

# **Bridging the Gap: Leveraging synergies between the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R)**

Short thematic paper submission for the Second Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security<sup>1</sup>

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## **Executive Summary**

A decade after its adoption, the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda faces a critical implementation gap: while policy commitments to youth participation and protection have expanded, these are not consistently reflected in how security institutions operate in practice. This paper argues that bridging this gap requires leveraging synergies with Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R). SSG/R offers practical entry points to transform security institutions from potential sources of youth grievance into partners for peace. By leveraging YPS National Action Plans as strategic bridges, youth participation in security sector governance can be promoted and enhance prevention and responsiveness. Strengthening the integration of YPS and SSG/R can enhance prevention, accountability, and trust, and support more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding outcomes.

## **1. SSG/R provides entry points for operationalising the YPS Agenda**

SSG/R provides practical entry points for operationalising the YPS Agenda, due to the synergies between its core principles and the five pillars of the YPS Agenda. At its core, SSG/R seeks to broaden inclusion in security sector governance and oversight, creating opportunities to integrate youth perspectives into decision-making processes.

This directly supports the YPS *Prevention* pillar by addressing the “violence of exclusion” by giving young people a stake in the security architecture. This said, as young people make up the vast majority of public and private security personnel, halting this violence requires preventative measures both through better security sector governance and more inclusive business conduct.

*Examples include the inclusion of youth representatives in the committees drafting National Security Strategies, integrating youth-led data into community policing plans, and lowering age barriers for participation in security oversight bodies (e.g., parliamentary defense committees and police complaints commissions).*

SSG/R also reinforces the YPS pillars of *Protection* and *Prevention*. A responsive security sector is one that adapts its services to the specific needs of its population. For YPS, this means shifting from a reactive, enforcement-heavy approach to a preventive, service-oriented model that addresses the root causes of youth grievances.

*Examples include strengthening the accountability and independent oversight of the security sector, including through independent institutions and civil society monitoring, specifically regarding abuses against young people, creating a protective environment that fosters trust.*

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## 2. Leveraging YPS National Action Plans (NAPs) as strategic bridges for YPS and SSG/R

National Action Plans on Youth, Peace and Security are a key mechanism for translating global YPS commitments into national policy. However, while many states are developing YPS NAPs, they often lack specific security sector commitments, leaving aside many important governance issues with peace and security implications. Conversely, security sector reform strategies frequently overlook youth-specific engagements.

This gap is important as the security sector is often an important point of interaction between the state and young people. These interactions shape whether youth perceive the state as a provider of security or a source of grievance. Embedding SSG/R objectives within YPS NAPs can help bridge this divide by aligning youth priorities with security sector governance. This requires integrating security actors and oversight bodies throughout the NAP lifecycle, from design to implementation, and grounding policies in evidence on youth-specific security concerns. It is also important that YPS NAPs be aligned with regional peace and security and SSG/R frameworks, to address transnational drivers of youth insecurity that exceed national boundaries.

Three core SSG/R principles can guide this process:

1. **Inclusiveness:** ensuring that security policies reflect the needs of diverse youth groups, and that young people are meaningfully included in decision-making procedures, while recognising that youth is not homogeneous and that age intersects with gender, ethnicity, class, disability, displacement, and geography to shape experiences of insecurity and access to decision-making,
2. **Accountability:** strengthening integrity, transparency, and independent oversight of the security sector, which will in turn increase the responsiveness and accessibility of security to youth.
3. **Effectiveness:** adapting security delivery to better respond to youth security needs, in order to foster trust in the security sector among young people.

*Examples include youth representation in security oversight bodies (Participation), auditing security policies for discrimination (Protection), involving youth in designing disengagement programs (Reintegration).*

YPS National Action Plans can serve as practical tools to translate policy commitments into changes in how security institutions operate.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The Second Independent Progress Study should recognize that transforming the security sector is critical to the success of the YPS agenda, as the "violence of exclusion" is perpetuated when security institutions mandated to protect citizens instead marginalize the demographic most affected by conflict and violence.

Making YPS commitments a reality can only be achieved through reforms to security policies, practices, and institutions, and leveraging SSG/R to this purpose. Crucially, YPS National Action Plans (NAPs) can act as strategic vehicles for this integration and help empower the security sector to shift from a source of grievance to a partner in prevention. Ultimately, sustainable peace is impossible without a security sector that is not only accountable to young people but actively governed *with* them.

The Independent Progress Study could consider:

- Encouraging Member States to systematically integrate security sector components into YPS National Action Plans.
- Supporting data collection and analysis on youth–security sector interactions and young people’s perceptions of state security providers, to better inform policy and address specific drivers of youth grievance and exclusion.
- Strengthening collaboration between YPS and SSR actors within the UN system, including through the Peacebuilding Architecture, to support more coherent and operational approaches at country level.