DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

# Applying lessons from the Women, Peace and Security agenda to the Youth, Peace and Security agenda

## Background note on how to aid implementation through an SSG/R lens

## About DCAF

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

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# Prioritizing protection needs to strengthen accountability

## Introduction: Protection

Both the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agendas consider protection a fundamental pillar to guide implementation. Because women and youth are profoundly affected by insecurity in different ways, these Agendas were created to counteract systemic trends that expose them to disproportionate violence, exclusion, and abuse. In both, protection means not only shielding individuals from harm, but also ensuring conditions in which they can exercise their rights and participate safely in public life and in peace and security processes. In realizing the protection ambitions of the WPS Agenda, actors have taken innovative measures to draw attention to and proactively address particular protection needs of women, and this approach could yield benefits for the YPS Agenda.

## Protection needs within WPS

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda illustrated the value and impact in identifying particular challenges faced by women and through concerted efforts could strengthen global and local efforts. In WPS, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) was identified both as a pressing protection need, as well as it also being a subject that had broader political support.[1] The WPS Agenda thus prioritized combatting CRSV by making it a focus in various security council resolutions, created strong oversight and monitoring mechanisms, and generally enhanced accountability on use of sexual violence in conflict.[2] This model of focusing protection efforts on an issue in which there is relative political consensus and a serious protection deficit could be applied to the YPS Agenda.

## Tailoring protection needs to YPS

Protection needs under the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda extend beyond direct exposure to physical violence and encompass a broader set of risks that shape how young people safely participate in civic, political, and social life. Youth consistently identify the protection of civic and education spaces as core priorities, particularly in contexts where schools, universities, student movements, and youth-led organizations are targeted, restricted, or securitized. Ensuring the safety and accessibility of these spaces is central to enabling youth participation, community organizing, and prevention-oriented peacebuilding. Likewise, digital protection has emerged as a distinct protection need for youth, who face heightened risks of online harassment, surveillance, disinformation, and digital repression linked to their civic engagement and political expression, which can turn into physical threats.

Addressing these protection needs requires deliberate action across multiple levels of the YPS Agenda. At the international level, greater attention could be given to youth protection through strengthened Security Council language on these specific protection needs, including through the use of thematic resolution, regular thematic reporting, and the consideration of dedicated mandates or mechanisms to monitor violations against youth in civic, education, and digital spaces. Where political consensus is lacking at the Security Council, the UN Youth Office has been mandated by the Security Council to advance the YPS Agenda,[3] and could also serve as a driver for sustained action on YPS, much like UN Women has for WPS.

At the national and local levels, collective action is needed to translate these commitments into practice. This includes integrating youth protection priorities into national youth frameworks, fostering dialogue between

[1] International Alert, *Twenty Years of Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Lessons from the Field* (October 2020), p. 4.

[2] United Nations Office on the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, "About the Office," accessed 12 December 2025.

[3] UN Security Council, Resolution 2807, S/RES/2807 (2025), para. 5.

youth and security institutions, and supporting localized protection initiatives that build trust while safeguarding both physical and digital spaces essential to youth participation and peacebuilding.

### Key takeaways

The experience of the WPS Agenda demonstrates that prioritizing clearly defined protection needs can drive political attention, strengthen accountability, and translate normative commitments into tangible change. Applying a similar approach within the YPS Agenda, by identifying youth-defined protection priorities and advancing them through coordinated action at international, national, and local levels, offers a pathway to more effective implementation. Anchoring these efforts in security sector engagement, and locally driven initiatives can help ensure that protection under YPS enables meaningful youth participation and contributes to inclusive and sustainable peace.

- **YPS protection efforts**: International and national policymakers must champion youth protection needs, specifically in education and digital spaces where there is relative political consensus and serious protection , and work collaboratively to translate these commitments into practice.
- **Building trust**: National policymakers and security providers should integrate youth-defined protection priorities into national policy while supporting local initiatives that foster trust between young people and security forces.

## Localizing security needs

### Introduction: Localization

Global normative agendas like WPS and YPS derive their strength from their universal principles, yet their impact ultimately depends on how meaningfully they are translated into local practice. While these agendas provide a shared framework for action at the international and national levels, they are necessarily broad in scope and ambition. Without deliberate efforts to adapt them to diverse political, social, cultural, and security contexts, implementation risks remaining abstract, technocratic, or disconnected from the lived realities of those they are intended to serve.

Localization has therefore emerged as an enabling condition for inclusive and resilient security. Developing flexible, context-sensitive solutions allows global commitments to be interpreted, owned, and operationalized by local actors, including civil society, community leaders, and local authorities, who are best positioned to identify priorities, constraints, and opportunities. Such approaches also help to bridge the gap between national policy processes and grassroots action, fostering accountability, legitimacy, sustainability.

Experiences from both the WPS and YPS agendas underscore that localization is not a formulaic exercise, but an iterative process that requires dialogue, adaptation, and investment in local capacities. Lessons learned from WPS localization efforts offer valuable insights for advancing YPS implementation, particularly in ensuring that global peace and security frameworks remain responsive, accessible, and relevant at the community level.

### Lessons from localizing WPS

Buy-in for WPS at the local levels is seen by many as one of the key elements for a sustained commitment and successful implementation of national action plans and related WPS activity[4]. Based on

[4] Laura J. Shepherd and Emma Kirby, 'The Futures Past of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (2016), p. 385; Valeria Mazzuca, *Towards a Fuller Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (London: LSE Women, Peace and Security Centre, 2016); Gender Security Project, *Twenty Years of*

contextualization and the active involvement of "subnational organizations such as local authorities and traditional leaders", progress and calls for action with respect to such localization of national action plans are a recurring topic in the annual reports on WPS of the UN Secretary General[5] and in WPS Resolutions[6]. Supported by UN Women, those localization efforts have been spearheaded by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and resulted in the development of a toolkit on the localization of the UNSCR 1325 on WPS in 2018[7]. One noted challenge to successfully involve people, particularly women, at the local level are translating broad, global commitments into local contexts, and sometimes quite literally. The lack of WPS resources in local languages has been cited as an impediment to generating local support.[8] Another challenge is that local activists pushing for reforms often face backlash within their own communities due to engrained cultural values, norms and/or power structures,[9] which has only reiterated the importance of tailoring WPS efforts to local contexts while emphasizing the "protection" pillar of WPS.

WPS efforts to localize the Agenda has spurred innovative and tailored community oriented policing and local security initiatives that involve women's groups and strengthen women's participation within security services with varying levels of success.[10] These models can be adapted to more intentionally incorporate youth perspectives and leadership—ensuring SSR efforts promote locally-driven security strategies inclusive of youth priorities.

Moreover, various WPS stakeholders have developed guidance and tools to facilitate localization efforts.[11] Many of these tools by their nature are designed to be flexible and contextualized, and are therefore of relevance to actors in the YPS ecosystem to assist in their own localization efforts.

## Relevance for YPS localization efforts

YPS too is given a clear mandate to localize the Agenda, acknowledging the critical role of youth organizations in delivering this mandate. However, resources on how to do this are still lacking and existing good practices and methods for implementation at the national level is also still in a nascent stage. Thus, guidance is needed on how to localize the YPS Agenda and make YPS more adaptive, understandable and accessible to implement at the local level, while linking it with national and international efforts.

## Key takeaways

Localization is central to translating the normative ambitions of the WPS and YPS agendas into meaningful security outcomes. Experience from WPS demonstrates that sustained local buy-in, accessible tools, and context-sensitive approaches are essential to effective implementation. Applying these lessons to YPS—by investing in youth-led localization, adapting existing guidance, and ensuring accessibility through local

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*Resolution 1325: Reflections from an Arab Perspective* (2016); Women In International Security (WIIS), *Twenty Years of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans: Analysis and Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC: WIIS Global, 2020).

[5] Laura J. Shepherd and Emma Kirby, 'The Futures Past of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (2016), p. 385; Women In International Security (WIIS), *Twenty Years of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans: Analysis and Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC: WIIS Global, 2020).

[6] UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000), 2122 (2013), and 2493 (2019).stress the importance of local approaches to realizing the WPS Agenda.

[7] *From Best Practice to Standard Practice: A Toolkit on the Localization of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women and Peace and Security* (Global Network of Women's Peacebuilders, 2018).

[8] Gender Security Project, *Twenty Years of Resolution 1325: Reflections from an Arab Perspective* (2016)

[9] *Twenty Years of Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Lessons from the Field* (International Alert, 2020), p. 4.

[10] An assessment by UN Women of its gender-responsive community-oriented policing efforts in South and Southeast Asia found that considerable progress was still yet to be made while another study by EPPI Centre reviewing gender-responsive policing initiatives found that community policing initiatives are generally effective in enhancing the feeling of security, especially among women. See: UN Women, *Gender-Responsive Community-Oriented Policing Efforts in South and Southeast Asia: Regional Assessment Report* (2025); EPPI Centre, *Review of Gender-Responsive Policing Initiatives* (n.d.).

[11] ASEAN, *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security: Localization Toolkit and Guidelines* (2023); UN Women Europe and Central Asia, *Guidelines on Localization of UNSCR 1325 in Ukraine* (2021); COACT, *Localization Manual for Ugandan Organizations* (2022).

languages—can strengthen legitimacy, accountability, and impact. Anchoring YPS in locally driven security priorities is therefore critical to ensuring that global commitments remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive at the community level.

- **Foster local dialogue and collaboration**: National and local actors must build and promote localization initiatives that establish direct dialogue and collaboration between local security actors and youth communities.
- **Adapt existing frameworks**: Actors should draw upon established localization tools from the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and tailor this guidance specifically to fit the context and goals of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda.
- **Ensure linguistic accessibility**: National and local actors, supported by donors, must ensure that National Action Plans (NAPs) and related YPS policy documents are available in local languages to facilitate effective localization and implementation

# Promoting inclusion and intersectionality

## Introduction: Intersectionality and security

Intersectionality is a feminist concept, which recognises that individuals experience overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and privilege based on gender, age, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and other identities. Applied to security, an intersectional approach means recognising that insecurity is not experienced uniformly, and that people's vulnerabilities and resilience depend on these intersecting identities. This has direct implications for the design of security institutions and interventions, and provides a methodology for applying a people-centric approach to security and security sector reform. In fact, the creation of separate Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security Agendas reflects this recognition of the need to take an intersectional approach to international security.

## Intersectionality and the WPS Agenda

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda advances women's protection, participation, and leadership in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including security sector reform. While using only one identity factor, gender, to assess security, it does not preclude taking a more intersectional approach. Increasingly, WPS practice acknowledges that women are not a homogeneous group, and that their experiences of insecurity differ according to social contexts and identities. A growing number of countries, including Ireland and Canada, have made this clear, by highlighting the intersectional nature of the WPS Agenda in their own national plans. [12] In addition, some efforts have been made within the Agenda to highlight how intersecting social categories can result in exacerbating vulnerabilities or insecurity, such as women refugees or displaced women being more vulnerable to rape and sexual violence.[13]

While integrating a thorough intersectional lens to the WPS is still more of an ambition than a reality, there is a growing awareness of the need for more differentiated and nuanced lenses of analysis for assessing the security needs of women, and intersectionality can be a way to bring more contextual approaches to the YPS Agenda.

## The importance of intersectionality for YPS

The YPS Agenda similarly recognises young people's role in peace and security. But like women, youth are not a monolith. A young woman in a refugee camp, for example, faces very different security risks than a

[12] "Intersectionality in the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda," *Transforming Society* (12 May 2022).
[13] Ibid.; UN Security Council, Resolution 2467, S/RES/2467 (2019), para. 31.

well-educated, urban young man. Intersectionality allows YPS to capture these layered realities, to avoid delivering solutions which do not meet the needs of most young people.

Importantly, the security sector is often present in the day-to-day lives of many youth, through policing, border control, or military presence. For many young people, especially from marginalised communities, the security sector can be a source of insecurity rather than protection. Thus, understanding the differentiated security needs of youth, so that the security sector can work with youth to deliver tailored and contextual support, rather than an all too frequent antagonistic relationship. For YPS to succeed, it must integrate such approaches—encouraging security institutions to partner with youth in co-designing security policies, while addressing the structural inequalities that shape their interactions.

## Key takeaways

The parallel existence of the WPS and YPS agendas demonstrates that security must be understood through the lens of identity and marginalisation. Yet without intersectionality, both agendas risk falling back into tokenism or homogenisation. The security sector has a pivotal role to play in bridging this gap. Its policies, training, and practices must be reoriented to reflect the lived realities of women and youth in all their diversity. For policymakers, this means not only supporting grassroots women's and youth organisations with flexible funding but also embedding intersectional analysis in security sector reform, peacekeeping mandates, and national security strategies. Intersectionality is not an "add-on" but a prerequisite for ensuring that security institutions serve all people equitably. Only by transforming both grassroots participation and the security sector's role can WPS and YPS deliver on their promise of inclusive and sustainable peace.

- **Institutionalize intersectional analysis**: SSG/R practitioners should embed intersectional analysis across all YPS programmes to ensure diverse needs are accurately identified and addressed.

- **Develop youth partnerships for common solutions**: The security sector should actively establish partnerships with youth to collaboratively design and implement common solutions that respond to differentiated security needs.