



North-South Centre  
of the Council of Europe

# LISBON FORUM 2018

YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY

Uplifting youth engagement in peace and democratic processes  
in the Euro-Mediterranean region

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## GENERAL OVERVIEW

An annual event since it was established in 1994, the Lisbon Forum is a platform which brings together high level *quadrilogue* actors (governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities and civil society) to share experience and best practice on themes which are closely related to the core mission of the Council of Europe: to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Recent editions of the Lisbon Forum have also sought to address key challenges faced by countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region and to explore cooperation possibilities.

The 24th edition of the Lisbon Forum, organised within the two-year cycle *EU/Council of Europe South Programme III: Ensuring Sustainable Democratic Governance and Human Rights* - referred to the **UN Security Council Resolution 2250(2015) on Youth, Peace and Security** and to the scenarios that the homonym agenda (YPS agenda from hereby) has opened for *uplifting youth engagement in peace and democratic processes in the Euro-Mediterranean region*.

During two days, the North-South Centre, through the Lisbon Forum brought together 140 high level **quadrilogue participants** coming from Europe and neighbouring countries. The presence of youth-led and youth-oriented organisations was fundamental to build up constructive discussions and inclusive dialogues with representatives of international organisations, governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities and other civil society organisations, committed to better understand what are the opportunities - also in terms of policies - and the challenges coming from the **recognition of the role of youth as agents for peace**. Many were the questions risen - even simple requests for clarifying the deeper meaning of the used concepts - and many were the answers given, trying to identify common grounds, challenges and proposals to address them, as well as strategic approaches and methods through which contributing to the implementation of the YPS agenda, whose contents related to youth, peace and security cannot be disconnected from the mission and mandate of the Council of Europe.

## KEY-FINDINGS

### *On the UNSCR 2250(2015), the YPS agenda and its implementation*

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- **Young people were already working on the five pillars of the UNSCR 2250(2015)** before the adoption of the resolution which, first of all – besides being **a mean, and a tool** to increase and advocate on youth engagement in YPS related matters -, is **a formal recognition** of the work and the advocacy efforts already done for decades by youth around the world, thanks to the support of international stakeholders (e.g. European Youth Forum (YFJ) , United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) , Global Coalition on YPS);
- **UNSCR 2250(2015) is not well known among all the stakeholders**. More efforts should be done to mainstream the YPS agenda and to advocate for its implementation, but this should not be the main focus of the actions carried out to advocate for youth engagement on peacebuilding processes: peace, security, youth engagement, protection for young people's life are **universal values and cross-cutting issues which should be mainstreamed in every peace and conflict related initiative**, without necessarily focusing on raising awareness on the Resolution per se;
- The UNSCR 2250 has opened **a European-wide discussion on peace and security**. Europeans usually think to live in a peaceful context, free from violence and conflicts, so they rarely take into consideration the YPS

agenda. Actually, it is not like this: regardless of the general atmosphere of peace, there are many challenges which must be addressed for conflict prevention and for achieving a sustainable peace. **Peace and security is not just a matter of having peace or war: it is also about the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of security.**

- Youth and women must be partners for the implementation of the UNSCRs 1325(2000) and 2250(2015); but **programs working for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and YPS agendas should be separated** for properly accommodating all the issues (principle of specificity);

- **The UNSCR 2250(2015) should be implemented according to the lessons learnt from the attempts done to implement the UNSCR 1325(2000)**: National Action Plans (NAPs) should not be isolated considered the primary effort and fundamental element to ensure sustainable peace engaging young people: it should rather be seen also as a useful tool for framing the efforts towards the implementation of the resolution at national level. Moreover the NAP could better play such a role if drafted based on inclusive consultations and bottom-up participatory mechanisms (where women, youth and civil society organizations have been actively involved) and if relevant funding schemes are provided;

- Up to now, very few countries have started working **in collaboration with national youth-led organizations on a draft proposal for the adoption of a National Action Plan** for implementing the UNSCR 2250(2015).

#### *On youth, youth engagement and how it could be addressed*

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- **Youth are more than half of the world population**: nowadays there is the largest youth generation ever. According to a study carried out by the *Institute for Economics and Peace*, it has been estimated that, in 2016, **over 400 millions of young people** were living in States or regions where armed conflicts or any other form of organised violence were taking place. That is the 23% of youth global population aged 15-29;

- (Not youth-led) responses to youth engagement are too often one-dimensional in response to complex problems and opportunities, simply focusing on education, training and employment, but without addressing the main need of youth participation to peacebuilding, which is **emotional and psychosocial support** (e.g. encouragement, motivation, engagement in young people's interests);

- **Youth engagement is often informal**: young people have always been working and continue to work with or without formal institutions and mechanisms that meaningfully support their engagement (politically, socially, and economically). **Having a better understanding of young people efforts in the informal space is the key** to realize their potential contribution in formal spaces and peace processes;

- In the peace and security context, people usually first and foremost push on the inclusion of young people in peace processes. Such an inclusion is, of course, a critical element for war-to-peace transition but, actually, it can only partially build trust (between the parties) and for a limited period of time. **For achieving sustainable and lasting peace, youth should be included in any political process, starting from elections, and they should be given the skills to do it properly;**

- **Diversification and contextualization as the best approaches. Young people are not one homogenous group**: they may be defined in terms of social, cultural, political, biological, psychological patterns and norms. Moreover, **youth are involved in different kinds of conflicts and at different levels**, and the way they experience and are affected by conflicts and displacement depends on **internal and external factors**, which also impact the way young people respond in/to conflicts, which are rapidly evolving because of globalisation, of the progress of modern technologies and new causes, such as climate change;

- Currently, the main way young people can participate to peace processes is to be at the front line with guns: **youth are asked to fight for peace, but they are not given space to talk for peace;**

- Not necessarily new spaces must be provided to youth: suitable **spaces and platforms are already in place, so it may be sufficient to open the doors of existing places to mainstream youth perspectives in daily discussions. Youth must be involved in any kind of discussion**, not only when talking about youth-related issues.

## OUTLINE OF PANELS AND WORKING GROUPS' INSIGHTS

Challenges	Proposals to address the challenges
<p>Stereotypes associating young people with disengagement and violence are largely widespread. Youth are usually considered as 'either troublemakers (extremists' and 'terrorists') or victims of violence (passive actors),</p> <p>Such <b>stereotypes feed reciprocal mistrust</b> between young people governments, multilateral organizations and even civil society actors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Change the narrative</b> about youth by highlighting positive stories about youth contribution to peace and security.</li> <li>✓ Share more information on youth contribution to peace by providing <b>reliable data and factual evidence</b>.</li> <li>✓ Ensure participatory and inclusive approaches: Consider the involvement of <b>young people as an asset in decision-making</b> processes where young people' lives are at stake. Building relationships when jointly taking decision, would also contribute in building confidence and trust among decision makers and young people</li> </ul>
<p>Youth are usually considered as a <b>homogeneous category</b>, lacking of specification, diversification and contextualization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Improve the efforts in understanding and analysing youth complexity by considering and exploring different experiences/opinions/grievances/needs/ dreams young people have, which change according to the context-related challenges they face (e.g. political, geographical, cultural).</li> <li>✓ The lack of understanding of young people' realities come also from the difficulties in communicating with them: Governmental' stakeholders should <b>engage with youth also through youth-friendly channels</b> (e.g. social media and social networks). This would also mitigate the generation gap that it represents an extra element of miss-representation and miss-communication.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth are not sufficiently involved in decision</b> and policy making processes related to peace and security. Marginalized youth, in particular, are hardly considered in those processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Developing capacity building programmes for youth where is fostered participation and are explored the processes of representation</li> <li>✓ Establishing and support structures such as youth councils, youth networks etc. in view of multilevel governance structures.</li> <li>✓ Change the mind-set and attitudes of decision makers also considering the power of words: e.g. working 'for' youth VS 'with' youth; youth are the future VS youth are present etc.).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Increase the number and the type of the grassroots activities for reaching out the more marginalized youth.</li> <li>✓ Promote co-management systems and <i>quadrilogue</i> dialogue approach at international level.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gender biases are widespread:</b> young men are usually considered 'security threats', while young women are seen as 'passive victims'.</p> <p>There are cultural contexts where community structures do not allow the participation of young women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Raise awareness on gender issues and gender-based discrimination also in the context of Youth peace and security</li> <li>✓ Implement target actions for gender mainstreaming and women empowerment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Military interventions are completely normalized</b> whereas (youth) civil society initiatives for promoting and building peace are rather unknown</p> <p>Lack of specific funding lines to support the peace actions of youth organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Promote peace studies and improve peace research at all levels of education</li> <li>✓ <b>Raise awareness</b> - also through <b>information campaigns</b> – on human security issues and its interconnection with the widespread fundamental values and principles of human rights</li> <li>✓ <b>Address peace issues</b> in schools already during childhood, in order to normalize nonviolence and peaceful intervention of young people as much as it is now normalized the military intervention. Such action would also prevent the risk of providing peace and human rights education only at those youth able to access high level education (where is currently more frequently provided)</li> <li>✓ Advocate for the recognition of the contributions of youth civil society organizations to peace and security.</li> <li>✓ Promote the adoption of national action plans (NAPs) through participatory and inclusive approaches, where funding are secure in the long-term.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Euro-Mediterranean Region</b> is facing a series of challenges which undermine the stability of the area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Increase <b>regional co-ownership by multilateral cooperation processes</b> that give the necessary <b>attention to the needs and the priorities</b> of the Southern Mediterranean Countries.</li> <li>✓ Promote approaches that foster integration through <b>intercultural dialogue</b>.</li> <li>✓ Develop <b>stronger international partnerships</b> based on sincere - and not just professional - collaborations moved by a <b>common commitment towards human rights</b>.</li> </ul>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In a context of multilevel governance, consider youth engagement in participatory and inclusive democratic processes as an urgent matter, not only when discussing youth-related issues, but also when addressing peace and security issues.
2. Prioritise gender issues in the political agenda to better integrate the gender perspective and women participation in peace processes.
3. Promote regional and interregional youth cooperation, through partnerships and networking actions to increase co-ownership and common sense of responsibility towards human security and the protection of human rights.
4. Minimise the concern about the economic cost of the peace initiatives (including the implementation of NAPs and funding lines for youth organization), especially in a general political environment where the cost of wars and military equipment are not suffering the same economic scrutiny. Move the money from war to peace.
5. Plan projects and programmes more effective looking at achieving greater results also in terms of data collection and impact assessment.
6. Invest more in sharing information, experience and good practices youth engagement for peacebuilding.
7. Pay greatest attention to the grassroots level, reaching out the more marginalized youth, fostering a bottom-up approach on peace and security's actions and policies.
8. Invest in young people's capacities through funding support, network-building and capacity-strengthening.
9. Consider youth, gender, peace and security as cross-cutting issues to be mainstreamed in any kind of action and intervention;
10. Invest in youth capacity building as fundamental first step for any peace and security programme based on the assumption that Peace is, first of all, a personal process.

## CONCLUSIONS

The concrete recognition of young people's role in democracy promotion, social cohesion, peacebuilding, as well as the ultimate success of the YPS agenda, rely on a multilateral effort based on partnership and capacity to put in practice lessons learned. A sincere multilevel collaboration is in fact the ideal way to fulfil legitimate aspiration of each person and to achieve the greatest collective goals for the common good.

Young people's courage, creativity, innovation, resilience and efforts constitute the "connecting tissue" to bridge the different levels of engagement toward a sustainable peace. What youth still face, is a lacking of spaces and opportunities to properly unfold their potential.

Shared responsibility, reciprocal trust, multilateral co-operation, political involvement through inclusive and comprehensive mechanisms of governance are the objectives that should be pursued both by youth and political representatives to ensure democratic processes aiming at a sustainable peace.

In fact, the building of democratic security, the fight against the violence and radicalization, the promotion of human rights, social justice and social cohesion, cannot be disconnected from the issues around youth, peace and security.

Only incarnating the principles of "leaving no-one behind" it will be possible to achieve sustainable peace and the global goals of the 2030 agenda.

## FOLLOW-UP

The North-South Centre intends to give continuity and sustainability to the process on Youth, Peace and Security initiated with the Lisbon Forum 2018.

The North-South Centre will continue to offer a platform for structured cooperation, promoting confidence building between governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities and particularly, civil society organisations with a bottom-up participatory approach, where youth is at the core of its programmes.

Within six months, a follow up seminar will be organised to look back at the Lisbon Forum 2018's conclusions and further build on that. On that occasion, a seed funding scheme will be launched. Thanks to the financial contribution of the South Programme III, the North-South Centre will be able to provide funding opportunities to grass roots initiatives. Moreover, a capacity building training course will be organized in the framework of the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Mediterranean University on youth and global citizenship (Tunisia, June 2019). All these follow-up initiatives will be taking into consideration the elements that were gathered and presented during the Lisbon Forum 2018.