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Youth Participation in Global Governance for Sustaining Peace and Climate Action

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Executive Summary

Youth movements have played an increasingly prominent role in calling for action to address climate change. Many youth-led organizations are also engaged in initiatives to build peace in their communities. In global policymaking fora, however, youth remain sidelined. The sidelining of youth peacebuilders and climate activists can be attributed to four main factors.

First, there are widespread misperceptions of youth grounded in age and gender stereotypes. Young men are often seen as perpetrators of violence, while young women are seen as passive victims. These misperceptions can lead policymakers to adopt a securitized approach to youth, peace, and security and overlook the efforts of young peacebuilders. In some cases, the perception that young activists are a threat to national security can also put them at risk.

Second, global policy frameworks on youth are outdated and piecemeal. While the UN Security Council has passed three resolutions on youth, peace, and security since 2015, there is no comparable framework for youth and sustainable development or climate action. Moreover, there is no overarching global framework on youth that links the youth, peace, and security and youth climate action agendas.

Third, youth organizations and activists are underfunded. Much of the work that young people do is voluntary. While there are some initiatives to direct more funding toward youth-led organizations, funding largely remains ad hoc, and many organizations lack the capacity to meet the onerous application and reporting requirements.

Finally, youth have weak institutional links to global governance fora. There are some mechanisms for consulting and involving youth, including the secretary-general's global envoy on youth, the UN-coordinated Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, and the Youth Constituency of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. However, youth have no direct decision-making role in the work of the UN and its member states, and engagement is often ad hoc.

To build peace and tackle climate change, governments and multilateral institutions must shift toward inclusive governance systems that involve and empower youth. They must also consider the synergies between youth, climate, and peace.

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Introduction

In the last five years, youth movements around the world have played a major role in increasing global, national, and local ambition to take climate action—a movement that is continuing to grow in strength and breadth. Many youth-led organizations from around the world are also engaged in initiatives to build peace and prevent violence in their communities.¹ Youth are increasingly calling for their voices to be heard and for policymakers to include them in decision-making processes at all levels.

This has led to some exceptional examples of youth influencing policymaking at the global level. Youth from around the world, together with their allies, succeeded in pushing for the historic UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace, and security (YPS), which was adopted in 2015.² This resolution recognized the positive contribution of youth to the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, including conflict prevention and resolution. The UN Security Council has subsequently passed two additional resolutions that together make up the YPS agenda. Resolution 2419, the second resolution on YPS, recognizes the role of young people in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements and in conflict prevention.³ Resolution 2535, adopted in 2020, emphasizes the meaningful inclusion of youth in peace processes and humanitarian action, as well as the protection of young peacebuilders.⁴ The secretary-general's appointment of a UN envoy on youth in 2013 has also opened the door for greater youth leadership in global governance and has strengthened advocacy for youth participation in decision making at the UN.

Overall, however, young people remain at the fringe of policymaking. They are usually sidelined rather than systematically included in decision-making fora, dialogues, and negotiations. Additionally, local-level work at the intersection of peace and climate change is not reflected at the

global level. For example, the resolutions that make up the YPS agenda exclude the impact of climate change as a risk to peace and security and the role of youth in climate action. This exclusion is particularly problematic due to the fact that 90 percent of the world's 1.8 billion youth live in developing or conflict-affected countries where climate change is a serious “risk multiplier” for peace and sustainable development.⁵

This issue brief outlines the synergies between the YPS and youth climate action agendas and examines a number of factors that contribute to young people's exclusion from global governance. It is based on several events and meetings convened in the fall of 2020, desk research, and fifteen interviews with individuals working on YPS and climate action. A research workshop on March 16, 2021, informed the final version of the issue brief.

Synergies between YPS and Climate Action

Youth have been at the forefront of efforts to demand urgent action on sustaining peace and addressing climate change. But while the YPS movement and youth climate movement emerged at similar times, they have taken different approaches (see Figure 1).

The climate action taken by youth is often characterized by marches and strikes to demand change from leaders. It counters the status quo and has a much smaller footprint in UN structures and little institutional recognition. YOUNGO, the Youth Constituency of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), provides perhaps the strongest institutional link between youth organizations and multilateral climate negotiations. Nonetheless, the youth climate movement remains at the periphery of the UNFCCC and its Conference of the Parties (COP). With the president of the COP changing every year, there is little institutional memory of how youth

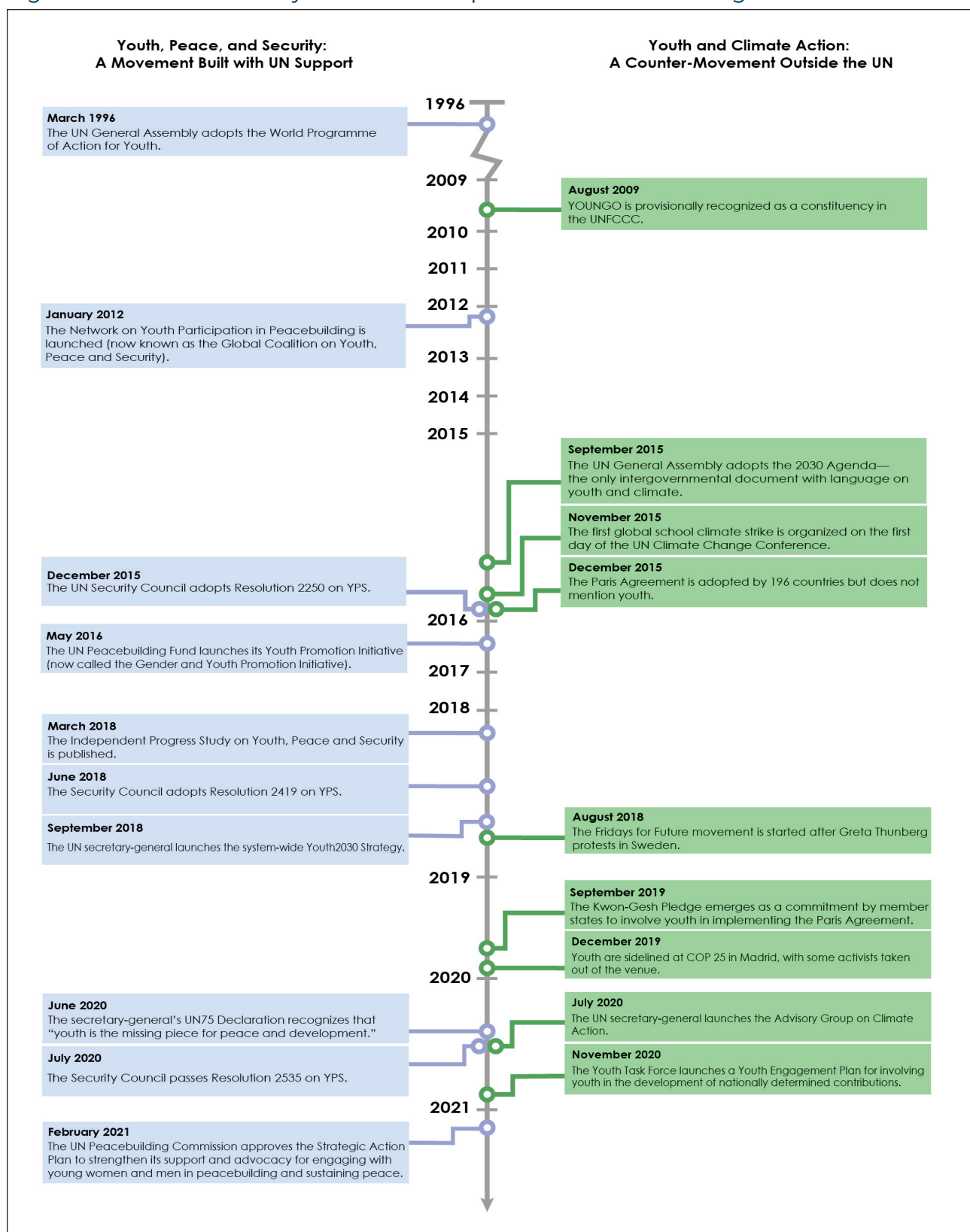
1 United Network of Young Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground, “Mapping a Sector: Bridging the Evidence Gap on Youth-Driven Peacebuilding,” 2017.

2 UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (December 9, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2250.

3 UN Security Council Resolution 2419 (June 6, 2018), UN Doc. S/RES/2419.

4 UN Security Council Resolution 2535 (July 14, 2020), UN Doc. S/RES/2535.

5 United Nations, “Youth and the SDGs,” available at www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/; International Institute for Strategic Studies and UNICEF UK, “Climate Change, Violence, and Young People,” 2015.

Figure 1. The evolution of youth action on peace and climate change⁶

⁶ The timeline is meant to highlight some of the main turning points in the youth and climate and YPS agendas and serve as a comparison between how these two movements emerged and evolved. It is not meant to be an exhaustive overview of all major events.

were involved in past conferences. The COP president sometimes assumes there is no youth constituency in place and invents new mechanisms, creating unnecessary overlap and missing the opportunity to build on what already exists.⁷

Without strong institutional linkages, youth pursue other forms of engagement in climate negotiations. At the 2019 COP, several youth protesters were escorted out of the building. This reflects the clear gap between the prominent climate activism of youth in the streets and their much smaller role in policymaking. The formation of the secretary-general's Advisory Group on Climate Change in July 2020 is an initial effort to bridge this gap by connecting youth leaders with the highest office at the UN.

Disagreement over issues such as youth political participation and sexual and reproductive rights has also prevented member states from adopting an overarching policy framework on youth and sustainable development.⁸ The Paris Agreement does not mention youth, only referring to intergenerational equity. The policy framework that most strongly makes this link is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where youth are mentioned in ten areas, but there is no stand-alone goal on youth as there is for women and girls. The most concrete link is in target 13.b, where youth are mentioned as important to building capacity to plan for and manage climate change.⁹ As a result, the UN development system has taken an ad hoc approach to youth, particularly when it comes to climate change.

The UN has a stronger normative and institutional framework for engaging youth on peace and security than on climate change, thanks in part to the three YPS resolutions. The UN secretary-

general is required to submit biennial reports to the Security Council on the progress made in implementing the YPS resolutions. The fact that the YPS agenda has the support of the Security Council, usually considered to be the most powerful body in the UN, is also of value at the global level. The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) also adopted a Strategic Action Plan on Youth and Peacebuilding in February 2021, though it does not mention climate change.¹⁰

Within the UN system, the agenda is coordinated by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) through the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). Additionally, UNFPA and PBSO co-chair the Global Coalition on YPS, where civil society and the UN systematically coordinate and collaborate with the aim of strengthening youth participation in peacebuilding policy and practice.¹¹ The establishment of a UN youth envoy has also increased the voice of youth at the UN and demonstrates the commitment of the organization to supporting youth leadership. The current envoy on youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, has been actively pushing for the creation of linkages between peace and climate action.¹²

At the global level, the links between the YPS agenda and the youth climate movement are relatively weak. Security Council Resolution 2535 on YPS makes a reference to “weather events” when referring to “young people’s meaningful engagement in humanitarian planning and response” and highlights that “young people play a unique role in strengthening the national, local and community-based capacities in conflict and post-conflict situations to prepare for and respond to increasingly frequent and severe weather events and natural disasters.”¹³

7 Virtual interview with experts on climate and youth, February 2021.

8 Virtual interview with YPS expert, February 2021.

9 UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UN Doc. A/RES/70/1, October 21, 2015.

10 UN Peacebuilding Commission, “Strategic Action Plan on Youth and Peacebuilding,” February 2021. The five key areas are: (1) supporting and advocating for engaging young women and men in peacebuilding; (2) providing advice to the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Economic and Social Council on the role of youth in peacebuilding; (3) promoting the role of youth in peacebuilding in bridging with other relevant UN bodies; (4) promoting youth participation in peacebuilding with regional and subregional organizations; and (5) assessing progress on implementation of the strategic action plan to advance the role of youth in peacebuilding.

11 Youth4Peace, “Global Coalition for Youth, Peace and Security,” available at <https://www.youth4peace.info/node/347>.

12 International Peace Institute, virtual policy forum on “Youth, Peace, and Climate Action,” October 22, 2020, available at <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/youth-peace-and-climate-action#2>.

13 UN Security Council Resolution 2535 (2020), UN Doc. S/RES/2535.

These weak links between YPS and youth climate action are exacerbated by a lack of consensus about how to link the peace and security and climate action agendas more broadly. According to one UN official, “Security Council members from the [Global] South have been more cautious in their approach, and rather than referring to climate as a ‘threat multiplier,’ they are referring to climate as a ‘risk multiplier,’ which is more closely connected with peacebuilding and prevention rather than... ‘boots on the ground.’”¹⁴ Firmly rooting climate action in prevention and sustaining peace could give local actors, including youth, a more prominent role and avoid framing youth and climate change as “threats” that require a securitized response. Overall, however, ongoing differences among Security Council members have meant that language on climate change is rarely included in its resolutions.¹⁵

Geographic disparities in who is driving the global YPS and youth climate action movements also weaken the linkages between them. There is a widespread impression that in practice the YPS agenda is focused on youth in the Global South. At the same time, youth from European countries are overrepresented at the COP and other climate change fora.¹⁶ To build peace and address climate change, both movements need to engage youth from all parts of the world.¹⁷

This gap between YPS and youth climate action reflects a “missing connection between the reality on the ground and policy at the high level.”¹⁸ At the local level, peacebuilders are often also climate activists and vice versa, and this is a growing trend. Youth, peace, and climate action are “in fact a trinity: indivisible.... You will not have one without either of the others.”¹⁹ While the magnitude of the risk and the specific challenges may differ, the

climate crisis is universal. It undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development and to promote and sustain peace—a reality that is unavoidable for youth peacebuilders and climate activists at the local level.

Why Are Youth Sidelined in Global Governance?

Because youth remain largely excluded from policymaking at the local, national, and global levels, they are increasingly mistrustful of national public institutions.²⁰ Many young people, particularly in conflict-affected countries, also share the frustration that global institutions are failing them and have turned a blind eye.²¹ Why are youth excluded from global governance institutions, and how can these institutions earn the trust of young people?

Perceptions of Youth Are Based on Age and Gender Stereotypes

One challenge is that the narrative around youth is either “extremely negative or exceedingly optimistic and not always evidence-based.”²² Youth are often not taken seriously, and their participation in decision-making processes is often symbolic. There is a gap between the optimistic language adopted in documents and policies such as the YPS resolutions and day-to-day perceptions of youth within governments and at the UN.²³

Particularly in conflict-affected countries, these misperceptions are highly gendered. Young men are often seen, at best, as “incomplete,” waiting to become adults, and, at worst, as perpetrators of violence. In this worldview, there is no seat for young men at the decision-making table, because

14 Virtual interview with UN official, April 2021.

15 On the Security Council’s approach to climate change, see: Jake Sherman, “How Can the Security Council Engage on Climate Change, Peace, and Security?” *IPI Global Observatory*, June 20, 2019.

16 Virtual interview with youth experts on climate, February 2021.

17 Virtual interview with academic expert on YPS, January 2021.

18 Virtual interview with academic expert on youth and climate, February 2021.

19 Participant in IPI event, October 23, 2020.

20 See, for example: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?” October 2020, Chapter 3.

21 Virtual interview with representative of Search for Common Ground, February 2021.

22 Virtual interview with academic expert on youth and climate, February 2021.

23 Virtual interview with UN official, January 2021.

they are the ones who need to be monitored. Young men are often viewed as a “threat to be contained” or “problem to be solved,” especially in discussions on terrorism and violent extremism. Young women, on the other hand, are often viewed as victims who need to be protected or as “inherently peaceful” and passive.²⁴ These perceptions contribute to the securitization of the YPS agenda, leading to the further marginalization and exclusion of youth.²⁵ They can also lead policymakers to ignore the agency of youth and their efforts to build peace and foster development in their communities.

Adolescent girls and young women often face double discrimination because of their age and sex; peacebuilding programs tend to focus on young men, and programs on women, peace, and security (WPS) tend to focus on adult women. Moreover, young women may miss out on their youth due to traditions such as early marriage that exclude them from political participation.²⁶ In many countries, there is a quick transition between childhood and adulthood that often skips over “youth” completely as young women “go straight from being young girls to being married women, even if they are fourteen.”²⁷ Those implementing the YPS agenda need to recognize how gender shapes young people’s actions and perceptions, which requires gathering age- and sex-disaggregated data. Ultimately, the WPS and YPS agendas share many goals: both seek to address gaps in participation in areas such as conflict prevention and sustaining peace through systemic change.²⁸ Those implementing both agendas can work together to involve young women in peacebuilding efforts.

There is also growing concern among both YPS and climate action groups about the threats facing young people working on peacebuilding and climate change. In many parts of the world, climate

youth movements are perceived as a threat to national security; youth climate activists and protesters are seen as instigators of rebellion rather than as political partners and experts exercising their right to speak. Climate defenders face the risk of stigmatization and hate speech in real life as well as in the digital space.²⁹ Online harassment often disproportionately targets women. In some cases, the threat to young peacebuilders and climate activists comes from their own governments or political parties.³⁰ For instance, the government of India recently arrested a young female climate activist who created a digital toolkit to gain support from around the world for India’s protesting farmers.³¹ Similarly, young peacebuilders, protestors, and human rights activists have been targeted in countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, Nigeria, and the US.³²

This targeting of youth activists goes against YPS Resolutions 2250 and 2535, which urge member states to provide protection for their citizens, including youth, in line with the Geneva Conventions of 1949, as well as the resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and other international laws. Resolution 2535 in particular “urges member states to facilitate an inclusive, safe, enabling and gender-responsive environment in which youth actors, including youth from different backgrounds are recognized and provided with adequate support and protection to implement violence prevention activities and support social cohesion.” This resolution also asks the UN secretary-general to develop a dedicated protection framework for young people as part of a new UN common agenda for protection.³³ However, the implementation of these provisions on the ground remains inadequate. As national, regional, and global institutions increase their engagement with youth,

24 Virtual interview with academic expert on youth and climate, February 2021; Helen Berents, “Thinking Intergenerationally: WPS and the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda,” *IPI Global Observatory*, October 7, 2020.

25 Graeme Simpson and Ali Altiok, “A Brief Analysis of New UN Security Council Resolution 2535 on Youth, Peace and Security,” *Interpeace*, August 2020.

26 UN Women, “Young Women in Peace and Security: At the Intersection of the YPS and WPS Agendas,” April 2018.

27 Virtual interview with academic expert on youth and climate, February 2021.

28 UN Women, “Young Women in Peace and Security.”

29 Civicus, “We Will Not Be Silenced: Climate Activism from the Frontlines to the UN,” November 2019.

30 Virtual interview with representative of Search for Common Ground, February 2021.

31 “Protests After 22-Year-Old Indian Climate Activist Disha Ravi Arrested in ‘Unprecedented Attack on Democracy,’” *CBS News*, February 16, 2021.

32 International Peace Institute, policy forum on “An Intergenerational Dialogue on Youth, Peace and Climate Action,” New York, March 16, 2020.

33 UN Security Council Resolution 2535 (July 14, 2020), UN Doc. S/RES/2535.

they also need to establish a strong system for protecting youth activists, both online and offline.

Policy Frameworks Are Outdated and Piecemeal

Apart from the three Security Council resolutions on YPS, there is no recent international policy framework on youth. The last such framework dates back to 1995, when the General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), providing a framework for national governments to take action to improve the situation of young people globally.³⁴ Under the WPAY, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) created a guide recommending actions governments at all levels could take to address the needs of youth.³⁵ While this was an important framework for youth policy, it is not clear to what extent it has been implemented. Moreover, none of the framework's fifteen priorities include climate-related issues.³⁶

The UN Youth 2030 Strategy, launched by the secretary general in 2018 with the support and leadership of the UN envoy on youth, is the first system-wide document on youth for the UN. It is a step in the right direction, providing “an umbrella framework to guide the entire UN as it steps up its work with and for young people across its three pillars—peace and security, human rights and sustainable development—in all contexts.”³⁷

The strategy has five priorities: participation, access to education, economic empowerment, youth and human rights, and peace and resilience building. Climate action is mentioned in the section on peace but is not one of the five priorities. The absence of climate action as a global priority for youth demonstrates how quickly this topic has gained momentum among youth in the few years since the launch of the strategy. Unlike the WPAY, the Youth 2030 Strategy has not been adopted by

member states, meaning that they are not accountable for and do not have ownership over its implementation at the national level. However, governments are expected to support UN country teams in implementing the strategy, and the UN has been working to raise awareness of the youth agenda and build capacity to implement it at the local, regional, and global levels.

While the lack of an overarching policy framework has limited collective action on youth by UN member states, it has also had certain benefits. If a policy framework were designed and negotiated in the traditional manner, it would likely have a top-down implementation structure. This could jeopardize the bottom-up, youth-led mechanisms that have emerged organically. If member states decide to develop an overarching policy framework on youth, they should co-design it with youth and use a mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches.

Youth Activists Are Underfunded

Youth organizations and activists continue to be underfunded. Much of the work that young people do is voluntary, and “there is an expectation that youth can work for free.”³⁸ For the YPS agenda, the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has been the main funder at the UN, providing financial support to youth-related activities under its Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative. However, this initiative does not fund youth-led organizations directly, a major impediment for youth trying to access funding. More recently, Search for Common Ground and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) established another funding mechanism, the Youth, Peace and Security Fund, to directly fund YPS programs and youth-led activities. The two organizations administer the funds and are seeking to raise over \$1.8 billion over the next ten years. This initiative, considered “the world's first youth-owned fund,” is innovative and community-centered.³⁹

34 United Nations, “World Programme of Action for Youth,” 1995.

35 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Guide to the Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth,” 2006.

36 The fifteen priorities of WPAY include: education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure time activities, girls and young women, full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision making, globalization, information and communications technology, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict, and intergenerational issues.

37 United Nations, “Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People,” 2018.

38 Virtual interview with member of United Network of Young Peacebuilders, January 2021.

39 Search for Common Ground, “Youth, Peace & Security Fund,” available at <https://www.sfcg.org/the-youth-peace-and-security-fund/>.

Although the UN does not have a dedicated funding stream for climate-related work by youth organizations, a number of UN entities have supported youth-led climate initiatives. For instance, the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) Small Grants Programme has provided funding for youth organizations and NGOs that work with youth on projects related to mitigating or adapting to climate change.⁴⁰

For both YPS and youth climate action, support has often been project-based and ad hoc. This is a challenge for youth organizations that lack core funding and makes it hard for them to engage in long-term planning. However, there have been some efforts to provide more systematic and sustainable funding. For example, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) provides structural funding to UNOY that supports its staffing costs. It also gives funding to UNOY regional members and coordinators, giving them the freedom to choose what to use it on.⁴¹

Many youth organizations also lack the human resources, technical capacity, and experience needed to fill out complicated funding applications, navigate extensive donor regulations, and fulfill donor monitoring requirements. There have been some efforts to make funding more accessible to youth organizations. For example, in 2020, MADRE launched VIVA Girls, a fund to support the leadership, creativity, and organization of young women and girls. Instead of filling out detailed applications, applicants shared their ideas via email, WhatsApp, or Viber.⁴² Providing flexible funding to youth-led organizations allows them to focus on their goals rather than on complex donor requirements or lengthy proposals.

Youth Have Weak Institutional Links to Global Governance Fora

Governments and multilateral institutions are beginning to recognize youth as key actors in building peace and advocating for climate action.

For example, the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, and other international bodies are increasingly inviting youth to deliver briefings at meetings. Some youth have also been selected to participate in high-level groups or task forces.

Nonetheless, there is still a significant gap between youth organizations and global governance structures. Youth have no direct decision-making role in the work of the UN and its member states. The role of youth remains largely symbolic and ad hoc, and they are usually only engaged in an advisory capacity. To add to these challenges, youth organizations are mainly horizontal, while global governance institutions are vertical. Many youth organizations resist the need to have a spokesperson or leader, which makes it challenging for them to engage with organizations that are hierarchical and bureaucratic. To bridge this gap, the UN75 report calls on “the UN to be more inclusive of the diversity of actors in the 21st century” by identifying and including civil society and youth organizations.⁴³

The governance gap grows even wider at the national level. People under the age of thirty make up only 2 percent of parliamentarians worldwide.⁴⁴ In countries with ongoing peace processes, young people continue to be “undervalued and unrecognized for their capacity to build peace.”⁴⁵ Particularly in conflict-affected countries with large youth populations, the overarching mindset that youth are “troublemakers” feeds the perception that they do not add value to substantive discussions on climate change or peace processes. While there are many examples of youth-led organizations working on issues of peace and sustainable development at the grassroots level, they are often disconnected from the national level. In the climate sphere, nationally determined contributions are mostly developed by governments alone, with little substantive input from youth, though this is starting to change. These national-level disconnects exacerbate the global governance gap. Moreover, global frameworks

40 Search for Common Ground, “Youth, Peace & Security Fund,” available at <https://www.sfcg.org/the-youth-peace-and-security-fund/>.

41 Virtual interview with member of United Network of Young Peacebuilders, January 2021.

42 See: MADRE, “Application for Viva Girls Grant,” available at www.madre.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/Application%20for%20VIVA%20GIRLS%20Grant.pdf.

43 United Nations, “The Future We Want, the United Nations We Need,” September 2020.

44 Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Youth Participation in National Parliaments,” 2018.

45 Ali Altioek and Irena Grizelj, “We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes,” United Nations, 2019.

Table 1. Synergies between the YPS and climate action agendas

	Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS)	Nexus between YPS and Youth and Climate Action	Youth and Climate Action
Perceptions of the Role of Youth	<p>When it comes to peace and security, male youth are often perceived as threats and female youth as victims.</p> <p>There is also an impression that the YPS agenda is only for youth in the Global South.</p>	<p>The language on youth in official documents on YPS and climate change is often aspirational, and youth are perceived as playing a symbolic role.</p>	<p>While overall the climate action movement is more broad-based, there is a perception that it is disproportionately driven by youth in the Global North.</p>
International Policy Frameworks	<p>The UN Security Council has passed three resolutions on YPS (2250 in 2015, 2419 in 2018, and 2535 in 2020).</p>	<p>No resolution or UN framework has linked the role of youth in climate action and peace.</p>	<p>The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development mentions the role of youth in climate. The Paris Agreement on climate change does not mention youth.</p>
Funding Challenges	<p>The UN Peacebuilding Fund's Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative is the UN's main source of funding for youth working on YPS, but their work remains underfunded.</p>	<p>Underfunding is a challenge that transcends both agendas. Youth have a hard time accessing funding given the burdensome application processes and funding requirements that often disqualify them.</p> <p>Youth working at the intersection of these two agendas also have a hard time accessing funds given the siloed nature of funding streams (i.e., they are only on peace or only on climate).</p>	<p>While there is funding available for youth to travel to the annual Conference of the Parties (COP), work on climate is underfunded, particularly at the national and local levels.</p>
Links to Global Decision Making	<p>While there is a Global YPS Coalition, there is no regular interaction between youth and Security Council members aside from discussions around the YPS resolutions. Moreover, special political missions and peacekeeping operations do not have youth focal points, which exacerbates this disconnect.</p>	<p>Youth are often sidelined and excluded from all levels of decision-making processes on both YPS and climate action.</p> <p>At the same time, as youth increasingly raise their voices and assert their leadership from the sidelines, their protection needs increase.</p>	<p>The involvement of youth in official climate change processes largely depends on the COP presidency and is ad hoc. The only formal connection is through YOUNGO (the youth constituency of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), but youth have little direct say in decision making.</p>

such as the YPS agenda are not always implemented at the national level. As one youth advocate said, “Countries sign [on] to [the] YPS agenda as a political tool but do not believe it applies internally.”⁴⁶

Nonetheless, there are positive examples of youth engagement in multilateral fora, particularly at the regional level. The Council of Europe’s co-management system has supported youth participation at the highest level. Within the council, young Europeans are represented in the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), which has thirty representatives from youth NGOs and networks. In addition, ministers and representative bodies working on youth issues are part of the council’s European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ). Both the CCJ and CDEJ co-manage the Joint Council on Youth, which is the “supreme decision and policy-making body for the Council of Europe’s governmental and non-governmental partners in the Youth Department.”⁴⁷ The Joint Council on Youth also develops a shared position on the youth sector’s priorities and budgets. The result is a “co-managed system where youth have a say in all decisions that directly affect them.”⁴⁸ Moreover, the Council of Europe’s Youth Department is a core component of its regular budget, which helps institutionalize engagement with youth. This framework could be a model for other regional and global multilateral bodies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Climate change is increasingly undermining sustainable development and altering the peace and security landscape. To accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, governments and multilateral institutions must shift from top-down approaches toward inclusive governance systems that involve and empower youth. They must also consider the synergies between youth, climate, and peace. The majority of youth live in developing countries, and many are experiencing firsthand the impact of climate

change as a root cause of conflict in their communities. Failure to focus on these synergies could result in the securitization of the youth, peace, and security agenda and inaction in the face of challenges such as climate-related migration. Youth must have a proactive role in providing long-term solutions to preventing and halting climate change and mitigating its impact on peace.

This year presents several opportunities for increasing youth inclusion in decision-making processes and the formation of global policy frameworks. The twenty-sixth UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties in November will provide world leaders with an opportunity to consider how to meaningfully include youth in climate action, particularly through the development and implementation of nationally determined contributions. The presence of several climate-friendly countries in the Security Council also provides an opportunity to reflect upon the growing impact of climate change on youth in conflict-affected countries and to consult youth on this issue.

Governments and multilateral institutions should move beyond ad hoc approaches to including youth that relegate them to an advisory role. Instead they should systematically and meaningfully engage youth in decision-making processes at the local, national, and global levels. The following are recommendations for governments and multilateral institutions to better assess the links between youth, peace, and climate change and include young people in decision-making processes.

- **Bridge the gap between national governments and youth organizations:** Governments should work closely with youth organizations to develop local action plans on youth, peace, and sustainable development. Once such local action plans are developed, governments and youth organizations could co-create and co-lead national action plans. Governments in both the Global North and the Global South should also work closely with youth organizations when developing and

⁴⁶ Virtual interview with representative of Search for Common Ground, February 2021.

⁴⁷ Council of Europe, “Joint Council on Youth,” 2020, available at www.coe.int/en/web/youth/joint-council-on-youth.

⁴⁸ Virtual interview with representative of Global Challenges Foundation, February 2021.

implementing their nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

- **Bridge the gap between global governance institutions and youth organizations:** Global governance institutions should put in place mechanisms to consult with youth at the international, national, and local levels. The Security Council's informal working group on climate security should regularly meet with youth, particularly youth from settings where UN peace operations are present. The Security Council should also invite a youth representative to speak in all climate-related discussions, as when it invited the chair of the Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change in February 2021. The Group of Friends on Climate and Security should also regularly invite youth peacebuilders and climate activists to meetings to interact with member states and discuss synergies and areas for collaboration. In addition, the president of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC could appoint a youth envoy or champion to liaise with YOUNGO and other youth around the world. This could ensure that institutional memory on youth engagement is passed on from year to year and strengthen links between informal and formal UNFCCC processes. Looking ahead to 2022, youth should be substantively engaged early on during preparations for the proposed Stockholm+50 Conference, including through the UN Major Group for Children and Youth. The youth representatives involved in these processes should be chosen by youth organizations themselves rather than by officials in governments or multilateral institutions.
- **Systematically put youth on the agenda of intergovernmental fora and conferences:** The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) should more seriously consider youth as a link between peace and development. Each HLPF session should consider how youth are involved in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including target 13b, which links youth and climate change. The Security Council should include strong language on the impact of climate change on youth in crisis settings in future YPS resolutions without securitizing the agenda.
- **Prioritize YPS and youth climate action within the UN Secretariat:** UN bodies such as the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), and the Development Coordination Office (DCO) should prioritize the YPS and climate action agendas. For example, DPPA and DPO could appoint a youth focal point in each special political mission and peacekeeping operation. This could help UN missions mainstream issues related to youth into their day-to-day operations, as similar positions have done in missions deployed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Youth focal points could also ensure that UN missions consider the protection needs of youth peacebuilders. Similarly, DCO should ensure that resident coordinators prioritize youth engagement in developing and rolling out the sustainable development cooperation frameworks that guide the work of all UN agencies at the country level.
- **Make funding mechanisms more accessible to youth organizations:** Both multilateral and bilateral donors should create youth-friendly funding mechanisms that are less focused on reporting than on delivering and on strengthening recipients' capacity in financial management. They should also review grant application requirements to make them less onerous for small, youth-led organizations with limited resources.
- **Expand the evidence base on the intersections between youth, climate change, and peace:** There is a need for more research on how youth are impacted by climate change, particularly in fragile settings, and how youth are taking leadership roles in adapting to climate change.

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