyond the absence of conflict or the fight against violence and its prevention. Rather, peace and security build on human rights protection, the safeguarding of the planet and ensuring social inclusion and justice for all. That is why we need to focus on "human security" instead of "state security" to better understand the needs of youth and civil societies affected not only by conflicts but also by violent crime, gender-based violence, political violence, domestic violence. Peace and security also encompass the opportunities to complete an education, to access the job market and to be able to travel freely, defined by the concept of positive peace.[17]

Peace and security are a universal concern and affect all regions of the world. Even if Europe has been experiencing relative peace[18] for a long time, manifestations of violence between individuals and state violence targeting individuals or movements persist. Moreover, many young people experience the increasing social divide within states as a threat to universal peace. Youth organisations have played and still have a role to play in contributing to building a more just and inclusive society, which falls under the positive definition of peace and security, which we refer to in this policy paper. Young people and youth organisations prevent violence and consolidate peace across the globe, in conflicts and in post-conflict settings as well as in those enjoying relative peace.

Ensuring peace and security means working towards the fulfilment of human rights of young people, and although not traditionally seen as such, youth organisations are human rights stakeholders working towards the advancement of youth rights. Therefore, their work in tackling inequalities and barriers to social cohesion, advocating for the protection of young people's physical and moral integrity and the fulfilment of their social and economic rights, and the work towards building a sustainable and safe environment is directly tackling potential root causes of conflict and violence.

Young people find themselves at the intersection of societal factors of destabilisation such as inequalities, the climate crisis, hate speech, discrimination, structural racism and the rise of populism that need to be addressed collectively. In summary, we call for a broader understanding of peace and security. The Youth, Peace and Security agenda does not exclusively address conflict-affected countries, but is a universal concern to all regions of the world. Our definition of peace and security incorporates a focus on human security instead of state security. Therefore, it allows for a better understanding of the multidimensional needs and intersectional risks of young people.

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15. Article 3 and 6 respectively
16. UN General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations, 217 (III)A, 1948, Paris, art.1
17. Positive Peace is defined by Galtung as including a lasting, and sustainable peace achieved through the positive emphasis on the establishment of peace the support of international law compliance with multilateral treaties, the use of international courts, and non-violent resolution of disputes, participation in international organisations(...) the establishment of social equality and justice, economic equity, ecological balance; protecting citizens from attack, and meeting basic human needs, Definition, Herath O., A critical analysis of Positive and Negative Peace Oshadhi, Department of Philosophy, University of Kelaniya
18. Relative peace is defined by Schahczensk as a situation where war is not completely absent in the international system, but rather that certain wars of a general, with a systemic and a cataclysmic nature between major powers are absent at least for fairly extended periods of time.

# 4. Contribution of youth organisations

For more than a century, youth organisations have consistently contributed to a culture of peace through peace dialogue, reconciliation processes and intercultural understanding within Europe and across the world. Intercultural youth exchanges, educating young people to use dialogue for peace instruments and youth participation in reconciliation processes are among the many missions and educational tools used by youth organisations to build peace. The work undertaken by youth organisations in building peaceful societies includes also their engagement in advocating for youth participation, for the protection of human rights, for climate justice and towards greater social cohesion and quality education. This section of the paper analyses and highlights the way youth organisations are engaging in these five topics and how this is contributing to peace and security in society.

## 4.1 Youth participation

We stand for inclusive and meaningful participation of young people and youth organisations in decision-making processes from local to global levels. As an illustration of a best practice of youth participation in policy-making, the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe[19], composed of representatives of youth NGOs, is allowing young people and representatives of national governments to co-produce and co-decide youth policies. The EU Youth Dialogue[20] also allows young people to participate in the design of policies at an early stage. Within the EU Youth Dialogue, 11 European Youth Goals were formulated by 50,000 young people from all over Europe. This serves as a good example for meaningful participation which needs to be further put into action by policymakers. By providing spaces for political debates and mechanisms for meaningful youth engagement and ways to affect political decisions, youth organisations promote positive change in society through institutionalised and democratic structures avoiding the accumulation of tensions and frustrations that could lead to the eruption of violence.[21] Additionally, equal participation of marginalised young people must be ensured. This is especially relevant when selecting, inviting, and appointing young people and youth organisations to participate in formal and informal peace processes. There is a need for diverse perspectives to help understand the distinct experience of youth as peace builders, peacekeepers, victims and perpetrators.

As youth organisations do not work in a vacuum and are part of power structures and political systems, political decisions and policies have an impact on the daily lives of youth. In security policies, as pointed out by the Progress study mapping the implementation progress of the UNSCR2250, young people are often portrayed either as perpetrators of violence or as victims of conflicts.[22] The consequences of these misperceptions of youth and the lack of their involvement in the decision-making process are the adoption of policies and programmes that consider youth as authors of violence rather than as actors for peace. Indeed, there are many young people who refuse violence and advocate for the right to conscientious objection.[23]

Increased attention to and investments in quality youth participation and representation mechanisms at different institutional levels empower young people to work towards positive change in society These participatory mechanisms would promote youth active participation, enabling them to engage with policymakers and therefore support the proper functioning and enforcement of democratic institutions that are entitled to ensure peaceful and secure societies.[24] An intersectional approach to Youth Participation is important to take into consideration the cultural identity of young people, as these significantly impact the way they experience armed conflict and on how they participate in peace processes. The different need of young females, young males, non-binary and queer people need to be considered in these peace processes.

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19. Council of Europe, Advisory Council on Youth
20. European Commission, European Youth Dialogue
21. Pietrzyk-Reeves D.(2016), Civil Society, Democracy and Democratization, Peter Lang edition, 2015, p.61
22. Grame S.(lead author), Independent progress study on Youth, Peace and Security UNFPA and PBSO, 2018
23. European Youth Forum, Resolution on the right to conscientious objection to military service in Europe, 2018.
24. United Nations, Rule of Law and Peace and Security available https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/rule-of-law-and-peace-and-security/

## 4.2 Human Rights

Human rights are universal and applicable to everyone and all societal groups. However, young people still struggle to be recognised as rights-holders. Youth is a transitory phase between childhood and adulthood, during which young people face specific challenges in accessing their rights. Moreover, young people are not a homogeneous group defined by age. Many other factors, such as their socio-economic background, ethnic origin, their religion, their gender, their disability among others, need to be taken into account, as they often result in young people suffering intersectional discrimination in accessing their rights.

Youth organisations play a crucial role in advocating for the recognition and fulfilment of youth rights through both policy change and legal tools. The work carried out by youth organisations covers a wide range of rights: from participation to employment and social protection, to access to health and to housing. Moreover, it includes both building young people's capacity to advocate for their own rights and monitoring and reporting violations.

More than this, youth organisations, due to the very nature of their work and the adoption of an informal and non-formal education approach, engage with vulnerable groups of young people, fostering social inclusion. Youth organisations, with their advocacy work, their capacity building activity, and their outreach to the most vulnerable, such as young refugees, have a positive impact on the overall society. Thus, the work of youth organisations reinforces the principle that engaging in human rights promotion, protection and fulfilment is essential to ensure peaceful societies by tackling experiences of injustices and discrimination through the judiciary system while also addressing the need for protection and empowerment of youth.[25]

## 4.3 Social Cohesion

Working towards greater social cohesion includes the work in building capacities and competences of youth through citizenship and peace education, advocating for access to education, for quality employment, social protection, supporting equality and inclusion.

When civil society is given the recognition, spaces and resources needed to operate, they are able to play a key role in capacity building, engagement with institutions and echoing the voice and concerns of groups at risk. Enabling civic space is thus essential for civil society to participate in protecting democracies against the rise of authoritarian regimes and human rights violations. Their role goes beyond this as they also engage on policies and programmes affecting youth and stimulate democratic and social innovation.[26]

Youth organisations' activities aiming at supporting social cohesion through promoting intercultural and interconvictional dialogue, advocating for quality education and promoting youth participation, contribute to prevent phenomena of violence. The work undertaken by youth organisations supports building bridges between divided communities, creating safe spaces and effective processes for negotiations in conflicts. Civil society actors, including youth organisations, also influence the way in which political crises are dealt with, including by bringing additional international attention to them.[27]

Youth organisations at all levels are leading the work on non-formal educational activities on peace education, peacebuilding work, intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution dating back to pre-World War I. The work undertaken by youth organisations and National Youth Councils in education for peace and inclusion, media literacy, critical thinking, peace and inclusion allowing young people to deconstruct misconceptions and disinformation that fuel tensions which may lead to conflicts and hybrid warfare and also enables the de-escalation of tensions in post-conflicts settings.

Activities involving non-formal education empowers youth to become agents of peace and non violence, this particularly includes work against online and offline propaganda and hate speech, targeted specifically at young people. However, their activities could have a much larger impact if adequate support would be provided to scale them up.

25. Greame S.(Lead author), Independent progress study on Youth, Peace and Security, UNFPA and PBSO, 2018, p.13
26. European Youth Forum, Safeguarding Civic Space for Young people in Europe, 2020
27. Cristescu R., Engaging with civil society in conflict areas- the role of international organisations, European perspectives in the context of Eastern Partnership, Yerevan, 2010

## 4.4 Climate Justice

The impact of the climate crisis is increasingly worrying the citizens around the world. Inaction on the crisis change is leading to heightened peace and security risks throughout the world. With the reality of young people being affected by climate risks, a new outlook is needed to actively involve youth in peace, security and climate governance work and decisions. Climate protests have been led by young people and youth organisations across the world. They have been calling on policy-makers to commit to and implement measures to ensure climate justice.[28]

Youth organisations are promoting environmentally friendly practices, and they are raising awareness among young people and the general public on the climate crisis and its negative consequences. They are also building the capacity of young people to become climate-advocates in order to make policy-makers and institutions accountable in the implementation of policies to fight the climate crisis.[29]
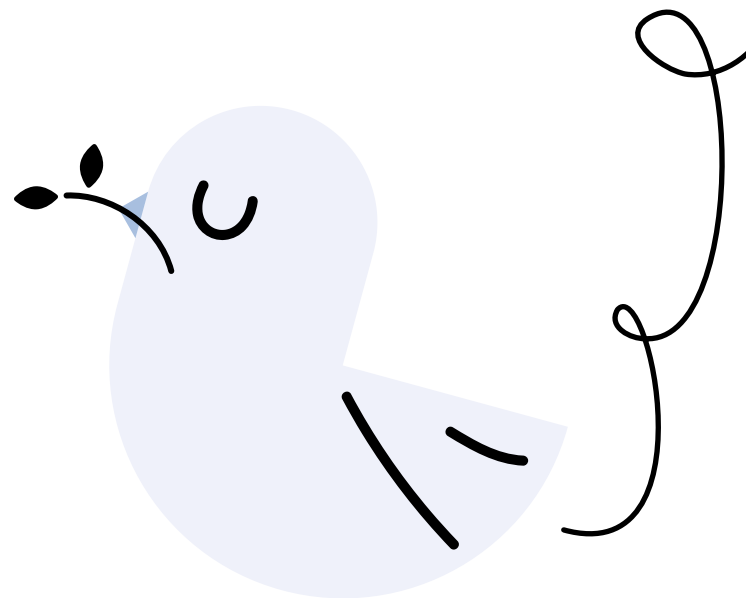
Despite the engagement of youth organisations demanding more actions and transparency on progress towards the fight against the climate crisis, the responsibility remains within governments to drive systemic change towards a green, carbon neutral and circular economy. Unfortunately, this responsibility is often not taken seriously enough by governments and is passed on to civil society.

Measures addressing jointly economic, environmental and social[30] issues remain unsuccessful in limiting global warming.[31]

The direct impact of climate crisis on peace and security is its direct effects on livelihoods, health, agriculture, water, food security, as well as making large parts of the planet uninhabitable and causing the displacement of affected populations. The accumulation of these factors combined with increased inequalities, human rights violations and geopolitical tensions are potential causes for conflicts if left unaddressed. The climate crisis represents an imminent threat to peaceful societies and to young people's access to their rights.

## 4.5 Quality Education

Education is a key aspect in maintaining a sustainable peace as it provides knowledge, perspective, skills, opportunities, employment, satisfaction, more participation in political processes. It reduces the potential of conflict outbreak and guarantees a more stable society and functioning democracy. Quality Education that sensitises on peace should be better integrated into official curricula in schools while also acknowledging that youth organisations provide extracurricular learning opportunities. Teachers, caregivers and youth workers should be trained to address discrimination and hate speech. They should also ensure the overall well-being of young people and provide conducive learning environments. This approach would promote a greater understanding of other cultures, civilisations, and human rights.

28. European Youth Forum, Resolution in support of youth demanding urgent climate action, 2019.
29. European Youth Forum, Policy paper on Sustainable development, 2018
30. European Youth Forum, Resolution: Climate matters - The vision of European Youth for COP21, 2015.
31. IPPC, 2018: Summary for policymakers in: Global Warming of 1.5°C, An IPCC special report on the impact of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, pp.9-11

# 5. Challenges faced by youth organisations

As highlighted above, youth organisations are contributing to building peaceful societies by implementing different kinds of activities and by advocating for positive change in different policy areas. However, young people are still struggling to see their rights fully respected. This situation threatens peace and security in our societies and may nourish new conflicts. These rights, recognised by international and regional human rights treaties, are the backbones of our democracies as they protect specific groups against differentiated treatment.[32]

Moreover, although youth organisations are actively engaged in several processes relevant to peace and security, their engagement in building peaceful societies is facing a number of challenges. The main challenges they are facing include the lack of funding, the lack of meaningful participatory mechanisms to engage with decision-makers, legal obstacles and the lack of recognition of the work they do in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. In this section, we analyse how more in detail those challenges and the way they are affecting the work of youth organisations and preventing them from fully contributing to build peaceful societies.

## Lack of recognition

The lack of recognition of the work of youth organisations in building peaceful societies is often reported by youth civil society as being one of the main challenges they face. Despite the adoption of the Youth, Peace & Security agenda, which formally recognises the role of youth organisations as contributors to peace and security, there is still a long way to go for a full recognition of their contributions and importance to building peace.

In a context of conflict, civil society is particularly at risk, and research[33] shows that in case of long-term conflicts, the impact on them can include physical insecurity of their members, the scarcity of financial resources, their political polarisation, combined with an increased erosion of social cohesion in society. Moreover, the consequences of the lack of recognition of the role of youth organisations can also lead to the design of policies and programmes, which address young people as a threat instead of a resource in the conflict resolution.[34]

## Absence of meaningful participation

Another obstacle youth organisations face is the lack of participatory mechanisms in policy making. Participation is a fundamental right that supports young people in growing as individuals but also fosters the development of the communities young people live in. Participation relates to many other rights: education, freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly. It is also recognised in key human rights instruments, including in the UDHR and in several other international human rights conventions and instruments. Although youth organisations are strong advocates for youth participation, obstacles towards meaningful participation remain numerous.[35]

The lack of involvement of youth in policy-making induces frustration and produces poor policy outcomes. The 2018 Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security shows that the largest global generation of youth is being excluded from governance systems rather than being recognised as a meaningful partner for peace and sustainable development.[36] Meaningful involvement of youth organisations in all stages of policy-making is also space to address resentments and avoid sources of conflicts.[37]

32. OHCHR, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, IBA, International Bar association, Human Rights in the Administration of Justice: A Manual on Human Rights for Judges, Prosecutors and Lawyers, the right to equality and non-discrimination in the administration of Justice, 2003. More information available at https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training9chapter13en.pdf

33. *Paffenholz T., Hirblinger A., Landau D., Fritsch F., and Dijkstra C., Preventing Violence through inclusion: From Building Political Momentum to Sustaining Peace.* Geneva: Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies), November 2017., p.45-p.47

34. Graeme S. (Lead author), Independent progress study on Youth, Peace and Security, UNFPA and PBSO, 2018, p.10

35. OHCHR, Equal participation in political and public affairs, Available at https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/EqualParticipation.aspx

36. Simpson, Graeme (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. p.1

37. Graeme S. (Lead author), Independent progress study on Youth, Peace and Security, UNFPA and PBSO, 2018, p.64

For instance, in the fight against global terrorism, decision-makers have been responding by adopting and implementing urgent policies based on the assumption that young people are violent, reinforcing policies and programmes only tackling the violence that comes with it instead of addressing the root causes. However, the efficiency of these measures is questioned by the progress report on Youth, Peace and Security, which notes that adopting and implementing urgency measures without proper inclusion of young people in their development, has created the effect of further excluding those young people, which were meant to benefit from these measures.[38]

## Legal barriers

Thirdly, youth organisations face increasing legal barriers in participating in policy processes but also in peacebuilding work. The fulfilment of the rights directly linked to the operations of an organisation, such as the right to freedom of association, opinion, religion, expression, information, movement and the right to participation have been increasingly under threat, lately.

Civil society organisations, including youth organisations, perform a number of functions that are necessary in promoting and safeguarding basic human rights and democracy. In fact, an open civil society is one of the most important safeguards against tyranny, oppression, and other anti-democratic tendencies. Using legal instruments to restrict their operations would have tremendous negative effects on our democracies.[39] The implementation of measures limiting the operations of youth organisations, by applying disproportionate legal restrictions and administrative burdens, is directly impacting their work. Emergency legal measures related to exceptional events like pandemics can also hinder aid and relief to vulnerable populations managed by youth organisations: we need to provide safe corridors for these important activities. The increasing shrinking space for civil society, we are experiencing in our societies, leads to the violation of human rights and threatens peace and security in society. Youth organisations are Human Rights advocates and the restraint of their work prevents them from monitoring human rights violations. These violations lead to persisting inequalities that remain unaddressed.

## Lack of funding

Finally, the lack of financial resources available for youth organisations is jeopardising opportunities for young people to engage in relevant participation spaces, including those linked to peace and security. In an increasing climate of budgetary restrictions for civil society, youth organisations do not have the financial capacity to engage in voluntary work and peacebuilding activities. This is especially true in conflict or post-conflict settings where actions to promote peace and security are the most needed and where the scarcity of resources is limiting the action of youth organisations. A major challenge for youth organisations is their dependency on project-based funding, preventing them from long-term planning and sustainable youth work. This calls for institutionalised financing mechanisms to ensure ongoing support for initiatives contributing to a culture of peace, particularly for bottom-up peace initiatives. The EU and international institutions must avail sufficient resources to support youth organisations in regions where state structures do not provide for sufficient support, e.g. in conflict-affected areas or politically unstable regions.

Civil society plays a crucial role in preventing conflicts through influencing the way in which political crises are dealt with and through raising international attention to ongoing issues, the lack of funding to civil society, including youth organisations, has a direct negative impact on peace and security.[40] Sustainable funding schemes are needed to allow youth organisations to afford the engagement in participatory mechanisms linked to youth rights, social cohesion and climate justice that could potentially prevent conflicts, if properly implemented. The funding schemes need to be easy for youth organisations to apply for and report on.

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38. Ibid., p.32
39. European Youth Forum, Safeguarding Civic Space for Young people in Europe, 2020
40. *Paffenholz T., Hirblinger A., Landau D., Fritsch F., and Dijkstra C., Preventing Violence through inclusion: From Building Political Momentum to Sustaining Peace.* Geneva: Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative (The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies), November 2017., p.45-p.47

# 6. Recommendations to governments and institutions

The framework of the UNSCR 2250, UNSCR 2419 and the UNSCR 2535 have increased the legitimacy and recognition of the work undertaken by youth organisations, and requested Member States to ensure that young people are involved in the political processes and programmes promoting peace and security.
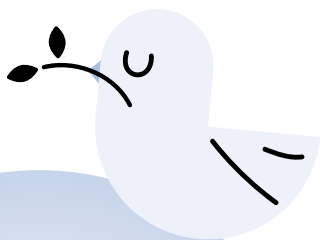
As pointed out in the paper, youth organisations are still facing a number of challenges in contributing to those processes. The implementation of the following recommendations would contribute to reinforce the role of young people and youth organisations as positive agents in building peaceful societies and preventing conflicts. The recommendations are addressed to both governments and institutions, in their respective levels of competence.
These recommendations build beyond the basic requirements we are entitled to expect from public authorities and that are foundational to peaceful societies: an equal treatment of all people, fighting all forms discrimination but also a long-lasting and sustained investment in young people, ensuring their full access to their rights.

## 6.1 Recommendations to overcome the lack of recognition of the role of youth in building peaceful societies

## Governments and institutions should:

- Implement the EU Council Conclusions on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe in cooperation with youth organisations;[41]

- Recognise the role of youth organisations as actors building peaceful societies, and their role in promoting a culture of peace, tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue that aims at discouraging their participation in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination capable of pursuing NGO diplomacy;

- Include youth organisations and National Youth Councils in the decision-making process of policies affecting peace and security. Youth organisations need to be included at all stages of policy-making from preparation to evaluation in peace and security processes;

- Promote youth-led initiatives, counter-narratives, stories, examples, and voices of young people related to the agenda on youth, peace and security.

- Take a gender-sensitive approach when taking into account the participation, views and needs of youth when negotiating and implementing peace agreements;

- Acknowledge the risks taken and threats faced by young peace activists and effectively protect youth led peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts as well as young peace activists and human rights defenders;

- Protect youth from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence by eliminating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

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41. For EU Member States- For non-EU Countries, inspiration can be drawn from these conclusions.

## 6.2 Recommendations to improve the quality of participatory mechanisms for the inclusion of youth organisations

# Governments and institutions should:

- Develop, implement and evaluate tailored national action plans on the implementation of UNSCR2250 in co-decision with youth organisations and involving relevant ministries, institutions and stakeholders engaging in peacebuilding at local and national level;

- Support the creation of quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in relevant bodies engaging in peacebuilding work and on youth policies;

- Appoint a special representative on the youth, peace and security agenda to coordinate its implementation at national level and to ensure a meaningful engagement with civil society.

- Support quality education for peace to enable youth to engage constructively in civic structures and inclusive political processes; educating young people in human rights and active citizenship, and promoting youth activism and engagement, e.g. through policies strengthening extracurricular learning and youth work.

- Better understand the needs of youth and civil societies affected not only by conflict but also by violent crime, gender-based violence, political violence, domestic violence, and extremism by focusing on "human security" instead of "state security";

- Promote synergies between the Youth and Women, Peace and Security agenda and use their alliance as a tool to integrate the perspectives of key stakeholders;

- Invest in intergenerational partnerships, for everyone to learn from each other and to allow dialogue and common problem-solving.

## 6.3 Recommendations to overcome legal barriers in building peaceful societies

# Governments and institutions should:

- Remove any legal barriers affecting the work of youth organisations and other civil society;

- Establish a specific mechanism to protect youth rights, this can take the form of an Independent Expert or Special Rapporteur. The specific form established in every country should be identified in co-decision with young people and youth organisations.

- Foster an enabling and safe environment for youth work on peace and security. Protect civil spaces and educational institutions as spaces free from all forms of violence and ensure accessibility to all youth, including marginalised youth; and to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict; and to investigate thoroughly and impartially threats, harassment, and violence against them, to ensure that perpetrators be brought to justice.

## Governments and institutions should:

- Dedicate specific funding schemes, which are easy to apply for and report on, for youth organisations for the implementation of the UNSCR2250 and consecutive resolutions on youth, peace and security at national and local levels;

- Ensure sustainable structural funding for youth organisations to allow them to participate in peace and security processes;

- Include youth organisations as co-decision-maker in the conception, implementation and evaluation of funding schemes and programmes on peace and security;

- Ensure that existing funding schemes, such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and EU development programmes allocate funding for projects on sustaining peace and human security at EU, interregional and global level contributing to a better interregional and global cooperation in the youth sector.

# 7. Conclusions

This policy paper outlined the role of youth organisations in implementing the peace and security agenda in Europe by exploring the role they play in building peaceful societies. It also outlined the current challenges youth organisations, young peace activists and human rights defenders face in contributing to build peaceful societies and preventing or transforming conflicts through non violence and gives recommendations to governments and institutions to overcome them.

Peace and Security means more than the absence of violence or conflict in society. It is inherently linked to the respect of human rights, and specifically to youth participation, social cohesion and climate justice. Youth organisations are doing their fair share in taking responsibility by engaging in political processes, by reporting human rights violations and by advocating for climate justice and fostering social cohesion. However, they still face challenges such as legal and financial barriers preventing them from fully engaging in this work and thus limiting the possibilities to have a long term approach on building peaceful societies and preventing violence. Moreover, the political responsibility in leading on systemic change addressing the above challenges remains a governmental responsibility and cannot be carried by young people only.

Young people have the right to live in a peaceful society and the lack of respect for youth rights in fields such as environment, economy and housing increases marginalisation and social exclusion. Young people's participation in decision-making remains limited which negatively impacts the possibilities for positive change. Thanks to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, institutions, at different levels, have increased their attention to the topic. However, the implementation of the UNSCR2250 at national level is not equally completed. This results in a lack of recognition of young people and youth organisations as positive agents in building peaceful societies. Furthermore, a shift to a more youth-inclusive approach to policy-making by governments and institutions is necessary. This will allow youth organisations to work alongside policy-makers to support the design, implementation and monitoring of policies linked to peace and security and to work together to promote and safeguard peace and stability.

# Annex I - *Institutional frameworks on "Youth, Peace and Security"*

*In this annex we will analyse the existing frameworks developed by the main international institutions the European Youth Forum engages with, namely the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE).*

## 1. United Nations

The United Nations paved the way on the development of specific policies on the rights of young people and their involvement in peace and security processes. Starting with the UN Charter which role is to enforce human rights, and maintain international peace and security as key purposes of the UN.[42]

The Declaration of Human Rights (preamble and Article 1) and the UN Charter frameworks protect the rights for individuals to liberty and security. They state that human rights and peace are mutually reinforcing: *"the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".* Strengthening the rule of law and fostering the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights are essential to ensure peaceful societies.[43]

In 1995, the World Programme of Action on Youth (WPAY) was adopted as a policy framework guiding Member states and relevant stakeholders to increasing opportunities and promoting well-being of young people. The WPAY called for the support of measures to increase opportunities available to young people for a *"full, effective and constructive participation in society."* The WPAY tackles the question of peace and security that can be worked through development and human rights.[44] The WPAY recommends the work on peacemaking programmes, educational programmes promoting values of human rights, solidarity and tolerance amongst others. The WPAY recommended involving young people in programmes for "reconciliation, peace consolidation and peacebuilding."[45]

The 2030 agenda for sustainable development adopted in September 2015 provides a holistic framework for governments and stakeholders to tackle, through a target of 17 goals, a range of issues such as poverty, health, education, inequalities in order to reach *"peace and prosperity for the people and the planet".* The sustainable development goal 16 focuses specifically on Peace, Justice and Strong institutions.[46] It promotes the rule of law, participatory and representative decision-making mechanisms and calls for the protection of fundamental freedoms, and tackling discrimination.[47]

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42. United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI
43. UN General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights.", United Nations, 217 (III) A, 1948, Paris, art.1.
44. UNDESA, World Programme for action and Youth, 2010
45. UNDESA, World Programme for action and Youth, 2010
46. United Nations, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015.
47. United Nations, Sustainable Development goal 16, 2015.

The UN Security Council adopted two key resolutions on Youth, Peace and security, one, the UNSCR 2250 in December 2015 and the other, the UNSCR 2419 in April 2018.

Youth organisations, and civil society to a larger extent, have contributed to the development of those resolutions by advocating for the recognition of the role of youth in peace and security processes. These resolutions contributed to shifting narratives and policies considering youth as being violent or victims of conflicts into narratives portraying youth as being actors of positive change and as crafters of peaceful society.
The preamble of the resolution expresses the concerns that the lack of access to education and economic opportunities have a major impact on the long term situation on peace. The resolution also recognises the "positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security".[48]

More in details, the Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security UNSCR 2250 calls for :[49]
On participation:
Member States to consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels (...) and to consider establishing integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution;

1  *All relevant actors to take into account the participation and views of youth in (a) identifying the needs of youth during repatriation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction; (b) taking measures supporting youth peace initiatives and involving youth in the implementation mechanisms of peace agreements; (c) in adopting measures to empower youth in peacebuilding and conflict resolution;*

2  The Security Council to take into account youth-related considerations including, as appropriate, through consultation with local and international youth groups.[50]

On protection, the resolution calls for the compliance of international law in armed conflicts. The resolution also calls for member states to ensure the protection of civilians specifically, youth groups against all forms of violence including gender-based violence during and post-conflicts.

On prevention, the resolution incites Member States *"to facilitate an inclusive and enabling environment for youth"* including through the support to implement violence prevention activities and foster social cohesion.[51] Member States should foster support for a quality education for peace. Member States are also called to equip youth to engage constructively in civic structures and political processes along with developing mechanisms involving youth to advance on the topics of tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

On partnerships, the resolution urges member States to increase, political, financial, amongst other, and to take into account needs and participation of youth in peace efforts, in conflict and post-conflict situations, by stakeholders, including UN agencies.
The resolution also encourages member States, local communities and non-governmental actors to develop strategies aiming to violent extremist and address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism empowering groups such as youth, families, women etc.

On disengagement & reintegration, additionally to taking in account needs of youth affected by armed conflicts in the "planning for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration", the resolution calls for the development of youth inclusive employment policies.

The Resolution on Maintenance of international peace and security UNSCR 2419 was adopted to further pursue the implementation of the UNSCR 2250.

# The resolution 2419 calls for:

- *the inclusive representation of young people in processes aiming at the prevention and resolution of conflict;*

- *the recognition of the role that young people play in conflict prevention and resolution;*

- *the recognition of young people and youth-led civil society organisations' efforts to contribute to build and maintain peace.*

The resolution 2419 further recalls the need for the implementation of the UNSCR2250. In addition, the resolution reaffirms the role that youth can play in conflict prevention and reasserts Member States to respect, promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals and in particular for youth.

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48. United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2250 (2015)
49. United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2250 (2015)
50. United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2250 (2015)
51. United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2250 (2015)

The UNSCR2419 acknowledges the role undertaken by youth and youth-led civil society for peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The resolution recalls the Security Council missions to take into account youth-related considerations including through the invitation of youth-led organisations for briefings to the council.

The resolution also stresses the importance of creating policies for youth that would positively contribute to peacebuilding efforts, including social and economic development.
It calls the Secretary-General and his Special Envoys to take into account views of youth in relevant discussions pertinent for the maintenance of peace and security. The resolution also calls for the equal and full participation of youth at decision-making levels and supporting the engagement at regional and subregional bodies.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2535 adopted in July 2020 underlines the vital role of youth in building Peace. The resolution encourages Member States to integrate youth into decision-making processes and strengthen their role and enable them to respond to the challenges affecting the life of young people. The resolution calls for the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth to coordinate Youth, Peace and Security activities across the UN and to monitor the implementation of the resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020).

Further than that, the United Nations adopted in 2018 its Youth 2030 Strategy.[52] The strategy affirms a new commitment of the UN to working with and for young people, including supporting young people as catalysts for peace and security and humanitarian action. Moreover, the 2019 resolution on *"policies and programmes involving youth"* adopted by United Nations General Assembly reiterates the importance of promoting the youth and peace and security agenda, and calls upon *"Member States and relevant United Nations organs and entities to consider ways to increase the meaningful and inclusive participation of youth in conflict prevention and resolution"*.[53]

## 2. The European Union

The European Union (EU) has been taking important steps towards the recognition of youth in building and maintaining peace. However, more needs to be done by their level in order to fully recognise the role of young people in this framework. So far, it has been the European External Action Service (EEAS) showing the greatest interest in developing actions and policies in this regard.

For instance, the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy calls for increased societal resilience by deepening work on education, culture and youth in order to foster pluralism, coexistence and respect.[54] However, this strategy does not go far enough in viewing young people as actors of change, but rather approach them as beneficiaries.

In 2018, the Council of the European Union adopted Conclusions on *"The role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe"*. This document 55 provides an active and meaningful participation of youth in building peaceful and resilient societies including through the use of non-formal learning and peer-to-peer approach, and gives direction to Member States on the implementation of the UNSCR 2250.

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52.  United Nations, United Nations Youth Strategy, 2018
53.  United Nations General Assembly, Resolution A/C.3/74/L.8/Rev.1 of the third committee on social Development 2019.
54.  European Union External Action, A Global Strategy for the European Union, 2018

## 3. The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe (COE) has a long tradition of working with young people, pionering this work among international organisations, and relying on co-management by youth organisations and governments. Legislative frameworks such as the European Convention on Human Rights asserted the need to work on freedom, Human Rights and justice as foundations for peace and security.[55]

The COE recommendations on young people's access to rights states that to promote and support young people's access to rights, governments of member States should:

*encourage and support young people and youth organisations to participate in building peaceful societies based on diversity, social cohesion and inclusion, in a spirit of respect, tolerance and mutual understanding;*

*promote peace building and dialogue in conflict and post-conflict regions by using programmes and instruments available, including mass media, in order to facilitate the re-establishment of a peaceful environment".* [56]

Through its main instruments in the youth field, which include the co-management system, the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and in Budapest, the North-South Centre and the European Youth Foundation, it supports the work of youth organisations on human rights education, conflict prevention, post-conflict reconciliation and inter-regional cooperation among youth civil society.

The Council of Europe also supports youth work at interregional and global level through the youth cooperation programme of the North-South Centre (NSC). The programmes aim at building capacity and encouraging the participation of young people in decision-making. Youth programmes of the North-South center are developed and implemented together with Youth led organisations and relevant stakeholders.

The NSC also coordinates the Network on Youth and Global citizenship, which we take part in. The network gathers youth organisations, institutions from the EU, Southern Mediterranean, Africa, Latin America and beyond. The objectives of the network is to promote dialogue and foster democratic cooperation between youth and relevant institutions on youth policies at regional and global level. The network also works on the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

In 2020, the Council of Europe adopted its youth sector strategy 2030, running for 10 years and including as one of the key four priorities "living together in peaceful and inclusive societies".[57]

## 4. Considerations

Despite the fact that the main international organisations have been developing policy frameworks to promote the role of young people and youth organisations in peacebuilding activities, a lot remains to be done to fully include in a meaningful way young people and youth organisations.

Moreover, apart from the work undertaken by international organisations, more needs to be done by national authorities to implement international policy frameworks and include young people and their representatives in it.

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55. Council of Europe, Recommendation on Young people's access to rights, CM / Rec(2016), 2016.
56. Council of Europe, European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as amended by Protocols Nos. 11 and 14, 4 November 1950, ETS
57. Council of Europe, Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe Youth sector strategy 2030, 2020.

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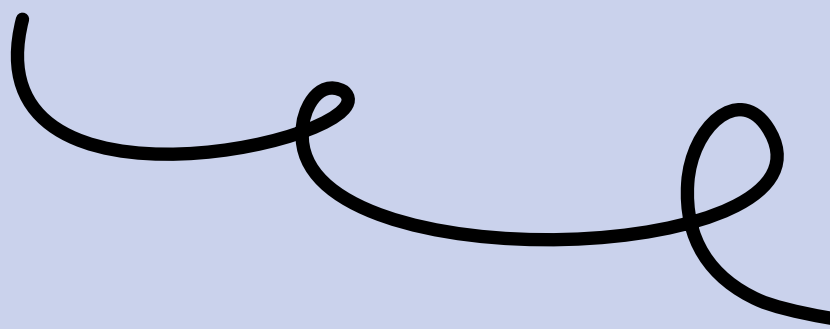United Nations Security Council resolution S/RES/2250 (2015), available from https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015)

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