DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

Youth, Peace and Security National Action Plans and Security Sector Governance and Reform

Guidance on developing Youth, Peace and Security National Action Plans from an SSG/R perspective

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DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 730 94 00
info@dcaf.ch
www.dcaf.ch

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Introduction

This guidance note aims to provide stakeholders with practical advice and succinct conceptual tools to develop Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) National Action Plans (NAPs) that fully integrate security sector governance and reform (SSG/R). Key stakeholders include government officials, civil society organizations, youth leaders, security sector personnel, and international actors. This guidance can also be of relevance to countries that opt not to develop a distinct YPS NAP but wish to incorporate YPS commitments into other national policies.

What are Youth, Peace and Security National Action Plans?

In 2015, the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda was launched by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in Resolution 2250. Formulated largely on the basis of work by civil society, the aim of the resolution was to promote the further inclusion of youth in peace and security issues.[1] Three further resolutions (Resolution 2419 in 2018; Resolution 2535 in 2020 and Resolution 2807 in 2025) have subsequently been adopted to advance the ambitions of the Agenda, with resolution 2535 (2020) aimed at institutionalizing its implementation, including by encouraging Member States to take action "through dedicated local, national and regional roadmaps" on YPS (see Box 1).

Box 1. UNSC Resolution 2535 (2020)

14. Encourages Member States, regional and subregional organizations to develop and implement policies and programs for youth and to facilitate their constructive engagement, including through dedicated local, national and regional roadmaps on youth, peace and security, with sufficient resources, through a participatory process, in particular with young people and youth organizations and to pursue its implementation, including through the monitoring, evaluation and coordination with young people[.]

The latest YPS UNSC resolution 2807 (2025) recognizes the progress in operationalizing the YPS agenda, including through national action plans and youth strategies and *"encourages Member States, where relevant, to consider adoption or strengthening of national action plans on YPS, and to support youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, including through engagement with civil society".*

The benefits of integrating SSG/R into YPS NAPs

As of mid-2026, over a dozen countries (see Figure 1) have developed YPS NAPs: Finland (2021 and 2025),[2] Nigeria (2021),[3] Democratic Republic of the Congo (2022),[4] Malawi (2024),[5] South Sudan (2024),[6] Burundi (2024),[7] The Gambia (2025),[8] Kyrgyzstan (2025),[9] Liberia (2025),[10] Cameroon (2025)[11], Colombia (2026)[12] and

[1] See: Graeme Simpson, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security* (UNFPA/PBSO, 2018), p. 17.
[2] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, *Youth, Peace and Security: Finland's National Action Plan 2021–2024* (2021); Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, *Youth, Peace and Security: Finland's National Action Plan 2025–2028* (2025).
[3] Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, *Nigerian National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security*: *An adoption of (UNSCR 2250) 2021–2024* (2021).
[4] Ministère de la Jeunesse, Initiation à la Nouvelle Citoyenneté et Cohésion Nationale, *Plan d'Action National de la Résolution 2250 du Conseil de Sécurité Nations sur Jeunesse, Paix et Sécurité de la République Démocratique du Congo* (2022).
[5] Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture, *Malawi National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security 2024–2029* (2024).
[6] Republic of South Sudan, *National Strategy on Youth, Peace and Security* (2024), Annex 1.
[7] Ministère des Affaires de la Communauté Est Africaine, de la Jeunesse, des Sports et de la Culture, *Plan d'Action de la Stratégie Nationale de la Jeunesse sur la Paix et la Sécurité au Burundi (2024–2028)* (2024).
[8] Government of The Gambia, *National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (2025–2030)* (2025).
[9] Kyrgyz Republic, *Action Plan for implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 "Youth, Peace and Security" for the years 2025-2027* (2025).
[10] Government of Liberia, *National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security: 2025–2029* (2025).
[11] Republic of Cameroon, *Plan d'Action National Jeunesse, Paix et Sécurité: 2025–2030* (2025).
[12] Government of Colombia, *Plan de Acción Nacional para la Implementación de la Resolución 1325 sobre Mujer, Paz y Seguridad* (Bogotá: UNFPA Colombia / Government of Colombia, 2026)

Italy (2026)[13]. Additionally, the Philippines has adopted a document entitled “Compendium” in 2022 and Jordan is completing the compilation of its national strategic document on the YPS Agenda.[14] And, according to the 2024 report of the UN Secretary-General on YPS, multi-stakeholder efforts were also underway in over 25 other countries to develop national frameworks on YPS.[15]

Figure 1. Timeline of development of YPS NAPs, 2015–2025



These NAPs are structured in different ways, but they all tend to include sections that:

- Analyse and contextualize the rationale for implementation of the YPS Agenda.
- Introduce the YPS Agenda and its normative framework, especially UNSC resolutions 2250, 2419, 2535 and 2807.
- Present a plan of action, highlighting priorities, objectives, and a means of measuring progress in each of the five pillars of the YPS Agenda: Participation, Prevention, Partnerships, Protection, and Disengagement & Reintegration.
- Expound on tools and coordination mechanisms to support implementation – such as monitoring instruments, performance indicators, and logical frameworks – and identify the responsible ministries, governmental agencies, and other entities, as well as timeframes or deadlines.
- Detail the budget for the years covered by the NAP.
- Explain how Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) tools will be used.
- Catalogue the entities consulted (including youth organizations, local authorities, experts, etc.) in developing the NAP and share copies of surveys and any other documentation derived from consultations and workshops (typically, these items are included in annexes).

The YPS resolutions help lay out a roadmap for the incorporation of YPS commitments into national policies, even without the development of stand-alone NAPs like those adopted by the countries listed above. It is notable that twelve countries had taken this approach by early 2024.[16] This guidance is therefore relevant not only to those spearheading efforts to formulate dedicated YPS NAPs, but also to those advancing initiatives that seek to mainstream YPS, including linkages to SSG/R, in broader frameworks (see Box 2).

[13] Interministerial Committee for Human Rights (CIDU), First National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (2026–2029) (Rome: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, April 16, 2026)
[14] As referenced in Italy’s YPS NAP. See also: National Youth Commission, Philippine National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security – NAPYPS 2023-2033: A Primer on the Journey of Every Filipino Youth towards Just and Lasting Peace (2022) and UNFPA in Jordan, “Ministry of Youth and UNFPA Sign Cooperation Agreement to Empower Youth and Implement UNSCR 2250,” 19 March 2025

[15] United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Youth, Peace and Security, S/2024/207 (1 March 2024), p.11.
[16] Ibid.

Box 2. Synergies between SSG/R and the YPS Agenda

Security sector reform (SSR) is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by increasing the effectiveness and accountability of security provision, management, and oversight within a framework of democratic governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights.[17] The goal of SSR is to enhance security sector governance (SSG) by institutionalizing good governance; which means ensuring that the sector is subject to the same standards of democratic governance as every other public service.[18] In other words, that it is expected to be *accountable*, *effective*, and *inclusive*.

A number of synergies exist in the objectives of SSG/R and those driving the YPS Agenda. For example, the YPS Agenda is aimed at stimulating transformative change to ensure the equitable delivery of security to all people, especially youth. Achieving this goal requires reforms to security provision practices and SSG/R models provide a blueprint for this. In fact, many goals and principles of SSG/R are captured in the YPS Agenda, including participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, accountability, rule of law, and gender equality; and likewise, the five pillars of the Agenda (Participation, Prevention, Partnerships, Protection, and Disengagement & Reintegration) support the practical implementation of many reforms in the security sector.[19]

Three reasons to integrate SSG/R into YPS NAPs

1) The security sector has a direct impact on how youth perceive the state

In various ways, security sectors influence the challenges facing young people as well as their opportunities to become positive agents for peace. At the same time, young people, like most people, tend to view the security sector as the primary representative of their state.[20] And so, whether the interactions of youth with security sector actors are positive or negative greatly influences their perspectives on state authority, security, and justice. Trust in the ability of state institutions to deliver services and deal with grievances is vital to the social contract, because it discourages resentment from feeding into conflict and violence, which is particularly important for youth as the part of the population most exposed to violence.[21] This trust is built when security actors interact respectfully and engage constructively with young people, which in turn, can reduce exclusion and prevent youth from joining extremist or criminal groups, and may inspire some young people to join the security sector.

2) Security sectors must develop better specialized strategies to increase youth inclusion, both in terms of protection and engagement

Success of the YPS Agenda requires that security sectors embrace a holistic approach to security that acknowledges youth as legitimate partners. Indeed, security actors can contribute to facilitating a more inclusive and sustainable peace by viewing young people not merely as potential perpetrators or victims but as potential allies. Tailored security strategies should recognize that young people face threats affecting them disproportionately, including police violence and political repression, and should build on youth insights to ensure the prioritization of their rights and protections. Engaging youth in discussions related to safety, rule of law, and justice can also empower them to take ownership of their community, attend meaningfully to its well-being, and contribute to longer-term problem-solving.

3) Implementing the peace and security commitments of a YPS NAP depends largely on the security sector

Because a security sector is generally responsible for enforcing laws, maintaining stability, and delivering security, the commitments to youth participation, protection, and prevention laid out in any YPS NAP risk being ineffective or going unfulfilled without security sector buy-in. Hence, in planning for implementation of the YPS Agenda, the role that will be played by the security sector must be defined. This is particularly true considering the power of the security sector to either facilitate or hinder youth inclusion within the sector itself, which includes protecting young

[17] DCAF– Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, “Security Sector Reform”, SSR Backgrounder Series, 2015.
[18] Heiner Hänggi, “Conceptualizing UN support to security sector reform”, in *The United Nations and Security Sector Reform, Policy and Practice* (Lit Verlag, 2020).
[19] DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, “The Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and Security Sector Governance and Reform”, SSR Backgrounder Series, 2024.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Youth Violence, World Health Organization Factsheet, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence

personnel from experiencing abuse, corruption, or discrimination.[22] Ensuring sustainable peace and resilience thus rests on strengthening the trust and inclusion of youth in security institutions, as well as the integration of their concerns in national peace and security agendas. Such collaboration can also offer significant opportunities to young people, for instance by providing them access to high-level government actors or by boosting financial support to youth-led initiatives.[23]

Adopting SSG/R approaches in designing YPS NAPs

There are various entry points, at different stages in the formulation of a YPS NAP, when SSG/R can be integrated, including during contextual analysis and data collection and the mapping and engagement of relevant stakeholders. The suggestions offered here will help facilitate the integration of SSG/R across the process of developing a NAP.

Contextual analysis and data collection

Key steps at this stage include a *review of a country's relevant policy or legal instruments*, and an evidence-based *analysis of the experience of its youth regarding peace and security*. This requires a framework for that analysis and for the data collection that informs such an analysis. *Needs assessments* also play an important role at this stage, guiding stakeholder engagement.

Legal and policy review

A review of legal and policy documentation – laws, as well as international, national, and regional policies or strategies – establishes a baseline of existing legislation and commitments. Evaluating the legal and policy context also helps identify the extent to which the security challenges faced by youth are already taken into account by security policy at the institutional level. Therefore, this step should entail:

- A review of existing SSG/R frameworks, including current national and regional policies related to SSG/R – whether these are national SSR strategies, national security strategies, or even relevant provisions of peace agreements – to align the YPS NAP with these frameworks or to determine if these frameworks lack necessary references to youth.
- A review of the current condition of the security sector, including its structure, policies, and practices, with a specific focus on issues affecting youth, such as the recruitment of young people into armed groups.
- An assessment of laws referencing or affecting youth, particularly security sector regulations containing age-related requirements or barriers.
- An analysis of the impact of current security sector policies on youth (e.g. examining discrimination, lack of access to justice, etc.).

Evidence-based analysis and data collection

A contextual analysis helps identify the unique challenges that youth face in relation to the security sector, and it relies on good data collection on the security needs, grievances, and priorities of young people. Such analysis may highlight issues like youth marginalization, the vulnerability of young people to recruitment by armed groups, or their lack of access to justice. To understand how SSG/R can be designed to address youth-specific concerns, this step should involve:

[22] See for instance: Jamie Bergin, The Impacts of Corruption on Young People and Their Role in Preventing Corruption, U4 Helpdesk Answer 2024:36, U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (2 September 2024); Youth, Health, and Well-being: A Scoping Review, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 18 (2021).
[23] Ruth Beeckmans and Marte Hellema, *Youth, Peace and Security: Fostering Youth-Inclusive Political Processes* (UNDP, 2024).

- An analysis of how security sector challenges (e.g. corruption) disproportionately affect youth, based both on security sector assessments and consultations with youth, so that addressing these challenges can be prioritized in the YPS NAP.

- An investment in conflict and political economy analysis as well as an analysis of the governance and capacity of security and justice institutions, to ensure a conflict-sensitive process that is mindful of the socio-political context and the potential conflicts that could arise from security reforms, and which seeks to avoid exacerbating tensions as is central to the "do no harm" approach of SSR.[24]

- The identification of key gaps in data collection on youth engagement with security institutions and the proposal of methods to improve this data collection.

- The collection of age-disaggregated data relating to the security sector, as well as other categories of data, to measure inequalities based on gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, disability, etc.

Example of age-disaggregated data

While 60 percent of the general population in Country X feels unsafe, 85 percent of youth (ages 15–24) report feeling unsafe, compared to only 45 percent of adults (ages 40+).

As opposed to simply stating that 60 percent of people in Country X feel unsafe, the age-disaggregated data in this example provides valuable detail, highlighting that youth report experiencing insecurity at a considerably higher rate than older people.

Needs assessments

Needs assessments can uncover gaps, problems, and requirements related to young people vis-à-vis their interactions with, and within, the security sector. This feeds the processes of data collection and analysis, while also guiding stakeholder engagement by clarifying which groups are most affected. To that end, needs assessments should:

- Examine youth experiences of (in)security and (in)justice, youth interactions with security and justice institutions, the views of young people regarding what makes them safe and secure, and the specific security needs of marginalized groups.[25]

- Take structure from a set of questions, such as these, suggested by the UN-FBA *YPS Programming Handbook*[26] :

[24] See: OECD Development Assistance Committee, *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform (SSR): Supporting Security and Justice* (OECD, 2007).
[25] Ibid.
[26] United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy, Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook, New York, 2021, p.36-37.

- *Which security mechanisms are available in both the formal and the informal security sectors for the protection of youth? How responsive are they to the needs of young women and men?*
- *Are youth included in the composition of the security institutions as well as in the decision-making processes pertaining to the development of national security policies and strategies? If yes, who are these youth and what role do they play? How are they organized?*
- *How do crime and other security concerns affect young people differently? Are youth partaking in criminal behaviour? If so, who are these youth and what are the push and pull factors?*
- *What is the police force's perception of youth? (Do the police perceive young people as a threat, victims, perpetrators, etc.?)*
- *Do the police have specific protocols for interacting with and handling youth?*
- *What are the perceived experiences of young people of the security forces (experiences of injustice, targeted discrimination, etc.)?*
- *Conversely, consider whether young people perceive police forces in terms of prevention, protection and security, or more in terms of repression and violation/limitation of human rights and fundamental liberties.*
- *Are youth adequately aware of the level of accountability of the police and security forces? Are they aware of the police internal oversight structures that they can contact in the event of abuse?*
- *Are youth joining criminal gangs, armed groups or violent extremist groups? If so, who are these youth and what are the push and pull factors? What measures are in place to mitigate the phenomenon?*

Stakeholder mapping and engagement

The mapping of stakeholders is an important step, to clarify who it is that has decision-making power, who holds influence in various areas, and who must be consulted or engaged to ensure that youth are meaningfully included. Stakeholders may include the government, local authorities, youth groups, security sector institutions, community leaders, civil society organizations, international partners, and more. Mapping these stakeholders can help reveal where trust-building efforts should be directed, such as between youth groups and the security sector. To best support the success of the YPS NAP, it is important that both mapping and engagement are broad and inclusive.

Understanding and involving the security sector

By mapping stakeholders involved in security governance, a picture of the national security sector landscape is likely to emerge, as well as information on the political and technical abilities of the sector to support meaningful change. Yet, at first glance, mapping the security sector can appear rather daunting. This is because the sector comprises a range of state and non-state actors involved in providing security services or overseeing security operations at various levels (see Box 3).[27]

[27] DCAF, "The Security Sector", SSR Backgrounder Series.

Box 3. Defining the security sector

The security sector is composed of all the state and non-state structures, institutions, and personnel responsible for security provision, management, and oversight at both the national and local levels. This captures actors that use force, as well as those tasked with controlling how force is used by engaging in management and oversight. State actors in the sector include institutions such as the military, police, intelligence agencies, and the judiciary; while non-state actors may include private security companies, civil society organizations, community groups, and international entities, among others.[28]

Thus, to successfully map the security sector for the purposes of developing a YPS NAP, it is essential to:

- Identify the key state and non-state actors involved in security governance and assess their influence, roles, the potential impact the NAP process may have on them, and power interests, as well as relationships between security actors and other stakeholders.

- Take structure from a set of questions, such as these, adapted from suggestions of the UN-FBA *YPS Programming Handbook*[29] :

  - *Who are the actors (i.e. individuals, organizations, institutions, states) involved in security governance? How do youth perceive those different actors? (As allies? As gatekeepers?)*
  - *Out of the identified stakeholders, which actors do youth see as the key drivers of peacebuilding?*
  - *Are there youth-led actors (organizations, networks, informal structures) playing an active part in peace and security processes?*
  - *Who has influence (an initiative, funding, political power, information and media channels available/ used by youth) over the youth-led organizations and/or initiatives?*
  - *How do the identified key actors perceive the young people? (As a threat? As troublemakers? As peacebuilders?) How do they see themselves as stakeholders? Passive and powerless or active and important?*
  - *Are there any intergenerational differences in the perceptions of particular stakeholders? If so, are there any insights into why these differences exist?*

And, to utilize this information for the most effective engagement, it is crucial to:

- Design engagement strategies that define a best approach to each stakeholder, mindful of their political affiliations, potential points of resistance, and any concerns about confidentiality that may arise.

- Carefully consider which mechanisms for engagement are best used between larger, multi-stakeholder meetings, whether these bring together certain parts of the security sector with other stakeholders (e.g. youth groups) and/or involve decision makers in targeted bilateral meetings to secure institutional buy-in.

Inclusion and diversity in stakeholder engagement

An inclusive process is ensured only when young women and marginalized youth such as ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and those with disabilities are represented. Inclusion and diversity contribute to greater legitimacy and public trust, and it is civil society that gives voice to social groups which tend to

[28] Ibid.
[29] United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy, Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook, New York, 2021, p.39.

be excluded from security discussions, such as young people.[30] Indeed, it is often youth who become key assets in fostering whole-of-society approaches.[31] Hence, civil society engagement in security issues is indispensable because "it creates a channel for communicating the diverse views of the population about the quality of security and ways to improve it".[32] The security sector benefits from this, as its ability to respond to a broader range of security concerns and public interests is enhanced.[33] For this reason, engagement undertaken during the development of YPS NAPs should include:

- Consultations with youth, civil society, and relevant security institutions to identify synergies.
- The organization of focus groups (including young women and youth from marginalized backgrounds) designed to capture youth perspectives on the security sector.
- The use of inclusive digital platforms that combine surveys and questionnaires, to obtain inputs from a diverse sampling of young people. In addition, working with influencers and digital media where young people are active and can exercise meaningful power can enhance reach to wider youth audience.
- Design of strategies for empowering young people as champions in organizations with promotions based on merit and innovation on public service delivery.
- Support for awareness-raising and advocacy by civil society to promote the YPS Agenda.
- Observer status for civil society organizations in the coordination/implementation body, or structured consultations between civil society and the implementation body.[34]

Integrating SSG/R into the content of YPS NAPs

The ability of a YPS NAP to give rise to more inclusive, accountable, and effective security institutions is significantly strengthened by integrating SSG/R in meaningful ways. This ensures, for instance, that young people are actively engaged in shaping security policies, which are then more likely to address their needs and contribute to sustainable peace. By embedding SSG/R principles within a YPS NAP, youth participation in governance is promoted, trust building is prioritized, and the legitimacy of the security sector is enhanced.

Developing a vision, objectives, and goals

A clear vision should be articulated in any YPS NAP, and should incorporate SSG/R principles that reflect an unambiguous commitment to youth empowerment in relation to the security sector. The objectives of the NAP should also be clear, as well as achievable (with a preference for "SMART objectives" that are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound), and should align with both the YPS Agenda and SSG/R principles, such as by increasing youth participation in decision-making processes within and alongside the security sector. To that end, specific goals may include ensuring youth representation in local security councils, addressing youth concerns with regard to safety and security, promoting inclusivity, and building trust between young people and security institutions. Achieving these goals will strengthen the legitimacy and accountability of these systems, which makes this an important stage in initiating reform processes that centre inclusive relationship building. With that in mind, this stage should be viewed as an opportunity to bolster stakeholder engagement, for instance by engaging young people in the development of the vision articulated in a YPS NAP, using tools such as horizon scanning and future scenario-planning.

It is essential to understand the development process as a key investment in the future. Therein, insisting on the quality of YPS NAPs at this stage pays dividends later (see Box 4). It is similarly vital to ensure political

[30] UN Women, *Women and Peace and Security: Guidelines for National Implementation* (2012).
[31] United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy, *Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook* (New York, 2021).
[32] DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, "Civil Society", SSR Backgrounder Series, DCAF, 2019.
[33] Ibid.
[34] UN Women, *Women and Peace and Security: Guidelines for National Implementation*.

commitment throughout the process of formulating a NAP. For, in the long run, moving SSG/R elements forward will depend on the assignment of clear responsibilities in coordinating implementation, while actively engaging the security sector.

Box 4. Quality standards for strategic policies for impactful SSG/R

In *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice*, the OECD offers a "framework of quality standards of national youth strategies" that provides a model for fostering the effectiveness of YPS NAPs.[35] To be effective, NAPs must be: evidence-based, participatory, resourced/budgeted, transparent and accessible, monitored and evaluated/accountable, aligned with other strategies or well-integrated, gender-responsive, and supported by political commitment. Every one of these dimensions is relevant to the development of impactful SSG/R commitments as well, and viewed through this lens, could be translated into YPS NAPs in the following ways:

- YPS NAPs should be grounded in strong evidence of the specific security needs of young people.
- Adequate funding and human resources should be available to support all implementing entities, including in the security sector.
- Youth-focused reforms should be envisioned as whole-of-society endeavours, with coordination extending beyond the security sector to the justice, health, and education sectors as well, to simultaneously address underlying causes of insecurity alongside direct security concerns.
- The security needs of young people of all genders should be addressed in a YPS NAP.
- Accountability mechanisms must be in place to ensure that security actors are held responsible for their actions.

Sustainability and long-term impact lie at the core of successful planning. Quick-fix reforms often fail, but sustainable SSG/R is designed to bring about security institutions that have long-term capacity, resources, and governance structures to function effectively. Thus, as part of this stage of YPS NAP development, it is prudent to:

➔ Assess the sustainability and long-term impact of the strategies and approaches of the YPS NAP through scenario-planning exercises (e.g. to evaluate potential future challenges), adaptive management, SWOT analysis, and sustainability assessment frameworks (e.g. SDGs).

Mainstreaming SSG/R into YPS NAPS by capitalizing on synergies with the five pillars of the YPS Agenda

Given the synergies between SSG/R and the YPS Agenda, various strategic actions and initiatives of SSG/R should be considered for their applicability to each of the five pillars of the YPS Agenda: Participation, Prevention, Partnerships, Protection, and Disengagement & Reintegration. What follows are suggested activities – inspired partly by the YPS NAPs of the DRC, Finland, Philippines, and Nigeria – that bring SSG/R and the YPS Agenda together in ways that capitalize on this synergy. These activities offer the potential to strengthen governance writ large by mainstreaming good governance principles across sectors, through whole-of-society approaches that emphasize participation and inclusion.

Participation

Sensitize and train security sector decision makers on UNSCR 2250 and the YPS NAP

➔ Train and sensitize decision makers in security agencies, and promote the integration of principles drawn from UNSCR 2250 into the mandates of security sector entities (especially operations/missions)

Develop guidelines for security stakeholders on YPS implementation

➔ Create resources for security stakeholders, including legislators, members of the judiciary, traditional and religious institutions, civil society, and security agencies

[35] OECD, *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*, OECD Public Governance Reviews (Paris, 2020), Table 2.1.

Conduct youth audits of security laws

- As a means of updating laws and regulations while removing barriers to youth participation in peace and security processes, invite youth to conduct audits aimed at: evaluating how security-related laws and policies affect young people; analysing whether these laws are youth-inclusive, rights-based, and responsive to their specific needs; and identifying gaps, biases, and opportunities for legal reform

Enhance conditions for youth within the security sector

- Support human resources and financial reform processes to improve staff retention and reduce youth attrition, which will improve conditions for young recruits and professionalize the sector

Engage youth in peace and security processes

- Consider setting youth quotas for participation in formal processes to ensure that this participation is institutionalized, equitable, and sustained
- Appoint and deploy both young civilians and soldiers in decision-making bodies and peace and security missions
- Raise awareness of the positive impact of youth participation in peace and security
- Develop rosters of young people skilled in peace and security disciplines, who can be called on by the security sector
- Encourage security institutions (e.g. ministries of interior and defense) to identify short and long-term youth engagement opportunities

Prevention

Engage youth in prevention-focused programming alongside security sector actors

- Involve youth organizations in projects related to the prevention of crime, violence, and violent extremism
- Recognize the value of young people and their potential to improve efforts to prevent violence and conflict by supporting their participation in both planning and implementing prevention initiatives
- Raise awareness about the role of high-quality education in preventing marginalization, violence, and conflict

Address factors of security risk and resilience that are specific to youth

- Assess and address relations between the security sector and youth, including by understanding youth-security dynamics, conducting youth-security landscape analysis, and undertaking vulnerability assessments
- Analyse factors of risk and resilience for youth when assessing mechanisms of youth violence in the context of projects aimed at preventing violence or violent extremisms

Partnerships

Build partnerships between the YPS community and the security sector at large

- Involve the security sector in multi-sectoral coalitions, platforms, and networks to ensure concerted action at local, national, regional and global levels with other partners (e.g. youth organizations, government, civil society, local communities, etc.).
- Develop partnerships, memoranda of understanding, and joint initiatives between the security sector and youth organizations
- Hold regular meetings, roundtables, and workshops that bring togther the security sector with youth
- Organize workshops on emerging security challenges (e.g. cyber threats, terrorism, human trafficking) for the security actors and youth partners

Deepen engagement by the security sector in the YPS NAP process

- ➔ Name liaison officers or YPS focal points within entities of the security sector (e.g. police, conscript rights, juvenile justice...)
- ➔ Establish a pooled fund for joint security projects that meaningfully engage both youth groups and the security sector to meet YPS commitments

Support the development of a mutual understanding between youth and security sector actors

- ➔ Launch ad hoc activities involving youth and security sector actors, such as hackathons or innovation challenges, to find solutions to security problems
- ➔ Encourage open-door policies/days when youth can communicate directly with security sector representatives
- ➔ Create digital communities or platforms where security actors and partners can share updates, engage in discussions, and exchange feedback

Protection

Advocate and raise awareness about youth protection needs to the security sector

- ➔ Encourage the security sector to promote awareness and engagement in support of the YPS NAP at the national, state, and local levels

Increase youth representation in oversight bodies

- ➔ Integrate young people into ombuds and national human rights institutions, as well as other independent oversight bodies, and strengthen youth ombuds office where existing
- ➔ Support and facilitate the involvement of youth organizations and civil society in security sector oversight

Improve youth access to and participation in oversight of the security sector

- ➔ Provide a range of channels through which youth can report abuses or misconduct by security actors

Disengagement & Reintegration

Engage young people in the planning and implementation of disengagement and reintegration programmes

- ➔ Cooperate with youth organizations to plan and implement disengagement and reintegration programming, engaging them in development and design and encouraing their participation and leadership in delivering outcomes

Plan inclusively for the integration of youth into the security sector

- ➔ Organize planning workshops that include both security sector actors and representatives of youth organizations
- ➔ Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of security sector entities such as the ministries of interior and defense

Mobilizing the principles of SSG/R to address the needs of young people

Underlying the interconnectedness of SSG/R and the YPS Agenda are key principles of SSG/R, such as inclusiveness, accountability, and effectiveness. Therefore, introducing these principles in YPS NAPs helps support the meaningful involvement of youth in matters of peace and security.

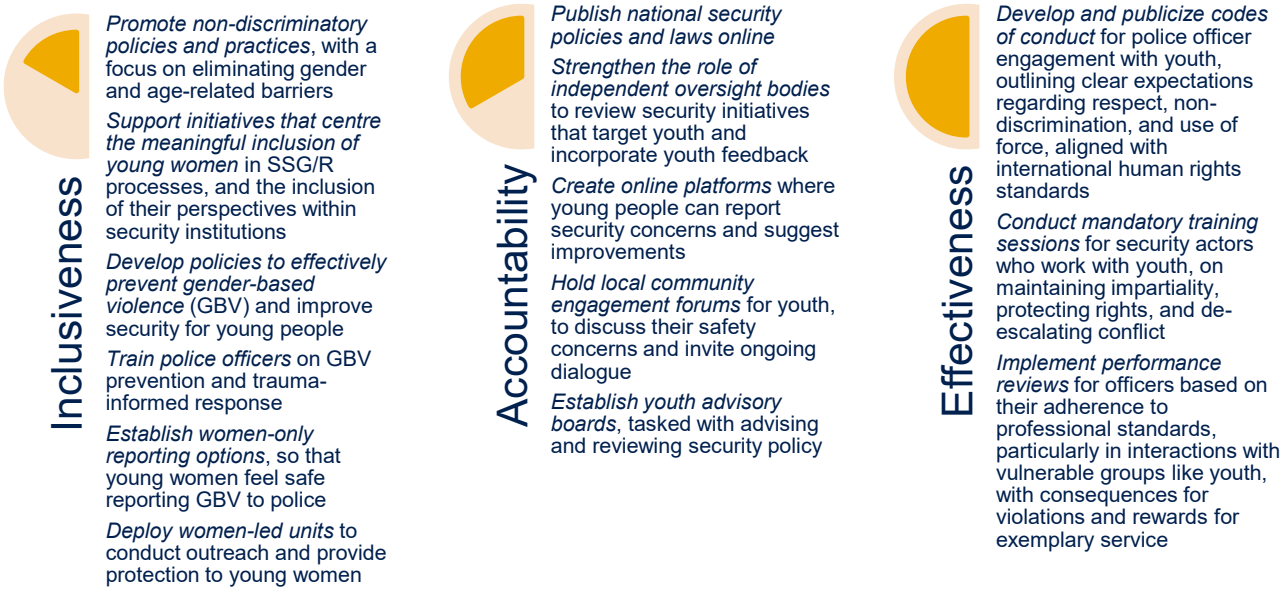
- **Inclusiveness** refers to conditions in which social equity, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity, and intergenerational equity are all systematically advanced. In this context, youth-inclusive decision-making contributes to ensuring that security is provided equitably to all parts of society, and gender equality is similarly vital to driving gender-sensitive reforms that address the specific security needs of young women and girls.

- **Accountability** rests on integrity, transparency, and independent oversight. These are all connected, but it is through progress on transparency that access to information for youth can be improved, which in turn helps raise awareness among young people of the security context and its complexities, providing them with new tools to facilitate their meaningful engagement in decision-making processes.

- **Effectiveness** arises from competence, sound policymaking, and collaboration. This means that, in addition to tailoring policy and practice to meet the security needs of youth, the security sector must hold itself to a high level of professionalism while also exhibiting policy coherence and a good faith desire to work toward shared goals with communities, in order to build trust and safeguard the rights and needs of young people.[36]

Of course, the question may arise, *how* these principles can be mobilized through YPS NAPs. The action steps listed below, in Figure 2, offer concrete ways to do so.

Figure 2. Making inclusiveness, accountability, and effectiveness a reality

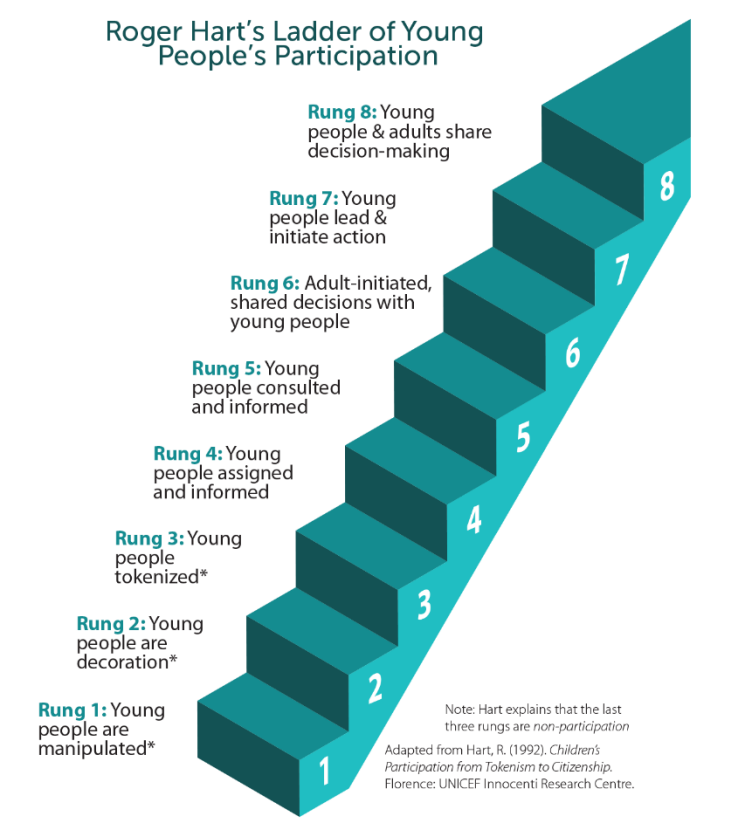


[36] See: United Nations Economic and Social Council, Principles of effective governance for sustainable development, Supplement No. 24, E/2018/44-E/C.16/2018/8, para. 31 (2018).

Supporting implementation and MEAL from an SSG/R perspective

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) enable a clearer understanding of what is effective and what is not, helping to ensure that processes and strategies are grounded in evidence-based insights. Thus, the most effective YPS NAP development processes incorporate regular and transparent communication practices. This means publishing all documentation related to the YPS NAP online, for instance. Ensuring and normalizing coordination between the security sector and young people in MEAL is key to addressing and overcoming many existing barriers[37], and can be facilitated in this context through the establishment of monitoring mechanisms that engage security actors and youth to participate in tracking various measures of progress, including through multi-stakeholder platforms, participatory workshops, community dialogues, surveys and questionnaires, and digital engagement instruments.

Box 5. Understanding meaningful participation via Roger Hart's *ladder of young people's participation*



Participative tools should be used with a care to avoid tokenistic approaches towards youth engagement. It was with this in mind that Roger Hart first developed his *ladder of participation* in the early 1990s.[38] The ladder is composed of eight rungs, each assigned a different type of participation granted to youth by adults and institutions, as illustrated in the picture (left).

Rungs 1 through 3 are considered by Hart to represent "non-participation". In other words, meaningful participation is only represented by the types indicated on rungs 4 through 8; so that, at the least, youth must be assigned but informed (i.e. given clear instructions and baseline knowledge) to enable their participation.

Activities which simply and mindlessly 'tick the box' of youth consultations do not make a process more participatory, and worse, can have the counterproductive effect of damaging trust with youth.

Photo credit: IREX, 2019.[39]

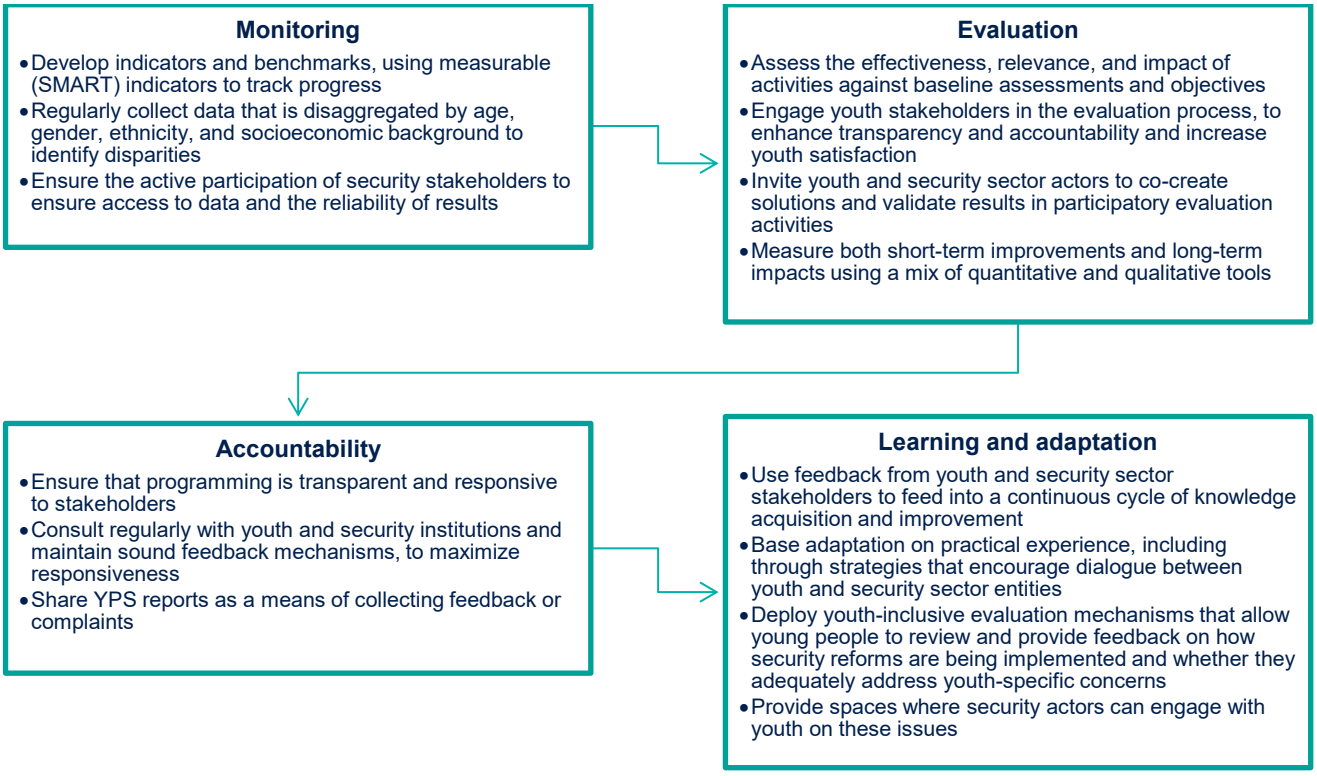
There are several useful blueprints for how MEAL mechanisms that include youth participation can be integrated into YPS NAPs, including the YPS NAPs of both Nigeria and Democratic Republic of the Congo, each of which developed frameworks for this. Also valuable is the OECD's "framework of quality standards of national youth strategies" which highlights that relevant frameworks must be youth-friendly, and must account in a cross-cutting way from the outset for meaningful engagement with youth stakeholders, as this leads to more responsive and

[37] Data from OECD Youth Governance Surveys shows that where youth organizations have been involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, they report a higher satisfaction with government performance. See: OECD, *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice*.
[38] Roger A. Hart, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, Innocenti Essays No. 4 (Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre, 1992).
[39] Nina Oduro, "What We Learned from Piloting a Youth-Led Labor Market Assessment in Uganda", IREX (blog), 1 August 2019

inclusive policy outcomes.[40] Ultimately, a continuous process of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) will ensure that the possibility persists to "redefine goals and objectives according to new trends and needs in young people's lives" (see Figure 3).[41] Still, this possibility only exists if a dedicated budget is allocated to YPS NAP implementation; which is why it should be noted that a failure to implement the YPS Agenda, including due to under-budgeting, risks leading to a potential erosion of trust among young people in security institutions and processes.[42]

[40] OECD, *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice*.
[41] UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Youth Policy Formulation Manual, ST/ESCAP/2036 (New York, 1999).
[42] Ibid.

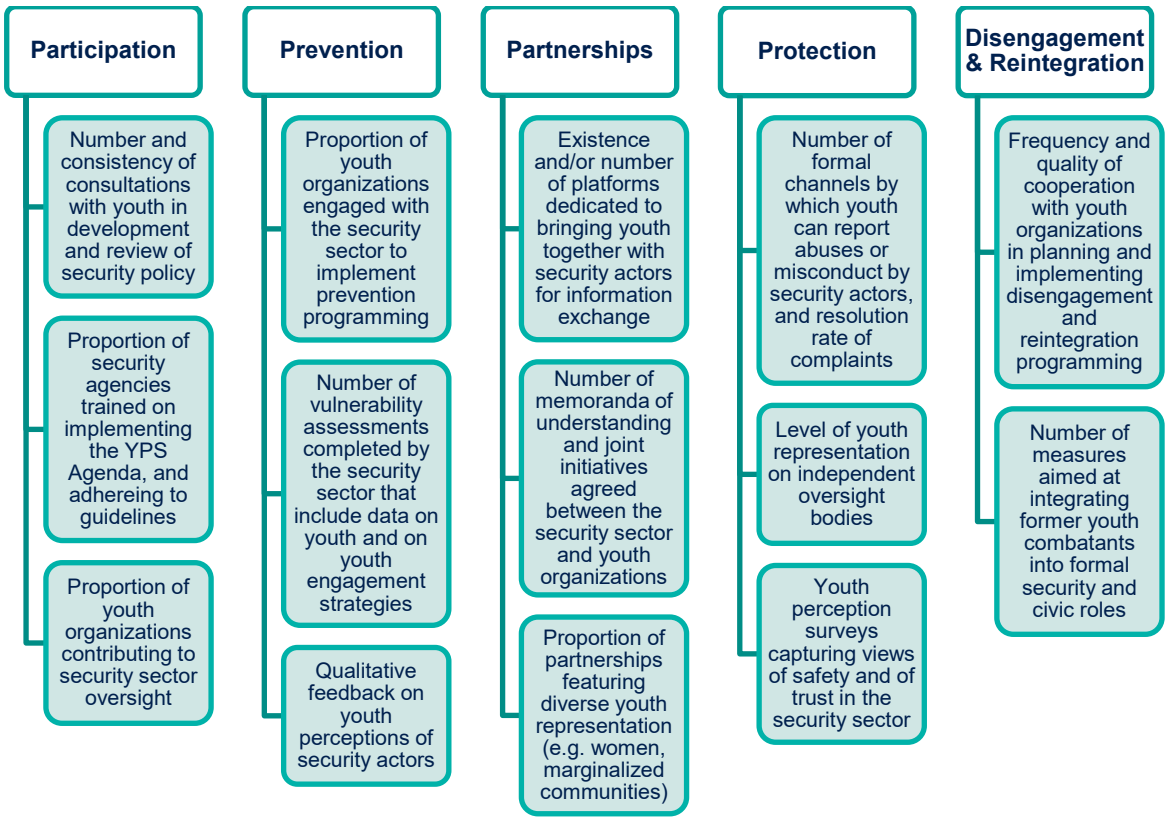
Figure 3. MEAL process



The credibility of the sector also depends on a fair assessment of its existing capacities (both state and non-state) and how can these be enhanced.[43] It is from such an assessment that some of the goals and indicators of a NAP are drawn (see Figure 4), and these should reflect meaningful measures of where real progress can be made so that they are achievable and more likely to contribute to success. These processes should be informed by lessons learned in implementing similar initiatives, such as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, which has been achieved in part by encouraging progress and performance with positive incentives, including the issuance of awards for high-performing components of a NAP or public recognition or learning opportunities for relevant stakeholders.[44]

[43] OECD Development Assistance Committee, *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform (SSR)*.
[44] UN Women, *Women and Peace and Security: Guidelines for National Implementation*.

Figure 4. SSG/R-informed indicators that may be included in a YPS monitoring framework, by YPS pillar



Common challenges and recommendations

Attempting to infuse the perspective of SSG/R into a YPS NAP may be met with some resistance; whether due to a lack of political will, funding constraints, or defiance from traditional security actors. Some practical solutions and strategies to address common challenges are listed in Table 1 (below). Collectively, these solutions demand strong leadership, adaptive planning, and robust mechanisms for feedback and accountability.

Table 1. Addressing common challenges to YPS NAP implementation from an SSG/R perspective

	Challenges	Approaches
Stakeholder Engagement	➔ **Complete a stakeholder mapping with a power/interest grid, and update it** ➔ **Identify short-term milestones to demonstrate immediate benefits** ➔ **Assign clear roles and responsibilities to each stakeholder** ➔ **Prioritize inclusive, participatory planning and implementation processes**	
	Convincing YPS partners to work on SSG/R	Relying on documentation that links YPS and SSG/R, highlight case studies or examples of how SSG/R can contribute to the meaningful participation of youth in peace and security processes.
	Convincing SSG/R partners, including traditional security actors, to work on YPS	Emphasize the strategic benefits of youth engagement to addressing the root causes of insecurity (exclusion, grievance, etc.). Where resistance is high, suggest that stakeholders start slowly, with pilot projects that can showcase tangible results. For example, workshops to with traditional security actors and youth representatives.
	Resistance to change within the security sector	Establish transparent and iterative stakeholder engagement processes, while identifying and balancing competing interests through stakeholder mapping (e.g. power/interest grid analysis).
	Lack of ownership within the security sector	Involve all stakeholders in the planning process from the beginning, through participatory workshops, and provide them with opportunities to lead initiatives throughout the process.
Resource limitations	➔ **Start with small, scalable initiatives that require fewer resources, to prove success before expanding their scope**	
	Funding constraints	Leverage the funding potential of international partners, the private sector, and civil society, and tap into in-kind local resources and expertise.
	Insufficient budget	Early on, establish a sound budget with sufficient resources, both in terms of funding and human resources, accounting for national institutions, the security sector, and youth organizations.
	Resource/capacity constraints among partners (including non-state security sector actors)	Encourage collaboration among partners to pool financial, technical, and human resources; provide technical support and capacity building to help increase efficiencies; and seek external funding or technical support from international organizations, donors, or private-sector partners to supplement internal limitations.
Implementation	➔ **Emphasize adaptive, evidence-based policy design and governance frameworks that integrate data-driven decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and coordinated implementation mechanisms**	
	Insufficient data and evidence	Develop robust data collection methods and link them to decision-making processes.
	Ambiguity in goals, with overly broad objectives or competing priorities	Define Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) objectives to ensure clarity and focus.
	Policy incoherence and siloed institutional frameworks	Define clear roles for all stakeholders; establish an inter-institutional YPS committee to ensure alignment; harmonize the YPS NAP with any national youth strategies, national development plans, and national prevention strategies; and maintain horizontal and vertical institutional coordination.
	Poor public perception	Develop a proactive communication strategy that centres evidence-based messaging to build public trust and engage the security sector.

Recommendations

Involve the security sector in YPS NAPs

The security sector, which has a direct impact on youth perceptions about the state, must develop strategies to protect and engage with youth and to include them in the security sector, in order to meet the YPS Agenda. Any policymaker involved in developing a YPS NAP must understand the sector as a key to its implementation.

Use various entry points at different stages of the development process to integrate SSG/R

There are a number of stages throughout the process of developing a YPS NAP that invite the integration of SSG/R, particularly during contextual analysis and data collection, and the mapping and engagement of relevant stakeholders. It is in the contextual analysis stage when evidence-based analysis is captured to assess the situation of youth vis-à-vis peace and security in the country, and the extent to which security challenges faced by youth are already taken into consideration by security policies at the institutional level. In the mapping and engagement stage, a comprehensive mapping of security actors and stakeholders helps ensure that stakeholder engagement is broad and inclusive, and strengthens that engagement.

Integrate SSG/R into the content of the YPS NAP, at all levels

This amounts to a mainstreaming of SSG/R principles into the vision, objective, and goals of a YPS NAP, and into each dedicated (YPS) pillar of activities and the strategic actions and initiatives detailed therein. Security sector actors can play a key role in advancing the YPS Agenda by:

- Enhancing youth participation through initiatives designed to strengthen youth agency, such as youth audits of security policy and clear commitments to improving conditions for youth within the security sector.
- Engaging youth in prevention activities and carefully considering the specific risks and resilience factors that extend from relations between youth populations and the security sector.
- Strengthening youth participation in and use of oversight bodies, while raising awareness within the security sector of youth-specific protection needs; which will enhance the ability of the sector to contribute to the protection pillar.
- Including young people in the planning and implementation of disengagement and reintegration programming, and in efforts to integrate youth into the security sector.
- Welcoming partnerships with the YPS community, as a way of developing mutual understanding and facilitating implementation of the YPS NAP.

Mobilize SSG/R principles

Several core principles of SSG/R can be leveraged to address the needs of young people:

- *Inclusiveness* – Policies and initiatives should foster intergenerational and gender equality and should adopt approaches that are sensitive to the needs of marginalized youth populations.
- *Accountability* – YPS efforts should enhance the integrity, transparency, and independent oversight of the security sector, which will contribute to making security more responsive and accessible to youth.
- *Effectiveness* – Security actors must exhibit competence and the ability to adapt security delivery to youth security needs, in order to foster trust in the security sector among young people.

Adopt a MEAL framework

To facilitate implementation and monitoring from an SSG/R perspective, the meaningful participation of youth should be supported by relevant indicators. By being engaged in a robust MEAL approach, young people can track the impact of activities involving security actors and youth, and can be empowered to provide feedback on how and why adapting certain policies is likely to achieve better outcomes.

Annex: Examples of activities under each YPS pillar, in existing YPS NAPs

Participation	
Nigeria	Sensitization and training for decision makers in the security sector
	Youth audit of security sector legislation
	Development of guidelines for security agencies on YPS implementation
	Recruitment of youth into the justice and security sector
Finland	Increased education on youth participation for people working on matters of peace and security
	Awareness raising regarding the positive influence of youth participation in peace and security
	Promotion of the integration of UNSCR 2250 into the mandates of crisis management operations and missions
	Awareness raising among young people about humanitarian and peace work, and crisis management
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Appointment and deployment of young civilians and soldiers in decision-making bodies and peace and security missions
	Partnerships with institutions specialized in peace and security, and conflict prevention and management, at the national, regional, and international levels
	Roster of young people with skills in peace and security
Prevention	
Finland	Involvement of youth organizations in prevention of violent extremism, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior
	Communication on the role of high-quality education in the prevention of marginalization, violence, and conflict
Protection	
Finland	Awareness raising among young people regarding the key principles of humanitarian law and international criminal law
Nigeria	Advocacy to various stakeholders, including security agencies, promoting engagement by civilian and security sector institutions in support of YPS NAP implementation, at the national, state, and local levels
Disengagement & Reintegration	
Philippines	Collaborative formulation of conflict-sensitive and peace-promoting disengagement and reintegration strategies so that they will be embraced by different stakeholders, especially the security sector
	Integration of youth-responsive approaches that address the holistic well-being of young people being reintegrated into society
Finland	Youth participation in the planning and implementation of reintegration measures, in research production and promotion related to work involving people returning from war zones, and in supporting young returnees in their psychological and physical recovery

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Online YPS resources

YPS Monitor: https://ypsmonitor.com

An independent, youth-led initiative to capture and present data assessing the leadership, participation, and inclusion of young people in implementing the YPS Agenda at the national level

YouthPolicy.org: https://www.youthpolicy.org

A global, evidence-based hub providing research, analysis, and data on youth rights, youth policy, and youth participation worldwide

YPS NAP Scorecard: https://cnxus.org/theme/ypsnapscop/?swcfpc=1

An online tool tracking and comparing YPS NAPs and their implementation