



# Security Council

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## Youth and peace and security

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

Young people have faced unprecedented challenges in the past two years owing to multiple crises: the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change, violence and armed conflict, and their compounded effects. However, the mobilization of young people for peace, social justice, climate action and equality remained unfaltering and critical to the peaceful development of societies. Young women and men have continued to drive peace even though the impact of the pandemic has reinforced barriers and created new challenges for their meaningful participation in peace and security processes. The safety, security and protection of young people has not improved: shrinking civic spaces, coupled with the impact of armed conflicts and the pandemic, have led to acute protection challenges requiring urgent action. Young people – young women in particular – are at risk of being left behind in terms of education, economic opportunities, health and social protection during a crucial stage of their lives. Inclusive partnerships with young peacebuilders are crucial to the youth and peace and security agenda and should be prioritized by all partners. Preventive efforts can only be effective if use is made of the capacities, perspectives, contextual knowledge and creativity of diverse groups of young people. The institutionalization of the agenda has noticeably accelerated since the first report on youth and peace and security (S/2020/167), yet profound challenges persist that concern meaningful participation of young people in decision-making and financing for peacebuilding this is led by and inclusive of young people.



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution [2535 \(2020\)](#), in which the Security Council requested a biennial report on the implementation of resolutions [2535 \(2020\)](#), [2419 \(2018\)](#) and [2250 \(2015\)](#).

2. When the first report of the Secretary-General on youth and peace and security ([S/2020/167](#)) was presented to the Security Council in April 2020, the world had just been shaken by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Two years later, the effect of the pandemic on young people's lives and prospects remains systematic, deep and disproportionate, with disrupted access to education and services, massive growth in youth unemployment and an aggravated mental health crisis.<sup>1</sup>

3. The COVID-19 crisis has significantly exacerbated the root causes of conflict and has magnified existing socioeconomic and political vulnerabilities and inequalities experienced by young people, especially in contexts in which conflict and crises have undermined institutional capacities and limited access to services. Young people with specific needs are at a heightened risk and are particularly vulnerable, especially if their identities are intersectional, for example, young women, young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people and young people living with disabilities. This is further compounded for refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, young people who are homeless or out of school, young people living in informal settlements or rural areas, young people living with HIV/AIDS and young people from ethnic minorities or indigenous groups. The gendered effects of the pandemic have been particularly severe and the risk is that they will reverse gains made in the area of gender equality.

4. Nevertheless, young people continued to mobilize and demand fairer and more peaceful societies. Before and during the pandemic, young people participated in and often led large public protests across the globe, demanding better democratic systems, gender equality, economic opportunities and social justice as well as transformative action on climate change. Young women often played leading and visible roles in the protest movements in spite of increased threats to their safety and well-being, particularly online.

5. In the Sudan, young people remained at the forefront of calls for a peaceful political transition, tirelessly pushing for peaceful and inclusive change despite communication shutdowns and violent repression. In Nigeria, mass protests led by young people resulted in the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad and improved police accountability. In Myanmar, health-care workers and young people initiated a civil disobedience movement in response to the military takeover of 1 February 2021. Mass protests also took place in many countries around the world, with young activists demanding racial equality, justice and police accountability. The "lockdown generation" showed an indomitable spirit of resilience and leadership in addressing today's challenges. The accelerated digitalization of civic space and participation opportunities offered a chance for wider engagement and inclusion, while also presenting new protection challenges requiring urgent action.

6. Six years after the adoption of resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#), young people's crucial contributions to peace are yet to be systematically recognized, promoted and embraced. As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Our Common Agenda" ([A/75/982](#)), young people lack trust in the ability of existing institutions and leadership to meet their concerns. The renewal of the social contract requires a deepening of intergenerational solidarity and a focus on the meaningful, diverse and effective

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-Being – Survey Report 2020*.

engagement of young people, within and outside the United Nations. The youth and peace and security agenda is a powerful vehicle for realizing these goals and achieving a new agenda for peace, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

7. The present report covers progress in implementing the youth and peace and security agenda since January 2020. It addresses the five pillars outlined in resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#): participation, protection, prevention, disengagement and reintegration, and partnerships. The report is informed by analysis and data provided by the United Nations, Member States, regional organizations and civil society organizations, including organizations that are led by and focused on young people.

## **II. Updates on progress, gaps and challenges across the youth and peace and security agenda**

### **A. Participation**

#### **Youth participation in times of the coronavirus disease pandemic**

8. The impact of COVID-19 has reinforced existing barriers and created new challenges for young people's meaningful participation in processes related to peace and security. Yet, young people worldwide acted as front-line responders to the pandemic, providing psychosocial support to their communities, combating the spread of misinformation and reaching out to marginalized communities. In the Sudan, volunteers conducted COVID-19 awareness activities with internally displaced people in El Geneina, spurring the development of youth peer networks. In Colombia, Haiti, Jordan, Liberia, South Sudan, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, civil society organizations that are led by and focused on young people received support from the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund to improve young women's representation in peacebuilding and foster inclusive COVID-19 responses.

9. The pandemic triggered rapid innovation to sustain meaningful connection and participation in the digital space. In numerous countries, peacebuilding efforts that were led by young people adapted into hybrid models, combining face-to-face workshops and dialogue with online activities. The online dimension made it possible to expand the geographic reach of those initiatives, including in hard-to-reach areas, enabling the engagement of a greater number of young peacebuilders.

10. As civic space became more digitalized, opportunities grew for young people to develop their civic identities and express their political stances creatively, claiming agency that may not have been afforded to them in traditional civic spaces. Yet, varying levels of infrastructure, Internet access, digital literacy, affordability of services and devices and online protection issues, including gender-based protection concerns, remain significant challenges. This is especially true for young people in remote or conflict-affected areas and in lower-income classes, and for young women and girls. Efforts should intensify to tackle the digital divide, increase access to digital resources and opportunities, foster norms for the safe and inclusive use of technology and digital spaces, and combine online and offline engagement to ensure that no young people are left behind.

#### **Participation in peace processes**

11. Young people are directly affected by the outcomes of peace processes and should have an opportunity to shape them. Yet, young people, particularly young women, are seldomly engaged as strategic partners in reimagining and building a better future. The lack of data on young people as signatories of and participants in

peace processes, and the rare provisions in peace agreements that are responsive to young people, show that the inclusion of young people remains marginal.

12. Since 2019, the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth has steered a multi-stakeholder partnership that has resulted in a five-year strategy aimed at peace and mediation processes that are more responsive to and inclusive of young people. The strategy was launched at the High-level Global Conference on Youth-inclusive Peace Processes held virtually in January 2022. The Conference was co-hosted by the Governments of Colombia, Finland and Qatar, and co-organized with civil society and United Nations partners.

13. The United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has harnessed technologies and innovation to expand the inclusion of young people in political and peace processes. Examples include large-scale digital dialogues to support the work of special political missions on peace processes in Libya and Yemen, as part of dialogue and reconciliation processes in Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Tunisia, and virtual dialogues designed by young people in North-East Asia. The digitalization of peace processes, however, has also led to protection and inclusivity concerns, especially with regard to young women and young people from diverse socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds.

14. The role of young people is critical for the sustainable implementation of peace agreements. Young people engaged with national political and security actors through forums organized by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, which increased the Government's recognition of the role of young people in implementing peace agreements. In the Central African Republic, young people helped to raise awareness of the peace accord areas among the rural population, enhancing ownership and acceptance, through a Peacebuilding Fund project implemented by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Search for Common Ground. In Cameroon, Chad and Gabon, a network of 1,800 young peace ambassadors supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Volunteers programme, contributed to mechanisms aimed at preventing and addressing conflicts.

### **Participation in politics, governance and elections**

15. Youth participation in formal political processes remains worryingly low. Voter turnout has dropped around the world, and young cohorts tend to vote less than older cohorts in many places. This reflects existing structural barriers and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions.<sup>2</sup> The “youth in politics” index proposed in Our Common Agenda could be used to track the opening of the political space around the world, which is clearly demanded by younger generations.

16. Despite some positive developments with regard to the presence of young leaders in Governments, the Inter-Parliamentary Union reports that youth representation in national parliaments increased only marginally over the reporting period and remains minimal. In 2020, only 2.6 per cent of the world's parliamentarians were under the age of 30, and 17.5 per cent were under the age of 40, representing small increases of 0.4 and 2 percentage points, respectively, compared with 2018. In 2020, only about 1 per cent of parliamentarians were women under 30. In 2020, 25 per cent of the world's single and lower chambers of parliament had no members under 30, and 73 per cent of upper chambers had no members under 30.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Youth, peace and security: fostering inclusive political processes” (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments* (Geneva, 2021).

17. Structural and institutional barriers and cultural biases still limit the participation and capacity of young people – especially young women and young LGBTQI+ persons – to engage in political processes. In 69 per cent of countries, a gap exists between the minimum voting age and the age required to stand for election.<sup>4</sup> This hinders young people from running for office, being represented in parliament and engaging in broader political processes. In addition to aligning voting and eligibility ages, age-based quotas may help to increase youth participation. Such quotas should be designed within the context of the electoral system and require gender parity within each age group to address the double discrimination that young women often suffer on account of their age and gender. Greater and more sustainable sources of campaign financing and capacity-building for young leaders are also needed.

18. Support for efforts of young people to engage in electoral processes remains crucial. Prior to the legislative elections of March 2020, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) sensitized young people to their election-related rights in order to enhance the meaningful participation of, in particular, young women and reduce the likelihood of electoral violence. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), UNFPA and partners support young people through training, networking and intergenerational dialogues on participation in electoral processes. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) promotes the political participation and civic engagement of young people in a number of countries, most recently in Honduras and Zambia. Young people also require capacity-building support once elected: a training organized by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and its partners strengthened the leadership of 45 young women parliamentarians at the national and state legislatures. In 2021, the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth launched a call to action to increase young women's political participation and leadership by supporting young women candidates and investing in their leadership.

19. Local governance provides a strategic entry point for youth participation on matters relating to development and peace and security. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo<sup>5</sup> supports the participation of multi-ethnic young people in local and central governance processes. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Civil Society Support Room, established by the office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, encourages young people to share their views and perspectives during civil society consultations. In the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Somalia, peacekeeping and special political missions collaborate with youth groups to strengthen governance and civilian oversight of the security and defence forces at the national level.

### **Participation in humanitarian contexts**

20. Humanitarian needs and displacement have increased dramatically in recent years, driven by conflict and climate change, and exacerbated by COVID-19, taking a devastating human toll, including among young people. The humanitarian system has increased its attention to the needs and perspectives of young people, including those who are forcibly displaced. To address their specific needs, a resource hub was launched by the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action. The *Guidelines: With Us and For Us – Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian Settings* of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee helps to steer action focused on young people in Bangladesh, Iraq and Jordan. In 2020, approximately 5 million adolescents

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

participated in civic engagement and decision-making in their communities through programmes in humanitarian and crisis settings supported by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

### **Participation in climate action**

21. Young people have long been a powerful force calling for transformative action on climate change, which is a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing grievances and aggravates root causes of conflict. At the local level, young peacebuilders are often also climate activists, and vice versa.<sup>6</sup> At the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, a global statement on climate action was delivered on behalf of over 40,000 young people. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus established a network of young activists, Youth Champions for Environment and Peace, to collaborate on environmental campaigns and build peace from the bottom up. UNDP, through its climate promise, facilitated national dialogues led by young people in 80 States as part of the enhancement process for the nationally determined contribution.

22. In Somalia, UNSOM and its partners are designing climate and ecosystem-responsive approaches to mediation and peacebuilding that are inclusive of young people, combining community-led and high-level political elements to address conflicts in Hirshabelle State. In Solomon Islands, with the support of UN-Women and UNDP and with funding from the Peacebuilding Fund, young people participated in consultative processes related to inequitable land resource management as a key driver of conflict, thus contributing to the Traditional Governance Bill. In 2021, climate security risk assessments were carried out in Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, involving consultations with young people, through a project funded by the Peacebuilding Fund and implemented by UNDP and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

23. In “The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights”, the Secretary-General stressed the importance of space for young people to participate in shaping the decisions that will affect their future, including on climate change. In June 2021, heads of United Nations system entities took a joint commitment to promote the right of children, young people and future generations to a healthy environment and their meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels in relation to climate action and climate justice. Through his Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, which was formed in 2020, the Secretary-General also seeks to bridge this gap and sustain dialogue with youth climate leaders.

24. More than ever, the interconnectedness of multiple crises – COVID-19, climate, violence and armed conflict – and their compounded effects, including on young people, highlights the artificial distinction between different types of assistance. It is therefore important to actively engage young people across the humanitarian-development-peace continuum to avoid siloed programming and ensure timeliness, scale and effectiveness of support.

## **B. Protection**

25. Since 2020, the safety, security and protection of young people has not improved. Civic space online and offline has been shrinking, which has created acute participation and protection challenges for young people, such as reprisals and

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<sup>6</sup> Masooma Rahmaty and Jimena Leiva Roesch, “Youth participation in global governance for sustaining peace and climate action”, International Peace Institute publication (New York, April 2021).

intimidation.<sup>7</sup> In addition, armed conflicts continue to affect young people disproportionately, particularly young women. This is further aggravated in contexts where State and non-State actors, including terrorist groups and criminal organizations, target young people.

26. In Afghanistan, the Taliban takeover has severely affected young people; civil society activists, in particular young women, are especially exposed. Some have fled the country, others have joined women's protests against restrictions of their rights, including the right to civic activism.<sup>8</sup>

27. Violence has not merely been confined to the battlefield or the streets. Pandemic-related lockdowns have led to sharp and immediate surges in domestic violence against women and girls. For many young women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security (S/2021/827), many countries registered a sharp surge in cases and calls for service, and conflict-affected countries were no exception, as increases ranged from 20 per cent to 100 per cent in most cases.

28. Young people's experiences of arbitrary treatment by criminal justice systems and mistreatment by State security forces have intensified with the pandemic.<sup>9</sup> During protests in numerous countries, young people were exposed to extreme forms of violence, including kettling, tear gas and rubber bullets, which can cause permanent injuries and even be deadly.<sup>10</sup> In Myanmar, many LGBTQI+ rights activists and young women protesters have been detained and tortured. Young women who participate in protests have also been exposed to threats and violence from fellow protestors in addition to State security forces. In Colombia, young women peacebuilders responded by designing safeguarding protocols for demonstrations.<sup>11</sup> The unlawful and disproportionate use of force against young people by law enforcement officials and non-State actors in four countries was condemned by the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth.<sup>12</sup> Through community-oriented activities, United Nations police continue to engage young people as key partners in preventing and managing crime, as well as with regard to other security aspects.

29. Young people have reported exposure to hate speech, surveillance, harassment and smear campaigns worldwide.<sup>13</sup> In the Western Balkans, divisive narratives have been on the rise. Young women and minorities have been particularly targeted through online hate speech, harassment and intimidation intended to constrain their equal right to freedom of expression.<sup>14</sup> Education can address and counter hate speech, which can drive violence and atrocity crimes. In October 2021, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect held an interministerial conference that

<sup>7</sup> CIVICUS, *People Power Under Attack* (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on young women peacebuilders" (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> Graeme Simpson and Ali Altiok, "'Building back better': youth, risk and resilience in the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic", Accord, 2 September 2020.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space* (2021).

<sup>11</sup> UN-Women, "Assessing the impact".

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, "Joint statement on recent violent escalations during youth-led protests around the world", 30 October 2020.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Rapid analysis: digital civic engagement by young people" (New York, February 2020).

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, *If I Disappear*.



led to specific recommendations to Member States on addressing hate speech through formal and informal education.

30. Young women, young people from minorities, young LGBTQI+ persons, young people with disabilities, forcibly displaced young people and other marginalized youth groups continue to face specific patterns of discrimination. Young people face numerous challenges that have a lasting impact on their mental health, particularly in conflict-affected settings. As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding and sustaining peace ([A/74/976-S/2020/773](#)), enhanced integration of mental health and psychosocial support into peacebuilding practice is crucial, including by supporting youth organizations in their work around age- and gender-sensitive trauma healing and reconciliation. The Peacebuilding Fund has supported mental health and psychosocial support interventions for young people affected by conflict in Somalia and South Sudan and prioritized proposals with regard to such interventions under the 2021 Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative.

31. In “The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights”, the Secretary-General stressed the need for a protection agenda that considers the different experiences and protection needs arising from differences in age, gender, disability and diversity. Furthermore, the United Nations Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space highlights the importance of meaningful inclusion of young people across the “three Ps” of civic space: participation, protection and promotion. Peacekeeping operations also play an important role in strengthening protection mechanisms for young people, particularly young women. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali has protected young people who are working to shed light on human rights violations and abuses in their communities, including through temporary relocation within Mali.

32. In its resolution [2535 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council called upon Member States to foster an enabling and safe environment for youth working on peace and security, including by protecting civic space. In 2021, the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth published a global report with 500 testimonials from young people of diverse backgrounds identifying six categories of threats: sociocultural, financial, political, legal, digital and physical. Those threats must be addressed through tailored youth- and gender-sensitive responses.

33. Young people often lack the networks and resources needed to access protection support when their rights are violated.<sup>15</sup> Initiatives such as the youth-specific civil society protection network of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders are essential to address these gaps and improve protection. They raise awareness and provide financial and logistical support to young peacebuilders in countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Philippines and South Sudan. Existing protection mechanisms, institutions and structures must also serve to address these gaps and ensure robust and accessible protection measures for young people.

## C. Prevention

34. Inequalities, discrimination, marginalization, and human rights violations and abuses, continue to drive conflicts and negatively affect young people. The increasingly devastating impacts of the climate crisis and socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19 are deepening existing social inequalities and discrimination and are triggering new ones. Gaps in social services can have profound implications for health, economic stability, trust in Governments and social cohesion.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Young people, and young women in particular, are at risk of being left behind in terms of education, economic opportunities and in equal access to health and social protection during a crucial stage of their life. Structures that continue to uphold the exclusion of young people require reform.

### Education

35. Education remains crucial in shaping opportunities for young people and serving as a powerful engine for peace and resilience. Evidence shows that countries with higher inequality in education are 2.5 times more likely to experience violent conflict.<sup>16</sup> Even before COVID-19, the world was grappling with a serious learning deficit as education was not properly equipping students for life, work and civic engagement.<sup>17</sup> The pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, at its peak affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have affected 94 per cent of the world's students.<sup>18</sup> By September 2021, 131 million students had missed an estimated 1.8 trillion hours of in-person learning.<sup>19</sup>

36. School closures carry high socioeconomic costs for communities. For example, in Lebanon, in a context of a deep economic crisis, 40 per cent of school-aged children and young refugees displaced from the Syrian Arab Republic did not have access to any type of education in 2021.<sup>20</sup> The education crisis is particularly dramatic for girls, as an estimated 10 to 13 million more girls face the risk of child marriage globally in the next decade, as well as an increased risk of dropping out of school and unintended pregnancies.<sup>21</sup> In conflict-affected settings, many students will not return to school, which potentially feeds existing and new patterns of exclusion and threatens to exacerbate generational divides and trust deficits.<sup>22</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic also frequently disrupted essential health services, such as family planning and contraception services (in 40 per cent of 135 reporting countries and territories), antenatal and postnatal care (33 per cent), safe abortion and post-abortion care services (28 per cent) and services for intimate partner and sexual violence prevention and response services (39 per cent).<sup>23</sup>

37. It must urgently be ensured that education systems contribute to sustaining peace, reconciliation, human rights and social cohesion. Young Peacebuilders is a peace education initiative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations designed to provide young people with skills that can enhance their ability to positively contribute to peace and security and to preventing violent conflict. The World Programme for Human Rights Education includes a focus on training young people to build inclusive and peaceful societies.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF and FHI 360 Education Policy and Data Center, "Does horizontal education inequality lead to violent conflict?" (New York, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> World Bank, *Ending Learning Poverty: What Will It Take?* (Washington, D.C., 2019).

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, "Policy brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond", August 2020.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Education: from disruption to recovery", no date.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations and Government of Lebanon, *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2021 (2021 Update)*, January 2021.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Population Fund, "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family planning and ending gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage", April 2020.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, "Policy brief: education during COVID-19 and beyond", August 2020.

<sup>23</sup> World Health Organization, *Second Round of the National Pulse Survey on Continuity of Essential Health Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Interim Report*, 22 April 2021.

### **Economic inclusion and decent jobs for young people**

38. Decent jobs for young people can contribute to peace by creating economic opportunities, breaking down horizontal divides, promoting social dialogue and labour rights to resolve grievances and addressing perception of injustice, as highlighted by the partnership between the International Labour Organization, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UNDP and the World Bank. The pandemic hit young workers hard, exacerbating young people's disconnect from the labour market and highlighting the real risk of a lost generation.<sup>24</sup> Decent work for young people implies jobs that are productive and deliver a fair income; ensure security and representation in the workplace and social protection for families; offer better prospects for personal development and social integration; provide young people the freedom to organize, express concerns and participate in the decisions that affect them; and ensure equal opportunity and treatment for all, irrespective of gender.

39. In the Central African Republic, the International Labour Organization supported the creation of decent jobs for marginalized young people in a high conflict-risk area by rebuilding deteriorated infrastructure and supporting the growth of small- and medium-sized enterprises, which also improved contact and opportunities among violence-affected communities. In central Chad, investments in vocational training made by IOM since 2020 in partnership with the World Food Programme create alternatives for young people otherwise often trapped in human trafficking, forced labour in gold mines or recruited by armed groups.

40. Emergency response efforts and economic recovery from conflict and COVID-19 should be part of a wider, long-term vision for recovery that promotes sustainable livelihoods and addresses the underlying factors of fragility. COVID-19 has highlighted the urgency of sustainable, resilient, shock-responsive social protection systems that address the needs of diverse groups of young people and ensure access to predictable social cash transfers, in-kind assistance, employment guarantee programmes and health and social insurance. In support of the existing Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, the United Nations will launch a recovery barometer to track career paths and labour market outcomes for young people as part of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **D. Disengagement and reintegration**

41. Disengagement and reintegration processes are often conducted in contexts where most combatants and fighters are young. These processes help to create a protective environment by offering young people who have engaged in armed conflict the ability to re-enter their communities, and by addressing some of the underlying economic, social, political and personal factors that often drive the recruitment of young people into armed groups. The processes also contribute to prevention efforts by curbing their re-recruitment. The recently finalized module on young people in the revised Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards indicates ways to develop interventions, public information and community sensitization focused on young people and to meaningfully engage young people in peace processes.

42. Young people at risk of recruitment have been included in community reintegration programmes in the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Congo, Iraq and the Sudan, and in community violence reduction programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Mali and the Sudan. These initiatives provide alternatives to violence through inclusive vocational training and short-term and

<sup>24</sup> ILO, "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work – seventh edition", 25 January 2021.

decent livelihood assistance, including cash-for-work and income-generating activities that are conflict-sensitive and embedded in a longer-term employment strategy and security enhancement initiatives. Furthermore, in Somalia and the Lake Chad basin region, the United Nations has promoted the voluntary disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of young people formerly associated with non-State armed groups. In Colombia, IOM and UNICEF continued to support local authorities in developing action plans for the prevention of recruitment, use and exploitation of young people. In Australia, the Sudan and Sweden, the Office of Counter-Terrorism trained and coached young leaders through the peer-to-peer model of its Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme. This equipped young leaders and activists with tools to lead difficult conversations on preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism within their communities and enabled them to present their policy recommendations to senior national decision-makers.

43. Across various settings, including peacekeeping operations and special political missions, the number of disengagement and reintegration initiatives focused on young people and responsive to gender equality is increasing. By incorporating a gender analysis at all stages, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes should address the specific needs and priorities of young women and men, and girls and boys, and promote gender-transformative approaches to shift social norms and address structural inequalities that often lead young women and girls to engage with armed groups and can negatively affect their reintegration. While women often represent a minority of demobilized combatants, many community violence reduction projects have empowered them through gender-specific projects and the establishment of gender quotas. For instance, while women represented only 4 per cent of the demobilized caseload in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they represented 23 per cent of the direct beneficiaries in community violence reduction projects. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali has encouraged women to participate in the design and implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration projects. In Somalia, the gender-responsive approaches taken by UNSOM have enabled the provision of rehabilitation and reintegration support to women formerly associated with Al-Shabaab, who represented 56 per cent of the caseload supported in 2021.

## **E. Partnerships**

44. In Our Common Agenda, the Secretary-General called for meaningful engagement and partnerships with young people. This requires that Governments, civil society and inter-governmental organizations allow young people to identify their needs in order to participate in genuine intergenerational partnerships. Multiple shortcomings prevent inclusive partnerships from being fully realized. Partnerships or joint endeavours between youth organizations and national or international peace and security actors remain transactional and one-sided, lacking downward accountability. Too often, youth organizations are seen as implementers of peacebuilding interventions conceived without them.<sup>25</sup> Inclusive partnerships with young peacebuilders are the cornerstone of the youth and peace and security agenda and should be prioritized by all partners. Tools such as the United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, issued in 2020, and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders checklist for meaningful participation provide practical guidance for strengthening engagement with civil society, including youth groups.

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<sup>25</sup> Mie Roesdahl, Jasper Peet-Martel and Sweta Velpillay, "A global system in flux: pursuing systems change for locally-led peacebuilding". *Conducive Space for Peace* (April 2021).

45. National coalitions on youth and peace and security bringing together organizations led by young people, national authorities and international partners, have been established in Canada, El Salvador, India, Iraq, Norway, Somalia, the Sudan, Sweden and the United States of America, as well as in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Such coalitions are instrumental to national-level coordination and implementation efforts. Regional coordination platforms on youth and peace and security exist in the Arab region, Asia and Europe. The Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security continues to act as the primary strategic platform for coordinating efforts by civil society, Member States and the United Nations system to advance the agenda.

46. An intergenerational global movement aimed at collective action, the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, was launched at the Generation Equality Forum in July 2021. A number of transformative actions taken under the Compact are focused on young people, in particular the participation, resourcing and protection of young women.

47. The collaboration with the World Bank Group on data, analysis and strategies in crisis-affected contexts should be more focused on young people's needs and priorities. A promising example is the joint regional risk and resilience assessment conducted in border areas between Afghanistan and other countries in Central Asia by the World Bank, the United Kingdom and the United Nations, which adopted a holistic approach to analysing the situation of young people, including the social, economic, cultural and institutional challenges they face.

### **III. Institutionalization of the youth and peace and security agenda**

48. The institutionalization of the agenda has noticeably accelerated since the adoption of Security Council resolution [2535 \(2020\)](#), with important milestones achieved at the national, regional and global levels. Nevertheless, much remains to be accomplished for the full institutionalization of the agenda, including adequate resourcing, systematic monitoring and bottom-up accountability.

#### **A. National efforts**

49. Member States took incremental steps to institutionalize the youth and peace and security agenda and integrate it into regional, national and local policy frameworks. Finland and Nigeria launched the first dedicated national action plans, in 2021. Efforts to develop dedicated plans are also ongoing in Jordan and the Philippines. The plans have been developed through participatory multi-stakeholder processes with the engagement of young people, government officials and civil society organizations, a good practice that all Member States should consider. A guide for public officials, launched in January 2022, outlines several pathways for the operationalization of the youth and peace and security agenda at the national level.<sup>26</sup>

50. Youth and peace and security was also integrated into national policies and laws in Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Jordan and Mexico, while Sweden integrated the agenda into its development cooperation framework. Australia, Bulgaria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ireland, Italy, Jordan and Sierra Leone refer to the youth and peace and security agenda in their national action plans on women and peace and security. Dedicated capacity for youth and peace and security were established across

<sup>26</sup> Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level: A Guide for Public Officials* (New York, 2022).

governmental entities in Finland, Iraq, Ireland, the Philippines and Sweden, while a division for youth and peace and security was established within the Ministry of Youth in Jordan.

51. The group of champions of youth and peace and security, established in 2017 under the leadership of Jordan and counting 26 countries and the European Union, has continued to provide a strategic platform for Member States to engage and to support the implementation of the youth and peace and security agenda.

## **B. Regional efforts**

52. Intergovernmental regional organizations have made important steps towards the institutionalization of the youth and peace and security agenda. This includes regional plans, such as the 2020 Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security of the African Union, operationalized by means of a 10-year implementation plan for the period 2020–2029. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations formally agreed to include youth and peace and security as a new priority area in the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the United Nations (2021–2025). The ASEAN Regional Forum, which includes ASEAN together with China, India, Japan and the United States, adopted the first joint ministerial statement on promoting the youth and peace and security agenda in 2021. The League of Arab States is currently developing a regional strategy regarding youth and peace and security for the Arab region (2022–2025) following a participatory multistakeholder process.

53. Other regional-level efforts include funding, with the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace of the European Union financing over 60 programmes supporting young people in peacebuilding, crisis management and situations of violent conflict. At the political level, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe established the Group of Friends of Youth and Security to facilitate dialogue among delegates, staff and young representatives. The Commonwealth incorporated peace and security data in the 2020 Youth Development Index, a triannual flagship report that captures the degree to which young people can live in safety and pursue their goals without the risk of violence.

54. The United Nations is also supporting regional efforts. The United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (see [S/2020/1168](#)), developed by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and partners includes women/youth and peace and security as one of 10 thematic priorities that will guide engagement in the region over the coming decade. In the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, UNESCO is supporting the development of a youth and peace and security roadmap. In December 2021, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia held the third dialogue between the Governments of Central Asian States and graduates of the Preventive Diplomacy Academy. In North-East Asia, in 2021, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UNESCO convened a series of virtual dialogues with young people from China, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea to strengthen regional collaboration on key peace-related policy issues.

## C. Global efforts

### United Nations

55. The 2020 report highlighted the importance of strengthening expertise on youth and peace and security within the United Nations, as reiterated in resolution 2535 (2020). In response, a network of focal points for youth and peace and security has been established, at headquarters and in the field, for 11 peacekeeping operations, 13 special political missions and 24 United Nations entities. The focal points are experts in a wide range of fields, including the political, protection, rule of law and uniformed capacities fields. The focal points meet quarterly under the leadership of the joint UNFPA-Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs secretariat on youth and peace and security. Peace and development advisors important support, with 62 per cent of the 106 advisors reporting, in 2020, that they were working to enhance the participation of young people in dialogue and mediation.<sup>27</sup> The youth and peace and security secretariat, together with focal points, will work closely with the United Nations Youth Office proposed in Our Common Agenda, to ensure coherence across our work on peace, sustainable development, humanitarian issues and human rights.

56. Capacity development and technical guidance tools have been developed and widely disseminated to support the work of the focal points and the implementation of the agenda. In 2021, the United Nations and the Folke Bernadotte Academy launched a youth and peace and security programming handbook to strengthen the operational readiness and capacities of United Nations practitioners. Building on that handbook, a staff training programme on realizing the youth and peace and security agenda<sup>28</sup> was designed by the United Nations System Staff College in partnership with the Academy and with the support of youth organizations. The implementation package for the United Nations Strategy on Youth, known as Youth 2030, which was developed to support the work of all 130 United Nations country teams, was released in September 2021. It includes specific guidance on youth and peace and security. The youth and peace and security agenda has been increasingly integrated into the strategic plans of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Women, UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

### Intergovernmental bodies

57. Of the 114 resolutions adopted by the Security Council between January 2020 and December 2021, 33 per cent include references to young people. This is a positive trend, up from 10 per cent between 2016 and 2019 (see figure I). The mandates of 7 out of 12 peacekeeping operations and 11 out of 25 special political missions reference youth and peace and security or the engagement of young people.<sup>29</sup> A more

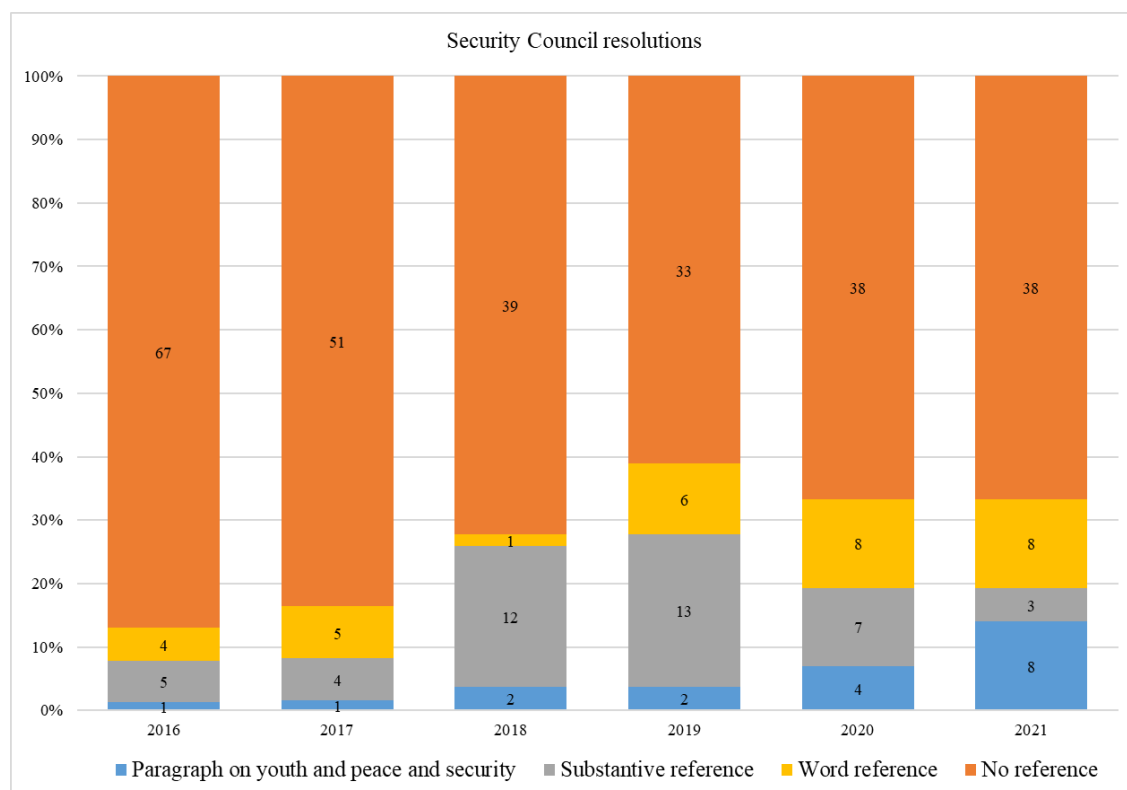
<sup>27</sup> UNDP and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, *2020 Annual Report: Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention* (New York, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> See [www.unssc.org/courses/realizing-youth-peace-and-security-agenda-0](http://www.unssc.org/courses/realizing-youth-peace-and-security-agenda-0).

<sup>29</sup> The seven peacekeeping operations are the following: United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei and United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The 11 special political missions are the following: United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS), United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive

systematic focus on young people in resolutions is, however, required. Similarly, in 42 per cent of statements of the President of the Security Council adopted in the reporting period, there is mention of young people, including in multiple statements in which the positive impact of engaging young people is highlighted. Reports of the Secretary-General presented to the Security Council since January 2020 are increasingly covering the situation of young people (see figure II): 32 per cent of the 230 reports include references to young people, for example in the context of the collaboration between the United Nations and the African Union, in the context of the formal and informal political participation of young people in Somalia.

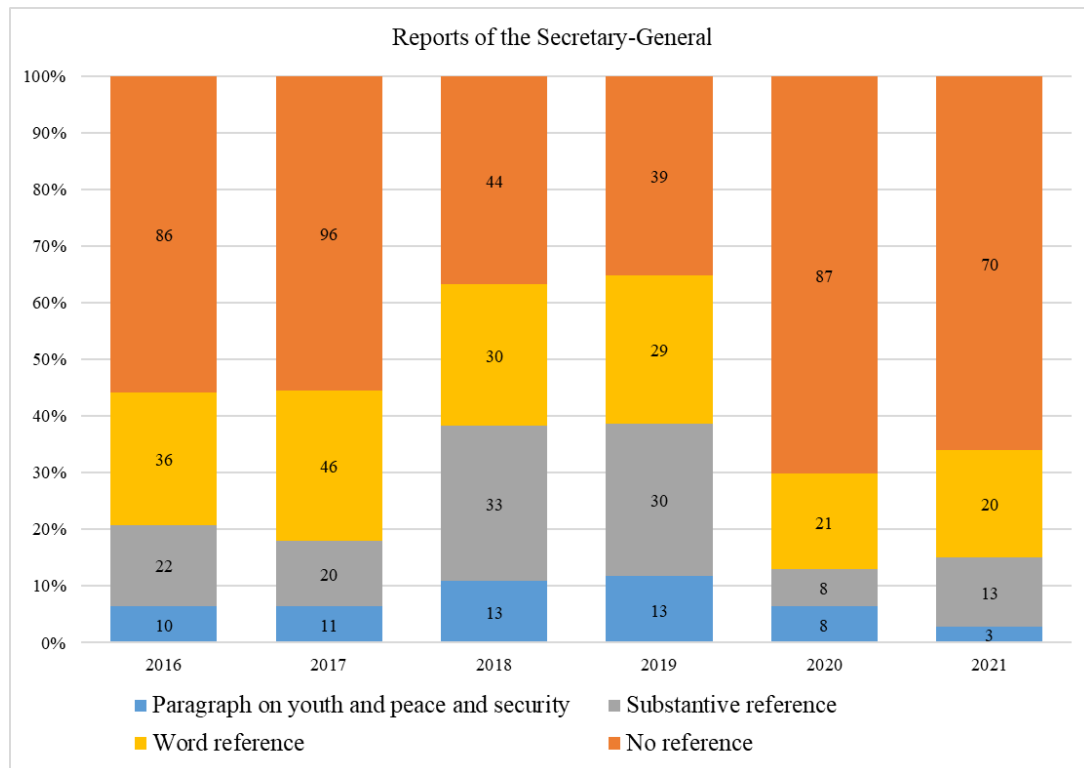
Figure I  
References to young people in Security Council resolutions



Diplomacy for Central Asia, United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus.



Figure II  
References to young people in reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council



58. The Security Council has increasingly sought young people's insights for its deliberations. Young briefers participated in thematic discussions on the climate crisis and country-specific discussions on Colombia, Haiti, Nigeria and Somalia. Young delegates have occasionally been invited to address the Council on behalf of their country, a practice that should be encouraged. The protection of all those who give briefings to the Security Council, including young women and men, is paramount.

59. A civil society working group on youth and peace and security led by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders was launched in December 2021 to advocate for the meaningful and intentional integration of civil society and youth perspectives into the deliberations of the Security Council.

60. The Peacebuilding Commission has continued to support the critical role played by young people and organizations led by them in peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In 2021, the Commission adopted a strategic action plan to strengthen its support for more meaningful youth participation. This resulted in the participation of young peacebuilders in nearly half of the Commission meetings in 2021. Since 2020, the Commission has heard from young people doing peacebuilding work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, the Niger, Nigeria, the Philippines and Sierra Leone. Based on its engagements with young peacebuilders, and based on regional and country visits and briefings, the Commission continued to provide policy and operational recommendations on youth and peace and security, including to the Security Council, such as the advice to the Security Council on women and peace and security of October 2021, in which it was stressed that young women needed to be empowered to contribute to peacebuilding initiatives.

61. Young people's advocacy for disarmament and non-proliferation is also increasingly assertive and visible. To mark International Youth Day, on 12 August

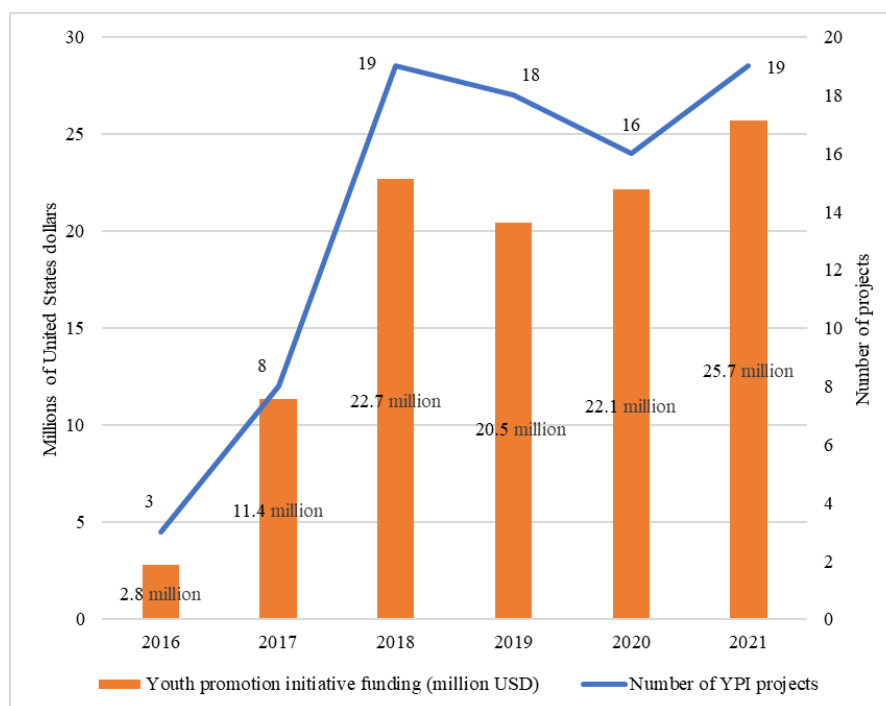
2021, a group of Youth Champions for Disarmament delivered the first-ever remarks by young people to a formal plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament. In September 2021, a young Kenyan activist briefed the Security Council on how young people are encouraging States to further strengthen the nuclear test ban regime. Youth participation in formal and informal meetings increased fivefold since the Office for Disarmament Affairs launched its Youth for Disarmament (#Youth4Disarmament) initiative in 2019. In its resolution 76/45, the second on youth, disarmament and non-proliferation, the General Assembly called for specific measures to promote youth participation in disarmament and non-proliferation.

#### D. Financing related to youth and peace and security

62. Ensuring adequate financing has been a central concern for the youth and peace and security agenda since its inception. Accelerated efforts are required to address persistent gaps in financing youth engagement in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

63. Within the United Nations system, a few key funds have played a significant role, including by promoting an intersectional approach that catalyses investments in peacebuilding led by young people and responsive to gender equality. It is crucial to enable young people to participate, whenever possible, in shaping the priorities set by those funds. The Peacebuilding Fund continues to support the contribution to peacebuilding, including through the annual Youth Promotion Initiative, the largest dedicated funding window in support of the agenda. In 2020 and 2021, the Fund invested a total of \$47.9 million in 35 projects through the Initiative. Since its establishment in 2016, \$105 million has been invested in 83 youth projects (see figure III) and 37.4 per cent of funds were allocated to civil society partners.

Figure III  
**Funding trends under the Youth Promotion Initiative of the Peacebuilding Fund**



64. The Youth Solidarity Fund of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations directly finances organizations led by young people, with \$2.5 million having been invested in 73 projects led by young people in 42 States since 2008. The United Nations Democracy Fund directly funds civil society organizations working on advocacy, human rights promotion and democratic participation, with 118 projects focused on young people in 68 States totalling \$26 million in investment since 2006. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund is another source of flexible and quality funding for organizations focused on and led by young people.

65. A major bottleneck is the absence of data collection, tracking and analysis on financing targeted at young people across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding portfolios. This lack of systematic data makes it difficult to assess how much of the official development assistance dedicated to peacebuilding supports programming focused on or led by young people, but it is likely a relatively small fraction. The United Nations has taken steps to address these gaps, including by incorporating youth empowerment and participation as a priority in the peacebuilding funding dashboard. According to the dashboard, less than 12 per cent of the \$876.8 million allocated to peacebuilding across the United Nations funds between 2015 and 2020 directly contributed to youth empowerment and participation. The "youth marker", which is currently being developed as part of Youth 2030, will enable the United Nations to better track youth funding across all pillars.

66. Despite some progress, most organizations led by young people do not have direct access to peacebuilding funding, which hinders organizational development and the compensation of young people's work. Most donors tend to prioritize time-bound and outcome-oriented grants, while peacebuilding led by young people benefits from flexible, longer-term, impact-oriented funding. To increase the financing of peacebuilding led by young people, donors should ease eligibility criteria, and application and reporting requirements. In addition, they should consult with youth organizations on funding priorities. Young women's organizations can face additional challenges with access to funding due to cultural bias and traditional exclusionary practices.

67. Promising civil society initiatives address these shortcomings, such as the local action fund for youth peace and security of Peace Direct, which has distributed \$900,000 to more than 200 groups that are led by young people or directly support young people and that have not received support from traditional donors. The aim of the youth and peace and security fund initiated by Search for Common Ground and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders, is to become a global fund built on small-scale investments, supporting young people-led and intergenerational peacebuilding where young people are co-owners as well as investors in the fund. Intermediary financing models rooted in collaboration between more established civil society and organizations led by young people can be an important avenue to enable such organizations led by young people to access funding.

68. Member States and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have increasingly focused on inequalities and the underlying causes of conflict. Through its fragility, conflict and violence strategy, the World Bank has committed to scaling up efforts to support young people as agents of change in conflict-affected countries. Increasing collaboration on youth and peace and security between aid partners at the analysis and prioritization stages is vital to guide investments to better address patterns of exclusion faced by young people.

## **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

69. Public trust in Governments and institutions has eroded significantly over the past decade, a trend that has been further exacerbated by COVID-19 and related misinformation campaigns during the past two years. This situation includes an important intergenerational dimension. Young people continue to experience exclusion from decision-making processes that affect them and a lack of equitable opportunities, and perceive an apparent inability – and a related lack of accountability – of older generations to address critical issues such as climate change, inequalities, injustices, corruption and conflicts. Many young activists face additional burdens in the form of threats and harassment and a shrinking civic space, both online and offline. Addressing these challenges across humanitarian, development and peace interventions is key to renewing the social contract and achieving sustainable peace and development.

### **Actions to be taken by the Security Council**

70. In acknowledging the progress thus far, I invite the Security Council to consider taking the following actions:

(a) Ensure that the mandate renewals of peacekeeping operations and special political missions include an acknowledgement of the importance of youth participation to the maintenance of international peace and security, and a call upon missions to integrate youth engagement in political, civil, human rights, protection, rule of law, and gender equality initiatives and in all other relevant mandated areas. There should be a requirement for reporting to include age- and gender-sensitive analysis and age- and sex-disaggregated data;

(b) Request field operations to monitor and provide age- and gender-responsive protection and support to young human rights defenders and peacebuilders at risk, including when engaging in online civic space;

(c) Create opportunities for young people to safely participate in meetings informing Security Council deliberations. The participation of young people should be inclusive and access for underrepresented groups and their organizations should be ensured, both at the global level and during country visits.

### **Actions to be taken by Member States and regional organizations**

71. Recognizing that the youth and peace and security agenda is the responsibility of all Member States, I invite Member States and regional organizations to consider taking the following actions:

(a) Ensure that COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction efforts are sensitive to young people's concerns and are shaped by active youth participation to build back better for future generations;

(b) Increase investments in human capital development through greater access to education, including human rights and peace education, access to digital resources and economic opportunities for all young people;

(c) Develop dedicated gender-responsive local, national and regional roadmaps on youth and peace and security in partnership with youth organizations, movements and networks;

(d) Appoint youth and peace and security focal points to lead national- and regional-level efforts and facilitate training for governmental officials on the meaningful engagement of young people;

(e) Ensure flexible, long-term and sustainable direct investment in peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts led by young people that are accessible to formal and informal organizations led by young people, including those led by young women and forcibly displaced young people, and consult young people on priorities;

(f) Together with multilateral actors, develop data systems to track investments in young people similar to those tracking funding for gender equality and women's rights. Member States could also consider setting aside minimum allocations in their official development assistance towards peacebuilding focused on and led by young people;

(g) To ensure time-sensitive responses to young people's reports on human rights violations and to bring perpetrators to justice, Member States are encouraged to adjust and strengthen country-level systems to systematically and impartially investigate threats, attacks, acts of intimidation, incitement to hatred and other human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violations, targeted at young people.

### **Actions to be taken by the United Nations**

72. To accelerate the efforts of Member States, the United Nations will explore taking the following actions, in line with Youth 2030:

(a) Reflect, in senior compacts, terms of reference and directives for senior leadership at headquarters, in field missions and in country offices – including heads of entities, special envoys, special representatives, resident coordinators, resident and non-resident representatives and humanitarian coordinators – commitments on meaningful youth participation, paying particular attention to the participation of young women and to the youth and peace and security agenda;

(b) Establish rapid response funds for the protection (including relocation, where necessary) of young peacebuilders and human rights defenders who face threats;

(c) Seek voluntary contributions to strengthen youth and peace and security capacities at headquarters, in field missions, at the regional and country levels, co-located across a range of offices within the peace and security pillar and within agencies, funds and programmes, and for the coordination function of the joint UNFPA-Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs secretariat on youth and peace and security.