



**UNDP Research Report**

# **Youth Participation to Sustain Peace during Electoral Processes**

**Sustaining Peace during Electoral  
Processes (SELECT) Project**





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# Acknowledgement & Disclaimers

The content of this report concentrates on identifying approaches that can be implemented on a national level as opposed to global strategies. Moreover, based on the recommendations set forth, a set of options for activities – with suggested considerations – has been consolidated. Finally, this document should not be considered a policy document and any solutions presented are intended to be informative and not prescriptive, recognizing that each country context will be unique.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), or any Member States. Moreover, the contents of this publication shall not be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

# Key terms and concepts

**Sustaining peace:** The twin resolutions on sustaining peace by the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly 2282 (2016) recognize that sustaining peace “should be broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development, and emphasizing that sustaining peace is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the government and all other national stakeholders, and should flow through all three pillars of the United Nations’ engagement at all stages of conflict, and in all its dimensions, and needs sustained international attention and assistance.”

**Conflict prevention:** “Conflict prevention aims to prevent the emergence of violent conflict and identify a non-violent means of resolving the tensions; stop ongoing violent conflicts from spreading or escalating; and deter the re-emergence of violence.”<sup>1</sup> Prevention as a pillar of the youth, peace and security agenda relates to support young people in preventing violence and in promoting a culture of tolerance and intercultural dialogue.

**Election-related violence:** Electoral violence is a form of political violence, designed to influence an electoral outcome, and thus the distribution of political power. It may be considered a tool to (re)direct the trajectory of the elections by actors who are dissatisfied with the expected outcome or hold issue with the perceived credibility of the process. It can take place in the pre-election, during the election day(s) or post-election periods. It may also be an expression of protests against a process that was seen as unfair—be it by incumbents or challengers. Election violence may take the form of physical violence or other forms of aggression, such as coercion or intimidation.<sup>2</sup> Elections are not necessarily a trigger of violence. Rather, it is a sub-type of political violence, which may be triggered through the electoral process and be embedded in conflict dynamics.<sup>3</sup>

**Electoral assistance:** Electoral assistance can be defined as “the legal, technical and logistic support provided to electoral laws, processes and institutions.”<sup>4</sup>

**Electoral cycle:** The electoral cycle covers the pre-electoral period, electoral period and post-electoral period. The approach taken by UNDP includes emphasis on long-term activities and increasing the capacities to support inclusive political participation.<sup>5</sup>

**Youth:** UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) defines youth as people age 18–29 years but notes the variations that exist at national and international levels. The United Nations Secretariat defines youth as people between age 15 and 24 years, for statistical purposes and without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. By ‘youth’, UNDP refers to young women and men, in all their diversity of experiences and contexts, taking into consideration the existing definitions of youth used at the country and/or regional level(s). In terms of programming, UNDP proposes to focus principally on young women and men age 15–24 years, but also to extend that youth group to include young men and women ranging from age 25 to 30 years (and even beyond through age 35), based on contextual realities and regional and national youth policy directives.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Department of Political Affairs. (2016). Policy Directive: Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence. Retrieved from [https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/ead\\_pd\\_preventing\\_mitigating\\_election-related\\_violence\\_20160601\\_e.pdf](https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/ead_pd_preventing_mitigating_election-related_violence_20160601_e.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UNDP (2009). Elections and Conflict Prevention: A guide to analysis, planning and programming.

<sup>4</sup> ACE Project. Electoral Assistance. Accessed 22 March 2022: <https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/electoral-assistance>

<sup>5</sup> UNDP and the European Commission (2017). Youth participation in electoral processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies.

<sup>6</sup> UNDP Youth Strategy 2014–2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future.

**Youth participation:** Participation as a pillar of the youth, peace and security agenda relates to taking youth's participation and views into account in decision-making processes, from negotiation and prevention of violence to peace agreements.

**Political participation:** Political participation, more specifically, includes "a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on their society and how it is governed, and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives."<sup>7</sup>

**Youth empowerment:** The UNDP Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (2016–2022) defines youth empowerment as "an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and in their societies."

**Information integrity:** This is the accuracy, consistency and reliability of the information content, processes and systems to maintain a healthy information ecosystem.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

<sup>8</sup> Yonder (2019). What is information integrity? In UNDP (2022). Strategic guidance: Information integrity: Forging a partway to truth, resilience and trust.



# Summary

Elections are inherently processes that lay bare differences within a society, and as a result, easily bring about tensions. As agents of change, young people are key advocates of peaceful elections; taking action to prevent and respond to conflict and the potential for violence. Electoral-related programmes can promote youth participation to sustain peace at different levels and degrees.

The purpose of this report is to lay out challenges and opportunities for electoral-related programming involving youth, with a specific focus on programmatic entry points for the promotion of youth participation to sustain peace during electoral processes. The findings have been informed by an extensive consultative process, including regionally focused and youth specific consultations and a youth survey with over 1000 responses, alongside a literature review to assess the current state of play in terms of policies and research that informs programming.

In line with key resolutions and agenda's, the outcomes of the SELECT once more underline that youth participation in elections transcends mere voter turnout among young people. Moreover, the research confirms that recognizing young people's positive role can be more effective, in terms of participation rates and from the prevention perspective. In addition, including and investing in youth, in its diversity is a key consideration and cannot be overstated.

The SELECT research process generally, and the youth participation workstream specifically promotes an integrated approach to the prevention of electoral-related violence and the meaningful inclusion of youth by bringing together the communities of practice working on elections, youth empowerment, inclusive governance and peacebuilding. This has brought a holistic lens to the research and its outcomes. It however also showcased the continued need for communities of practice to come together.

In order to support the design of a comprehensive youth participation strategy, informed by young people themselves and in support of peaceful electoral processes, this report suggests that programmes seek to include one or more of the following mutually reinforcing strategies:

- Invest in youth leadership and agency and an enabling environment; electoral-related programmes can consider supporting youth-led peace efforts in communities such as theaters for peace, dialogue meetings, awareness-raising through social media and radio programmes about electoral processes, rights and non-violence, among others.
- Include youth by transforming systems and removing structural barriers; electoral-related programmes can consider opening avenues for youth participation in decision-making processes through youth-friendly policies, enhancing transparency and accountability of institutions and addressing social and cultural norms relating to gender and age that may create a barrier for the implementation of legislation and policies relating to youth participation during elections, among others.
- Partner with young people and their organizations, movements and initiatives; electoral-related programmes can create space for intergenerational dialogue on electoral issues and violence prevention, support engagement mechanisms such as youth councils/caucuses/platforms and include young people in the design of electoral-related programmes.



# Chapter 1 Introduction

## The SELECT project

### Why youth participation matters

Young people are strikingly creative in sustaining peace and in bridging divides within and between communities. They participate in elections as observers, educators, candidates and civil society representatives and by monitoring electoral-related violence; promoting peace messages through innovative campaigns; and calling for accountability, inclusion and transparency by raising their voices through digital and offline platforms.

At the same time, young people experience discrimination and exclusion, and young women are particularly affected.<sup>9</sup> A stereotypical view of young people as disinterested in politics, objects of policy and troublemakers has caused development programming to largely focus on motivating young people, prior to elections, to vote while preventing them from engaging in electoral violence.<sup>10</sup> However, this report redirects the focus to the critical role that young people play in sustaining peace, which is in line with the youth, peace and security agenda,<sup>11</sup> and it seeks to help strengthen capacities in this regard during the electoral process. Thus, the aim is to shift the focus to comprehensive, youth-inclusive approaches for the prevention of electoral violence, instead of short-term reactionary approaches to manage the outbreak of violence during election periods. This can contribute towards reinforcing a preventive perspective and long-term activities to sustain peace and reduce the risk of violence during electoral processes.

Youth participation is a right and makes peacebuilding projects more efficient.<sup>12</sup> All people have the right to participate in public affairs,<sup>13</sup> and young people have the right to be

informed, consulted and considered, which implies that young people should have an influence upon decisions regarding their own lives and societies. Participation takes a centre stage in the youth, peace and security agenda and is one of the five pillars introduced by the first and groundbreaking UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015).

### The project

Credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful electoral processes are essential to confer legitimacy to national and local governments. When these processes are conducted in a well-organized and transparent manner, they often offer the means of channeling grievance and expectations into respectful and constructive debate. But electoral processes can also exacerbate underlying conflict dynamics

#### **UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security**

recognizes the importance of participation by urging “Member States to consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict ... and, as appropriate, to consider establishing integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution.”

triggering violence, sometimes undermining years of development and peacebuilding efforts.

This research report is prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as part of the Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project, which is funded by the European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI). The overall objective of the SELECT project is to build the capacity of both national electoral stakeholders and international partners to: (a) identify risk factors that may affect elections; (b) design

<sup>9</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>10</sup> UNDP (2013). Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle—a good practice guide.

<sup>11</sup> UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations (1948). Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

programmes and activities specifically aimed at preventing and reducing the risk of violence; and (c) implement operations related to the electoral processes in a conflict-sensitive manner.

This will be done by delivering on the two project outputs:

- Development of an online knowledge hub where implementable programmatic activities related to the prevention of electoral-related violence are listed, informed by research and knowledge development, available in French and English;
- The organization of outreach events/workshops to enhance electoral violence prevention capacities at national, regional and international level.

The ultimate purpose of the SELECT project is to establish an evidence base to support electoral practitioners in preventing and mitigating election-related violence. This includes a workstream with a focus on youth participation in sustaining peace and preventing violence during electoral processes. The project has also identified entry points for programming to increase capacities of stakeholders and development partners to support young people's participation in sustaining peace and preventing electoral violence.

UNDP applies a holistic approach to electoral assistance, which includes harmonization with overall objectives in the promotion of democratic processes and long-term support to electoral systems, processes and institutions. The European Union (EU) is a partner of the SELECT project, and the European Commission (EC) and UNDP share a vision regarding democratic governance and the value of electoral assistance in supporting the long-term, sustainable establishment and development of democratic institutions world-wide.<sup>14</sup> The SELECT project builds upon the UN and EU's joint commitment towards multilateralism and policy priorities relating to conflict prevention.<sup>15</sup> The main conclusion of the initial research phase of the

SELECT project was that current programming around elections would benefit from such a long-term and preventive perspective that includes broader governance areas of impact for electoral processes. The first phase was conducted through the European Commission, European External Action Service, European Parliament and UNDP.

### **UN Electoral Assistance Framework**

UN electoral assistance is provided to Member States at their request or based on mandates from the UN Security Council or General Assembly only. The UN system-wide focal point for electoral assistance matters, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, decides on the parameters of such assistance, based on needs assessments led by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). Implementation is guided by UN electoral policies set by the Focal Point, in consultation with UN entities, including UNDP.

<sup>14</sup> EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance. <https://www.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/en/about-us/>

<sup>15</sup> SELECT Project Document (2021).

## **UNDP's support to youth empowerment for sustainable development and peace**

UNDP's support to youth empowerment for sustainable development and peace: UNDP has promoted youth empowerment in more than 100 countries and territories<sup>16</sup>, taking a comprehensive approach that is multi-dimensional and multi-level, and for which youth political participation and civic engagement and youth participation in peacebuilding take a centre stage<sup>17</sup>. UNDP's first corporate Youth Strategy (2014–2017) 'Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future' includes a priority area on youth political participation and civic engagement. In 2018, the Secretary-General launched the first system-wide UN Youth Strategy 'Youth2030', which, among its thematic priority areas, includes a focus on the rights of young people; youth civic and political engagement; and young people as catalysts for peace, security and humanitarian action. Furthermore, the youth participation pillar of SELECT meets a demand from UNDP practitioners and beyond for more identification and knowledge of entry points for programming regarding support to young people's participation in sustaining peace during electoral processes and in preventing electoral violence.

## **The EU and youth participation in relation to elections, peace and violence**

The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027<sup>18</sup> aims to inform the EU's work across different sectors and support young people's engagement in democracy and society. The strategy has 11 goals, and of relevance to the SELECT project is the goal on space and participation for all, which aims to: "Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society" including through efforts to "increase youth participation and thus equal representation in the electoral process as well as in elected bodies and other decision-making organs at all levels of society." Other notable goals in this regard concern inclusive societies and information and constructive dialogue. Furthermore, in 2020, the European Council adopted conclusions on youth in external action, which calls on "support to young people's active engagement in responding to global challenges and efforts to build democratic, peaceful, inclusive, equitable, tolerant, secure and sustainable societies across the world" and to "support the inclusion of young people, and in particular young women and girls, and their participation in all efforts to prevent conflict, and build and sustain peace."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> UNDP (2021). Midterm review of the UNDP Strategic Plan.

<sup>17</sup> UNDP (2016). Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace

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<sup>18</sup> The EU Youth Strategy is based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Council of the European Union (2020). Council conclusions on youth in external action.

## Youth participation

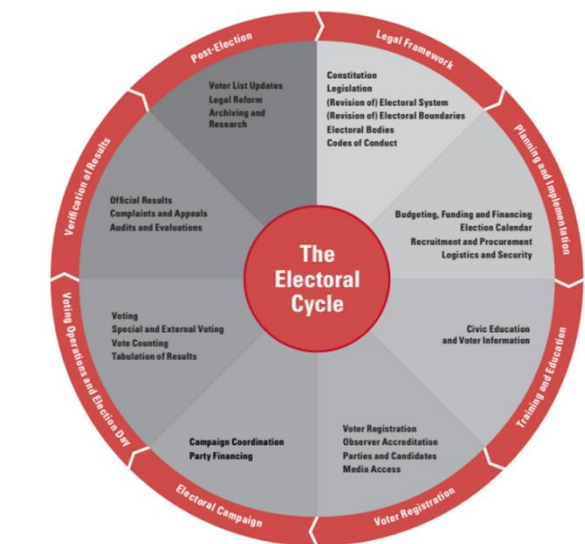
Participation as a pillar of the UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) relates to taking young people's participation and views into account in decision-making processes, from negotiation and prevention of violence to peace agreements and electoral processes. Youth participation is also an opportunity to deliver on the promises of inclusive electoral processes, and thereby, give voice to people from excluded groups.

### Youth participation

Participation is a key component of any quality stakeholder engagement and includes access to information and influence in decision-making,<sup>20</sup> and for youth participation, this includes influence in decision-making on all issue areas and not only youth-specific matters.<sup>21</sup> Other relevant components of youth participation are empowerment, learning and life skills, and access to rights.<sup>22</sup> Political participation, more specifically, includes "a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed, and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives."<sup>23</sup>

Young people often act for peace in their communities, hold political leaders to account for climate promises and deliver relief to the most vulnerable people, among other areas of action. However, there is low youth participation in formal politics in many societies. Young people and their organizations, movements and networks are more likely to engage through informal processes and alternate spaces. Formal

participation can be understood as engagement in established processes or institutions, whereas informal participation refers to people's organization for political, social or economic aims outside the realm of political parties and formal institutions.<sup>24</sup> In order to understand youth leadership and agency during elections, it is important to consider these alternative forms of participation such as youth civic activism and social movements, and that non-participation is also a form of participation/political expression. The youth survey and consultations of this research process have been a testimony to this. Youth participation is important and necessary throughout the electoral cycle. An electoral cycle approach "emphasizes the importance of long-term activities aimed at developing capacities for inclusive political participation. It covers the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral periods."<sup>25</sup> This can contribute towards fostering a safe, gender-responsive and enabling environment for youth participation where young people can raise their voices, engage in electoral operations and be agents for peaceful elections. It has become a key priority for the international community to not only amplify youth voices but to find ways to listen more attentively to youth perspectives.<sup>26</sup>



<sup>20</sup> UNDP-UNDESA (2020). A framework to analyse the quality of stakeholder engagement in implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

<sup>21</sup> The Danish National Youth Council (2019). Meaningful youth participation towards 2030 and beyond.

<sup>22</sup> UN-Habitat and UNDESA. Fact sheet: Youth participation.

<sup>23</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

<sup>24</sup> NDI (2021). Speak youth to power: Inspiring a new social contract.

<sup>25</sup> UNDP and the European Commission (2017). Youth participation in electoral processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations (2021). Our Common Agenda—Report by the Secretary-General.



*Figure 1: Electoral cycle.*<sup>27</sup>

Young people are not a homogeneous group, and electoral-related programmes would benefit from considering how the various identities of young people intersect and the impact of this in specific contexts in order to promote the participation of young people in their diversity. Leaving no one behind is a principle for sustainable development.<sup>28</sup> To leave no youth behind during the electoral process, stakeholder analyses should be sensitive to young people's identities relating to class, caste, religious affiliation, tribe, ethnicity, gender, age, people with disabilities and rural/urban, among others.<sup>29</sup>

### Framing of the Subject

#### The connection between youth participation, electoral processes and the prevention of violence

A focus on prevention and long-term efforts can strengthen the contribution of electoral assistance to address electoral-related violence.<sup>30</sup> The implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda provides an opportunity for fostering and strengthening such a preventive approach.<sup>31</sup> This entails a transformative approach to addressing the 'violence of exclusion' that young people experience and investing in youth as agents of change in sustaining peace.

By putting youth participation at the centre of efforts to prevent violent conflict and strengthen governance, the inclusiveness and accountability of democratic processes can be increased by supporting the participation of all people, tackling discrimination and enhancing representativeness. The following addresses

three key areas in this regard: trust, inequalities and intergenerational equity.

**Trust:** Global and regional surveys find that people's trust in democratic institutions is declining or remains at a low level across age groups.<sup>32</sup> This can discourage young people from participating in political and electoral processes such as voting, joining a political party or standing for office as well as engaging with national and multilateral institutions on matters of development and peace. Therefore, young people's mistrust in governance institutions and the electoral process is a key area of concern for electoral-related programmes that seek to contribute towards inclusive governance.<sup>33</sup> Another aspect relating to trust—put forward by young people and development practitioners through consultations<sup>34</sup> as well as research<sup>35</sup>—is how the lack of recognition of young people as right-holders and agents of change is creating a barrier to participation and empowerment and fueling young people's experience of not being trusted to have an influence upon decisions about their own lives and society. Hence, a key question is how elections can be made more resonant and trustworthy to youth as a way of removing barriers to their participation in governance and peacebuilding. This is a pressing issue given the trends in trust and human security. As the Special Human Development Report (2022) on Human Security notes, there is a link between declining levels of trust and feelings of insecurity: People who experience higher levels of human insecurity are three times less likely to find others

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<sup>27</sup> ACE—The electoral knowledge network. Accessed 13 November 2022: <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/emc/emc02w/emc02o>

<sup>28</sup> UN General Assembly (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

<sup>29</sup> For more information on how to engage young people through programmes and whom to engage, see United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook, chapter 1.

<sup>30</sup> SELECT Project Document (2021); UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (2016). Policy directive: Preventing and mitigating election-related violence.

<sup>31</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

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<sup>32</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes, pp. 22–23.

<sup>33</sup> In 2013, UNDP's good practice guide on enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle put an emphasis on strategic interventions in the pre- and post-electoral periods as a key priority of UNDP in order to support inclusive governance systems and address the mistrust of young people in formal political processes and the demand for change and access to rights by youth-led social movements. UNDP (2013). Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle—a good practice guide.

<sup>34</sup> For example see insights from the SELECT consultations, this report section "Insights from consultations"; UNDP (2021). 16 x 16 Dialogue Series: Youth leadership for peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

<sup>35</sup> UNDP (2022). 2022 Special Report on Human Security.

trustworthy.<sup>36</sup> Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, six out of seven surveyed people felt insecure.

**Inequalities:** Tackling inequalities is key to fostering a safe, gender-responsive and enabling environment for youth participation. Inequalities are often drivers of violent conflict and impact the lives and agency of young people.<sup>37</sup> The climate crisis and COVID-19 crisis are further exacerbating existing inequalities, and inequalities accumulate throughout life and persist across generations,<sup>38</sup> making it all the more difficult for young people to break out of situations of vulnerability. While young people are agents of change, this stage of the life-cycle comes with particular challenges stretching from being more prone to unemployment and less likely to having one's voice heard in decision-making.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, an agency-focused approach that recognizes young people's contribution to societies is essential to support protection against discrimination and tackle political, social and cultural norms to counter exclusion and promote human security. Examples of the impact of inequalities on youth participation in elections are the barriers to young women's voting in some societies due to unsafe travel to the polling station and limited access to information about elections for indigenous youth.

**Intergenerational equity:** Intergenerational equity relates to recognizing responsibilities to future generations and balancing the rights, opportunities and aspirations of current and future generations. Intergenerational equity is a key governance concern in relation to areas such as reducing inequalities and protecting a healthy planet. It brings a focus on long-term decision-making and addressing the barriers of structural inequality that prevent the full

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<sup>36</sup> A new generation of human security threats can be described as inequalities, digital technology threats, health threats, violent conflict and other threats as well as three enablers and promoters of people's agency: Solidarity, protection and empowerment. See UNDP (2022). 2022 Special Report on Human Security.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations and World Bank Group (2018). Pathways for peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict.

<sup>38</sup> UNDP (2019). Human Development Report 2019: Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century.

<sup>39</sup> UNDP (2022). Human Development Report 2021–22: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World.

participation of some young people in an effort to provide all people with opportunities.<sup>40</sup>

## Framework of analysis

This research report is among the deliverables of the youth participation workstream of the Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project. The research process was developed to deliver on the content of the project output 1 for the development of an online knowledge hub and to be used through the project output 2 for capacity-building and outreach. The research process has been designed to be inclusive and participatory to ensure the content produced in the final product has a multi-regional lens and takes into consideration experiences and knowledge from a wide range of stakeholders and particularly young people.

### Topics under the SELECT project

1. Promotion of information integrity
2. **Youth participation**
3. Electoral violence monitoring and analysis
4. Parliamentary support and citizen consultations
5. Gender and women's participation
6. Programming inclusive governance

The **consultative research process** has drawn on recent guidance materials on youth, peace and security programming in the relevant areas of support to sustaining peace during the electoral process with the aim of identifying opportunities for programming to account for the positive role that young people play in sustaining peace and the prevention of violence in the context of elections. Figure 2 illustrates the activities and data sources, and Annex 1

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<sup>40</sup> For more on solidarity with future generations, see for example United Nations (2021). Our Common Agenda—Report by the Secretary-General; Youth and climate action UNDP report.

provides more details on the data collection strategy. Through consultations, events, desk literature review and scoping interviews, the process has brought together UN/UNDP practitioners; young leaders of organizations, movements and networks; decision-makers; and other experts and stakeholders, and has connected the youth, peace and security community to the electoral assistance community.

supporting outreach and raising awareness of youth participation in sustaining peace and the prevention of electoral violence and (3) fostering coherence in programmatic approaches among a community of practitioners working on electoral assistance and youth, peace and security. See Annex 6 for the Terms of Reference and a list of the members of the Joint Working Group.

Five regional multi-stakeholder consultations 180 participants (270 registrants)	Youth survey 1,000+ respondents
Youth consultations 50+ participants (100+ registrants)	Thematic discussion meetings
Joint Working Group meetings	Desk literature review
Scoping interviews	Mapping of projects, initiatives and activities

Figure 2: Activities and data sources

The aim of the **participatory approach** was to: foster engagement of young people and consider youth perspectives from the outset; generate ownership among the actors engaged; support uptake of the outputs; and contribute towards strengthening capacities of organizations throughout the process. To this end, the process was informed by principles, standards and strategies for meaningful youth engagement and youth, peace and security programming, which are outlined in Annex 3.

Essential to the participatory process was the **Joint Working Group** on youth participation in sustaining peace during the electoral process, which provided overall guidance to the research process by (1) providing input to the outputs and product of the SELECT project, (2)

### Key research questions

- What promising practices, initiatives, activities and projects are being undertaken by national electoral stakeholders and international partners to promote youth participation in sustaining peace during the electoral process? Are these preventive and long-term efforts?
- What opportunities are there for integrating election-related violence prevention efforts into broader governance areas to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies (SDG 16)? How can this contribute towards transforming systems that reinforce the exclusion of young people from having an influence upon their own lives and societies?
- How do key risk factors of election-related violence relate to the situation of young people? What opportunities are there to support youth political participation, civic engagement and peace efforts as a means to prevent violence and sustain peace?
- What peacebuilding and violence prevention activities, initiatives and projects are being undertaken by young people during the electoral process, and what is their impact?
- What do young people recommend to promote youth participation in sustaining peace and the prevention of violence during the electoral process?
- What are the operational implications for UNDP and other (international/regional/national) organizations seeking to effectively

support youth participation during the electoral process?

The youth survey (July 2022) was designed to provide insights on youth peace efforts during elections and their capacity needs as well as young people's perceptions relating to peace, violence and elections. The survey was hosted online and circulated through the networks of youth organizations and movements as well as development partners, and it was also shared on social media. More than 1,000 young people responded to the survey. Over half of the respondents were from Colombia, and to identify any deviations, the analysis of the findings checked for regional differences and checked the data with and without the top-three countries in terms of the number of respondents. The analysis of open-ended questions applied a qualitative content analysis to determine themes and draw findings from the textual responses.

## Limitations

**Consultations:** Some issues are rarely discussed during multi-stakeholder meetings due to sensitivities. Therefore, the research has relied upon other data and studies to provide insights to areas such as protections issues, gender-based violence and threats towards young people engaging in civic space.

**Youth survey:** Because the experience of peace is context-specific,<sup>41</sup> it is difficult to design global surveys with perception questions on peace and violence. In addition, the survey was shared online, which creates limitations relating to the digital divide since the target group had access to the Internet. This has been considered when drawing conclusions from the findings of the youth survey, and a youth consultation was hosted to validate the findings.

**Findings:** It is beyond the scope of the report to assess the impact of youth-led efforts—which is a general challenge.<sup>42</sup> Instead, the report

provides insights to the types of youth peace efforts and how they relate to activities to prevent electoral-related violence.

**Programmatic options:** The programmatic options aim to inspire action to promote youth participation. However, these should not be understood as prescriptive, and context-specific approaches are essential for programming.

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<sup>41</sup> Firchow and Mac Ginty (2017). Measuring peace: Comparability, commensurability and complementarity using bottom up indicators, in *International Studies Review*, 19: 6–27.

<sup>42</sup> On measuring peace, see for example Institute of Economics and Peace (2022). Positive peace report; and on

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youth participation in peacebuilding, see for example Institute of Economics and Peace (2017). *Data for Youth, Peace and Security: A summary of research findings*, thematic paper for Simpson (2018). *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. UNFPA/PBSO.



# Chapter 2 State of the Research

While it is not new for development partners and stakeholders to advocate for and support young people's participation in peacebuilding, civic and political affairs, international frameworks are increasingly recognizing youth as agents of change, and research on youth participation is expanding and providing a growing evidence base for the development of electoral-related programmes involving youth and the prevention of violence.

## Trends

The UN Security Council-mandated, independent progress study on youth, peace and security: 'The Missing Peace' (2018) finds that societies may reap a peace dividend if the right investments in youth are made and their peacebuilding work is supported. However, to do this, there is a need to move from marginalization to meaningful inclusion of young people, which entails addressing young people's experience of a 'violence of exclusion' that stems from reciprocal mistrust between young people, their governments and the multilateral system.

## Youth and violence

In 2016, almost one-quarter of young people lived in settings affected by armed conflict or organized crime.<sup>43</sup> While young people are often portrayed as violent and much research and policy analysis has sought to examine youth violence, there is limited evidence to support a correlation between a large, young population group and high levels of violence, and indeed some peaceful countries have large youth populations.<sup>44</sup> Research finds that the level of development and regime type is a more pertinent explanatory factor of violence than an

increase in the youth population,<sup>45</sup> challenging the notion of youth violence. Research on post-conflict societies in Africa describes youth violence as a "...political response to the dynamics of (dis)empowerment, exclusion, and economic crisis" and a form of agency in a context with limited alternative opportunities.<sup>46</sup> Other findings highlight that it is critical to include information on the perspectives and the lived experience of young people in order to understand the relationship between youth and violence, as these insights are likely to go unnoticed in quantitative research, for example.<sup>47</sup>

Young people are often seen as a threat to peace and a problem to be solved, which has contributed to fueling a 'policy panic' where programmes are directed to respond to youth as a security issue while most people are not engaged in violence.<sup>48</sup> While in some contexts young people are victims or primary perpetrators of violence, the majority of young people are not, and the negative and restraining stereotypes relating to young people and violence—where youth is seen as troublemakers, young men as perpetrators of violence and young women as victims of violence—contribute to overlooking young people's leadership and agency for peace.

## Youth and peace

Even when young people are excluded from formal political processes and socioeconomic opportunities, they are creating alternative spaces for belonging and peacebuilding action. On the basis of the participatory research process (4230 young people), the progress

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<sup>43</sup> Institute of Economics and Peace (2017). Data for Youth, Peace and Security: A summary of research findings, thematic paper for Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>44</sup> See more on the youth bulge in Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO, pp. 19–21.

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<sup>45</sup> Urdal (2006). A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence, in *International Studies Quarterly*, 50(3), pp. 607–629.

<sup>46</sup> Ukeje and Iwilade (2012). African Youth and Violence, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6(2), pp. 339–351.

<sup>47</sup> Sommers (2015). The outcast majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO, pp. 19–21.

study on youth, peace and security describes how young people are taking leadership and ownership in building and sustaining peace across the world. When experiencing exclusion from formal participation in political affairs, youth mobilize for peace in communities through creative ways. When they are not invited to engage meaningfully at the table during a peace negotiation, they work around and outside the room.<sup>49</sup>

A survey<sup>50</sup> of 399 youth-led civil society organizations (CSOs) working to build peace describe types of youth peace work as engaging in all phases of peace and conflict, operating at all levels (from youth-to-youth projects to global advocacy), collaborating with diverse partners, responding to different forms of violence (from political violence to gender-based violence) and forging bridges across areas of work (from development to human rights).

Young people and their organizations, movements and networks do not all—or automatically—contribute to peace. Rather young people are as diverse as the general population, while age as a component of young people's identity is a transitional phase with particular risks of vulnerabilities.

Research on the efficacy of electoral violence prevention strategies is limited.<sup>51</sup> Some research finds that the impact of peace messaging, voter consultations and youth programming remain unclear and that there is a need for stronger programmes relating to civic engagement and education.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, research on youth participation in peacebuilding indicates an important contribution of youth initiatives, as mentioned above and further elaborated below. Election-related violence is often driven by factors relating to political interests and power dynamics,<sup>53</sup> which might explain the limited

effect of smaller, informal initiatives to prevent electoral-related violence. Nonetheless, these same initiatives can contribute significantly at the local and community level to build and sustain peace.

### Youth participation during elections

There is a generation gap in participation and representation of youth in politics, and young people are often voting less than older generations and express mistrust in governance institutions.<sup>54</sup> While it is essential to promote youth participation in formal processes to address the exclusion of young people, assessing youth participation in informal processes is key to understanding youth leadership and agency, for instance through CSOs, social media campaigns or protests.<sup>55</sup> Some argue that the barriers to direct youth participation in formal processes such as elections cause young people to seek these alternative forms of participation,<sup>56</sup> while studies also highlight that young people are not interested in participating in governance systems that they consider illegitimate.<sup>57</sup>

The low representation of young people in politics contributes to creating a barrier for youth participation. In 2021, 2.6 percent of parliamentarians were younger than 30,<sup>58</sup> while 49 percent of the global population is under the age of 30, and there has been limited increase in youth representation.<sup>59</sup> According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, there are few but a growing number of networks and caucuses of young members of parliaments, with parliamentary committees considering youth-specific issues present in more than half of the reporting countries, and youth parliaments

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<sup>49</sup> Alitok and Grizelj (2019). We are here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes.

<sup>50</sup> United Network of Young Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground (2017). Mapping a sector: Bridging the evidence gap on youth-driven peacebuilding.

<sup>51</sup> Birch and Muchlinski (2018). Electoral violence prevention: what works?, *Democratization*, 25:3, pp. 385–403.

<sup>52</sup> Claes (2017). Electing Peace: Violence prevention and impact at the polls.

<sup>53</sup> Birch and Muchlinski (2018). Electoral violence prevention: what works?, *Democratization*, 25:3, pp. 385–403

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<sup>54</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

<sup>55</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

<sup>56</sup> Kimberlee (2002). Why Don't British Young People Vote at General Elections?, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5(1):85–97.

<sup>57</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>58</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021). 2021 Youth Participation in National Parliaments Report

<sup>59</sup> Data between 2014 and 2020 from the Inter-Parliamentary Union presented in UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

existing in more than half of the surveyed countries.<sup>60</sup>

### Normative frameworks

In recognition of the essential role that young people play in the maintenance of international peace and security, the UN Security Council adopted the groundbreaking resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security and the subsequent resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020). The youth, peace and security agenda represents a narrative shift towards understanding the role that young people play as agents of change for peace and away from often predominant perceptions of young men as perpetrators of violence and young women as victims of violence.

The recognition of young people as agents of change cuts across the pillars of the UN—development, human rights, and peace and security—with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>61</sup> the sustaining peace agenda,<sup>62</sup> and the Human Rights Council resolutions on youth and human rights,<sup>63</sup> among other frameworks. It is also relevant to support youth participation across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See data on youth participation provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Accessed 13 November 2022: <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/youth-empowerment/data-youth-participation>

<sup>61</sup> United Nations General Assembly (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/res/70/1).

<sup>62</sup> United Nations Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) and UN General Assembly resolution 70/262 (2016) on sustaining peace.

<sup>63</sup> All people have the right to participate in public affairs (Universal Declaration on Human Rights), and all states are called upon to “promote and ensure the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for youth...” (The United Nations Human Rights Council resolution 41/13 (2019)).

<sup>64</sup> UN Security Council resolution 2535 (2020) recognizes the importance of young people’s meaningful engagement in humanitarian planning and response, and the UN General Assembly resolution 76/137 (2021) calls upon Member States and UN entities to increase the meaningful and inclusive participation of youth in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, post-conflict processes and humanitarian action and assist youth during armed conflict. Furthermore, the need for engaging young people in humanitarian action was emphasized at the World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul, 2016.

The UN General Assembly calls upon all Member States to “consider ways to increase the representation of all youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms, to promote the constructive political engagement of youth and to consider, explore and promote new avenues for the full, effective, structured and sustained participation of youth and youth-led organizations in relevant decision-making processes”<sup>65</sup> as well as to address barriers that limit young people’s participation and representation.<sup>66</sup>

The UN Secretary-General’s ‘Our Common Agenda’ highlights a continued need for meaningful engagement of the diversity of young people in political processes, promoting political representation of youth, including women and girls, and building the capacity of local youth networks and youth-led organizations. It stresses the importance of ‘listening’ to youth and proposes the initiation of a ‘youth in politics index’ to track the opening of political space, the establishment of a dedicated UN Youth Office and the drafting of recommendations for meaningful, diverse and effective youth engagement in United Nations deliberative and decision-making processes.<sup>67</sup>

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda are both supporting inclusive approaches to sustaining peace and addressing different forms of exclusion from decision-making processes. While the agendas have many similarities and are interconnected, it is critical to recognize the specific barriers to participation stemming from the different forms of discrimination faced by the population groups. To advance the implementation of the resolutions, it is key to understand the gendered experiences of young people engaging in peace and security matters as well as the implications of age for women’s participation in processes relating to peace and security. Hence, this relates to the recognition of

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<sup>65</sup> UN General Assembly resolution 76/176 (2021) on strengthening the role of the United Nations in the promotion of democratization and enhancing periodic and genuine elections.

<sup>66</sup> UN General Assembly resolution 76/137 (2021) on policies and programmes involving youth.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations (2021). Our Common Agenda—Report of the Secretary-General.

young women as peacebuilders, the inclusion of young women's needs and tackling masculinities relating to youth and violence. Youth should not be equated with women as excluded or targeted groups, and vice versa, and this calls for nuanced approaches to support youth participation to sustain peace during elections.<sup>68</sup>

This research report aims to identify programmatic options for aligning electoral assistance with the youth, peace and security agenda, the system-wide United Nations Strategy 'Youth2030', the principle of leaving no one behind of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development along with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and its promise to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, among other relevant frameworks. It is also of relevance to the EU's Global Strategy and the UN's 'Our Common Agenda' with the UN Secretary-General's 2021 report calling for meaningful, diverse and effective youth engagement in political processes as a core component of the social contract.

### Moving from policy to practice

While there is a tendency for development programmes to narrowly focus on voter turnout among young people and preventing youth from engaging in violence, there is growing agreement that treating young people as troublemakers, objects of policies and beneficiaries of programmes will not lead to increased youth participation in elections nor bring about a transformative change in societies. Rather, programmatic guidelines<sup>69</sup> increasingly have focused on supporting young people as agents of change for development, democracy and peace and on fostering a safe, gender-responsive and enabling environment for youth

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<sup>68</sup> United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). *Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook*.

<sup>69</sup> See for example UNDP (2013). *Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle—a good practice guide*; United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). *Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook*; UNDP and the European Commission (2017). *Youth participation in electoral processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies*; UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (2016). *Policy directive: Preventing and mitigating election-related violence*.

participation. This is backed by lessons learned from the UN's support to youth political participation and civic engagement, as it highlights the importance of partnering with key community actors and local youth organizations, movements and networks as well as engaging a diversity of young people in multiple capacities to strengthen the ability of programmes to amplify youth voices and rights.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, research of development programmes finds that initiatives that recognize young people's positive role and take a more comprehensive, longer-term community-based development approach can be more effective in addressing drivers of conflict.<sup>71</sup> In addition, a focus on inclusive electoral processes can give voice to people from marginalized groups.<sup>72</sup> In relation to electoral violence prevention strategies, a global study based on data between 2003 and 2015 finds that "...capacity-building strategies reduce violence by non-state actors, whereas attitude-transforming strategies are associated with a reduction in violence by state actors and their allies,"<sup>73</sup> which is further encouragement for development programmes involving youth to emphasize support for youth's peace efforts rather than prevention of young people's engagement in violence.

Existing guidance materials provide information for electoral stakeholders and development practitioners seeking to work with and for young people. The youth, peace and security programming handbook (UN and FBA, 2021) and the practice note on young people's participation in peacebuilding (UN IANYD,

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<sup>70</sup> Independent Evaluation Offices of UNFPA and UNICEF (2021). *What works to amplify the rights and voices of youth? Meta-synthesis of lessons learned from youth evaluations (2015–2020) to support the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy*.

<sup>71</sup> Research of the positive youth development approach finds that projects adopting such an approach have more sustainable impact than responses to triggers of violence. YouthPower Learning (2017). *Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and P/VE—Summary of Key Interventions and Examples*. Washington, D.C., p. 1, in United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). *Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook*.

<sup>72</sup> Independent Evaluation Office. *Lessons from evaluations: UNDP support to electoral processes*.

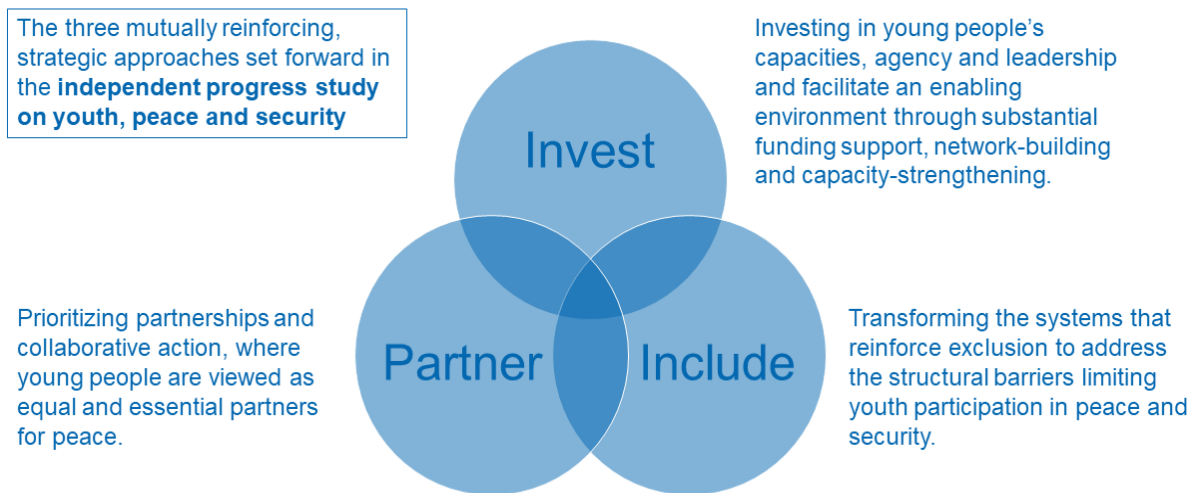
<sup>73</sup> Birch and Muchlinski (2018). *Electoral violence prevention: what works?*, *Democratization*, 25:3, pp. 385–403.



2016)<sup>74</sup> seek to increase capacities to strengthen young people's participation in peacebuilding throughout the programme cycle. Guidelines<sup>75</sup> on youth political participation during the electoral process highlight the importance of investing in youth as agents of change and partnering with youth organizations, movements and networks, including for Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs),<sup>76</sup> and how youth political participation can contribute towards inclusive peace and security processes.<sup>77</sup> Importantly and at the

Invest in youth leadership and agency and an enabling environment; electoral-related programmes can consider supporting youth-led peace efforts in communities such as theaters for peace, dialogue meetings, awareness-raising through social media and radio programmes about electoral processes, rights and non-violence, among others.

Include youth by transforming systems and removing structural barriers; electoral-related programmes can consider opening avenues for



*Figure 3: Invest, Partner and Include Youth*

strategic level, the progress study on youth, peace and security introduces three mutually reinforcing strategies: invest in youth, include youth and partner with youth. These are further elaborated in Figure 3

**Electoral-related programmes can:**

youth participation in decision-making processes through youth-friendly policies, enhancing transparency and accountability of institutions and addressing social and cultural norms relating to gender and age that may create a barrier for the implementation of legislation and policies relating to youth participation during elections, among others.

Partner with young people and their organizations, movements and initiatives; electoral-related programmes can create space for intergenerational dialogue on electoral issues and violence prevention, support engagement mechanisms such as youth councils/caucuses/platforms and include young people in the design of electoral-related programmes.

**Promotion of youth participation in electoral processes**

<sup>74</sup> UN Inter-Agency Network for Youth Development (UN IANYD) (2016). Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note.

<sup>75</sup> See for example UNDP (2013). Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle—a good practice guide; National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2007). Engaging Young People in Politics in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings—A Guidebook.

<sup>76</sup> UNDP and the European Commission (2017). Youth participation in electoral processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies.

<sup>77</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

EMBs can enhance youth participation during an election by supporting (1) an enabling environment for young people through legal frameworks, constitutions, lowering of the voting age and age of eligibility to run for office, and political party finance legislation; (2) youth empowerment through civic education, leveraging media and technology, taking advantage of educational institutions and using arts and creative activities; and (3) youth engagement through data collection, young staff in EMBs, registration and voting.<sup>78</sup>

As for progress on the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda, the first report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security (2020) has two key findings: (1) There is a growing recognition of young people's essential role in peace and security, and in many instances governments, United Nations entities, civil society actors and others are stepping up to implement resolution 2250 (2015); and (2) core challenges remain, including structural barriers limiting the participation of young people and their capacity to influence decision-making; violations of their human rights; and insufficient investment in facilitating their inclusion and empowerment. The second report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security (2022) notes the unprecedented challenges owing to multiple crises: the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change, violence and armed conflict, and their compounded effects, and recognizes that the mobilization of young people for peace, social justice, climate action and equality remained unfaltering and critical to the peaceful development of societies even though the impact of the pandemic has reinforced barriers and created new challenges for their meaningful participation in peace and security processes. There is a need to accelerate the implementation of policy frameworks relating to young people's participation in peace and decision-making processes.

In addition, reports by the UN Secretary-General on electoral assistance highlight the need for all

<sup>78</sup> UNDP and the European Commission (2017). Youth participation in electoral processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies.

Member States to "consider ways to increase the participation of youth in decision-making and in electoral processes as candidates, voters, electoral officials, party agents and observers" and for political leaders and parties to "promote generational changes and consider internal party regulations that can help advance young leaders."<sup>79</sup> The reports also note "the approach taken by some Member States to align the minimum age of eligibility to stand for elections with the minimum voting age is noted as being a possible path to greater participation."<sup>80</sup>

### Youth-participatory approaches to programming

Youth-sensitive and youth-responsive programming entails approaches that support the meaningful participation of young people. Support to the meaningful participation of a diversity of young people can improve the relevance, legitimacy, sustainability and impact of development and peace projects. It is also an opportunity for national electoral stakeholders and international organizations to be accountable to young people, which is a large constituency in developing countries and territories, which often experience exclusion and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of age, gender and social factors.<sup>81</sup> The promotion of inclusiveness is a principle for the United Nations efforts to prevent electoral-related violence and incorporates the involvement of underrepresented or marginalized groups.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Report of the Secretary-General (2017) on strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization (A/72/260).

<sup>80</sup> Report of the Secretary-General (2019) on strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization (A/74/285).

<sup>81</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council resolution 41/13 (2019) on youth and human rights and United Nations Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security recognize young people as underrepresented in formal political and peace processes and as experiencing difficulties in realizing their rights by virtue of being young.

<sup>82</sup> United Nations Department of Political Affairs (2016). Policy directive: Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence.

**The United Nations Security Council resolution 2535 (2020)** reaffirms

“...inclusivity, including by ensuring full, effective and meaningful participation of youth without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, disability, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status is key to advancing peacebuilding processes and objectives in order to ensure that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account.”<sup>83</sup>

The three-lens approach<sup>84</sup> to youth participation brings a focus on working with and for youth for effective development by (1) working for youth as beneficiaries (target groups), (2) engaging with youth as partners (collaborators) and (3) supporting youth as leaders (initiators).

These lenses are not mutually exclusive—electoral assistance can include different activities that involve working for youth as beneficiaries as well as supporting them as leaders. The nature of the work may also evolve over time. For instance, international development partners might collaborate with young people to set up a platform to monitor violence during elections. Over time, this platform may become self-sustainable and thereby, youth-led, and the support from the international development partners evolves from supporting the platform itself to have a focus solely on the enabling environment, such as opening avenues for the results of the youth-led monitoring to be considered in decision-making processes.

There are many forms and levels of youth participation: from informing young people about a matter, to empowering youth to take a final decision. Deliberative processes are a way

of engaging citizens in policymaking,<sup>85</sup> and youth deliberative participation can create space for intergenerational dialogue and for young people to have an influence upon decisions and conclusions relating to a set policy area.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, youth participation unfolds in both offline and online spaces and often by leveraging digital tools in combination with in-person activities. As will be elaborated below, online youth participation is integral to youth peace efforts during elections, but it comes with some specific opportunities and challenges.

Electoral assistance may want to consider the form, lens and level of participation that is the most relevant to the specific activity—and it will most likely include multiple levels—when deciding upon approaches to promote youth participation during elections. Annex 3 provides an overview of relevant principles and approaches to the meaningful engagement of young people in processes relating to development, peace and elections.

### Diverse development settings

Different development settings and regime types impact national capacities to promote youth participation to sustain peace. This can also affect the development challenges that programmes need to mitigate and transform as the risk of electoral processes catalyzes into violence.<sup>87</sup> For instance, countries and territories undergoing a political transition process may be prone to experience violent conflict; consolidating democracies might experience greater difficulty in overcoming differences and fostering peaceful co-existence; so-called post-conflict societies can still be affected by conflict drivers and divisions, often making elections a critical turning point; and elections have high stakes in situations of referendums to ratify peace agreements or determine sovereignty.

<sup>83</sup> UN Security Council resolution 2535 (2020) on youth, peace and security. S/RES/2535 (2020).

<sup>84</sup> Development for International Development–Civil Society Organisation Youth Working Group (2010). Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers in United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). Youth, Peace and Security: A programming handbook.

<sup>85</sup> The OECD has identified 12 models of deliberative processes, clustered under four types of purpose: (1) informed citizen recommendations on policy questions; (2) citizen opinion on policy questions; (3) informed citizen evaluation of ballot measures; and (4) permanent deliberative models, OECD (2020). Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the deliberative wave.

<sup>86</sup> SALTO (2013). Deliberation models featuring youth participation.

<sup>87</sup> UNDP (2009). Elections and Conflict Prevention: A guide to analysis, planning and programming.

Analyses of patterns and trends in electoral violence have found that it is a phenomenon affecting mainly electoral authoritarian or hybrid states, particularly in Asia, the Middle East and Africa.<sup>88</sup>

Statistical data indicates some regional trends in youth political participation and civic engagement. In Africa, there are generational and governance gaps,<sup>89</sup> and according to a 2016 survey by the Africa Barometer, young people are relatively less likely to participate in political and civic activities than other population groups.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, youth-led social movements are pushing for change and promoting peacebuilding across the continent.<sup>91</sup> According to the Arab Barometer, young people show relatively limited interest in political participation compared to older generations, express mistrust in governance institutions and tend to be more interested in informal processes.<sup>92</sup> While young people tend to participate more through social movements and civic initiatives, civic actions have not always led to more influence on politics.<sup>93</sup> In Asia-Pacific, according to a study conducted by the United Nations in 2015, distrust in political processes remains a barrier to youth participation.<sup>94</sup> In the Western Balkans, according to a 2021 study by the United Nations and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, young people indicate relative low satisfaction with their governance systems and institutions, and 19.5 percent of young people report being civically engaged, while over 65 percent are interested in being more active.<sup>95</sup> In Latin America, younger and

older people do not differ much in their assessment of the state of public affairs, with the exception of politics, where young people are more likely to be dissatisfied, according to a UNDP brief from 2021.<sup>96</sup>

### Youth participation in local elections

The local level is particularly important for youth participation during elections. However, in fragile contexts, electoral-related violence is often localized, and government power at the municipal level can be a driver of violence.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, community-level initiatives are promising means of enhancing youth-inclusive, participatory decision-making processes in fragile and conflict-affected societies.<sup>98</sup> The local level is also key to leaving no youth behind in sustainable development and reach a broader range of young people and foster more inclusive political processes to tackle the widespread mistrust by young people in governance institutions.<sup>99</sup> Support to youth councils and/or municipal youth committees can foster inclusion of youth perceptions, needs and aspirations about local issues relating to development and peace.<sup>100</sup> Young people's participation is essential to effective local governance towards resilient, peaceful and inclusive societies. Yet, young people often face exclusion from local governance, and actions to address this include the strengthening of constitutional, legislative and policy frameworks for youth inclusion, the promotion of institutional change (including local governments, traditional structures and civil society) and advocacy for the linkages between global agendas and local governance.<sup>101</sup> This can entail support to youth social accountability initiatives, access to local peace and dispute

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<sup>88</sup> Laakso (2007). Insights into Electoral Violence in Africa. In M. Basedau, G. Erdmann, & A. Mehler (Eds.), *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 386.

<sup>89</sup> The African Leadership Institute (AFLI) and the African Union's Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) (2020). Greater inclusion of African youth in public services and governance.

<sup>90</sup> Resnick and Casale (2016). Does less engaged mean less empowered? Political participation lags among African youth, especially women, *Afrobarometer*, Policy Paper No. 34.

<sup>91</sup> Bangura (2022). *Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa*. Routledge.

<sup>92</sup> Arab Barometer, data. (Accessed March 2021).

<sup>93</sup> UNDP (2016). *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*.

<sup>94</sup> United Nations (2015). *Switched on: Youth at the heart of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific*.

<sup>95</sup> UNDP (2021). *Shared Futures: Youth perceptions on peace in the Western Balkans*.

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<sup>96</sup> UNDP (2021). Internal brief: Young people's views of public life and politics in Latin America: An initial review of perception data. See also *Latinobarometro*.

<sup>97</sup> UNDP (2009). *Elections and Conflict Prevention: A guide to analysis, planning and programming*; Sisk (2008). *Elections in Fragile States, Between Voice and Violence*, paper prepared for the International Studies Association Annual Meeting.

<sup>98</sup> UNDP (2022). *Spearheading youth participation for peace in fragile and conflict-affected societies*. Thematic paper for the Report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security.

<sup>99</sup> ActionAid (2020). *Believe in better*.

<sup>100</sup> ACE Electoral Knowledge Platform. (Accessed 24 October 2022.)

<sup>101</sup> UNDP (2016). *Local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings*, pp. 50–56.



## Chapter 3 Regional Analysis

### Youth peace efforts during elections: the survey

Young people's perspectives, needs and aspirations in the context of elections and sustaining peace are often overlooked. The SELECT youth participation workstream launched a youth survey to place the perspectives of young people from across the world at the core of the research in order to better (1) understand youth engagement throughout the electoral process, (2) describe characteristics of youth peace efforts and youth actions to prevent electoral-related violence and (3) identify priority areas for young people's increased access to capacity development and support. Overall, 1006 young people responded to the youth survey, which was open between 6 and 31 July 2022.

Youth surveys and analyses have previously been conducted in relation to peace and security,<sup>102</sup> political participation<sup>103</sup> and civic space.<sup>104</sup> While these bring relevant insights, there was a need to further understand and harvest the expertise and experiences of young people specifically on sustaining peace during elections. The findings from the youth survey inform the recommendations and programmatic options set forward through the youth participation workstream of the SELECT project.

#### Who were the young respondents?

- The young respondents live across 65 countries and territories with over half of

<sup>102</sup> See for example Simpson (2018). *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. UNFPA/PBSO; United Network of Young Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground (2017). *Mapping a sector: Bridging the evidence gap on youth-driven peacebuilding*.

<sup>103</sup> See for example The Commonwealth (2020), *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2020*; The Body Shop and the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (2022). *Be Seen, Be Heard: Understanding young people's political participation*.

<sup>104</sup> See for example CIVICUS (2019). *People Power Under Attack*; United Nations (2021). *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space*.

the respondents hailing from Colombia (569) and many respondents from Nigeria and Kenya.

- The majority of the respondents reside in urban areas and are educated (graduate or post-graduate).
- More than half of the respondents identify as male (55 percent), but women were well represented (43 percent).
- The majority of the young respondents were between 14 and 29 years old; Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean were the regions having more younger youth (below 25 years of age) among the respondents, while there was a greater participation of older youth (between 25 and 35 years of age) from Africa.
- The survey primarily reached 'organized youth' with more than half of the respondents identifying as members of an organization and one-third as members of a youth-led organization. Few of the respondents are affiliated with political parties (16 percent). The majority of the respondents have an understanding of the electoral process (laws, policies, systems of elections) in their country/territory. The young respondents participate in elections, with 76 percent having voted in the last local or national election, 44 percent having participated in peace initiatives during elections and only 0.3 percent noting boycotting an election as a strategy to raise concerns.

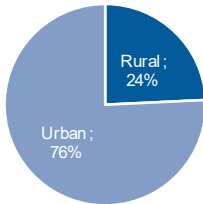
## Who were the young people responding to the survey?

1006 young people		65 countries and territories	
55% male	43% women	1% non-binary	1% prefer not to say

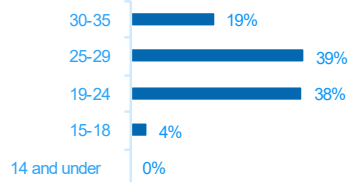
141 from Nigeria  
59 from Kenya  
569 from Colombia

Responses per region	
Africa	328
Arab States	51
Asia-Pacific	46
Europe and Central Asia	3
Latin America and the Caribbean	572
North America and others	6

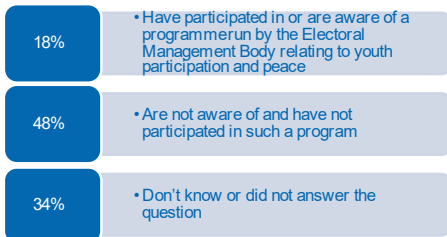
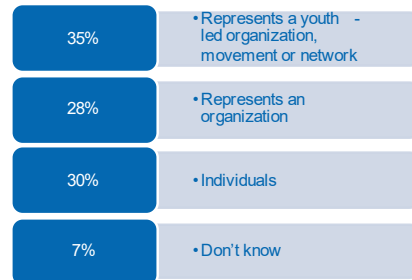
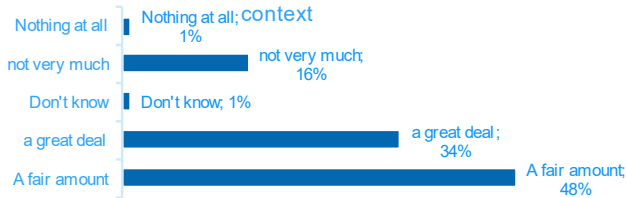
### Place of residence



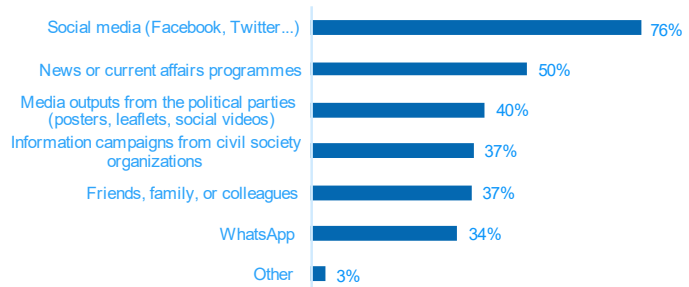
### Age



### Understanding of the electoral process in their



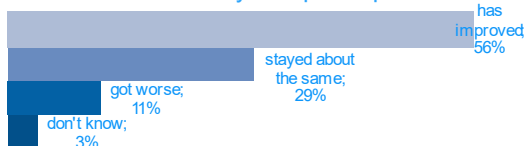
### Information sources



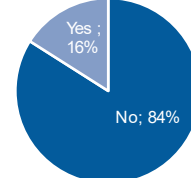
## Youth participation in elections

Voting is the primary form of participation in elections.

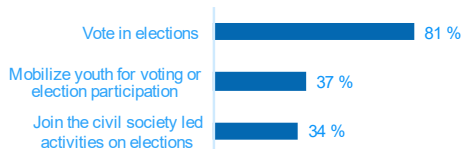
### Trend in youth participation



### Political party affiliation



### Top-3 forms of youth participation during the electoral process



### Top-4 actions by young people

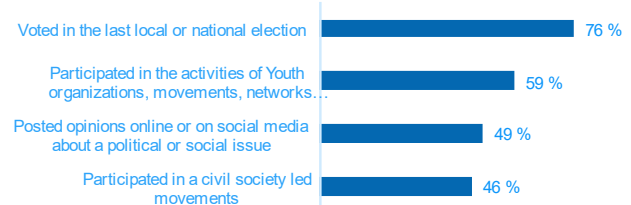


Figure 4: Survey respondents

## Key insights from the youth survey

Youth peace efforts: Young people and their organizations, movements and networks are agents of change for peace during the electoral process. Just under half (44 percent) of the respondents have founded or started peace initiatives during the electoral process in their community, and half of these were youth-led initiatives. Youth peace initiatives take many forms. Respondents reported the most prominent ways of contributing to sustaining peace and preventing violence including:

- Awareness-raising and access to information about elections including to mobilize youth;
- Youth-led peacebuilding and conflict prevention including peace walks and fostering a culture of peace through creative approaches and sports;
- Advocacy and campaigning including peace messaging through social media campaigns and radio programmes.

Furthermore, several respondents mentioned providing access to training, capacity development and education on peace, electoral laws, democratic values and conflict resolution skills as well as facilitating dialogue in relation to accountability platforms, multi-stakeholder dialogues and civic forums.

The reaction to violence: While young people consider violence as a hindrance to youth participation during elections, young people themselves take actions to respond to violence. One-quarter of the young respondents had taken action to address violence. Many of these actions relate to awareness-raising including access to information, advocacy, campaigns and trainings about peaceful co-existence, acceptance of diverging points of view, human rights, and the individual and societal consequences of violence. Youth-led peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities, including the creation of spaces for dialogue, were also common youth efforts. Furthermore, young people took action through political participation, oversight, violence monitoring and analysis, countering hate speech and misinformation, and taking protective measures.

Young people respond to violence as individuals raising awareness in communities and on social media; through NGOs, student associations and youth movements to promote a culture for peacemaking through the use of the arts and sports or by creating spaces for dialogue and bringing together people of diverging opinions; and lastly as part of—or in partnership with—formal institutions such as EMBs.

Political participation: When asked which actions they had taken, voting in the last election (76 percent) was the primary selection by the young respondents. Few of the respondents are affiliated with political parties, and the respondents tend to take action through civic engagement and advocacy rather than running for office or joining a political party or its youth wing. While respondents rarely noted formal participation in politics among the primary ways of sustaining peace during elections, the responses relating to priority areas for support highlighted youth-friendly policies, representation in governance institutions and youth engagement mechanisms. Several respondents highlight youth councils and other youth structures, which indicates the importance of considering youth engagement mechanisms through electoral programmes involving youth.

Gender: Gender equality and young women's leadership is a priority for the young respondents. When asked about priorities for support in this regard, more than half of the respondents highlight raising awareness of gender stereotypes and social norms and making resources and support accessible for youth initiatives and women-led organizations as well as supporting the participation of young women in women's groups, social movements and CSOs. While fewer respondents indicated legislative and policy aspects, still more than one-third of them highlight the importance of quotas and gender-sensitive policies and laws.

Information: Young people are using a variety of information sources on electoral processes with social media standing out among the respondents. One-quarter of the respondents are from rural areas, which could influence information sources since low connectivity tends to be more prominent in rural areas, but no urban-rural divide in the use of information

sources is observed for this survey. This may be explained by the data collection through an online survey and subsequently, the target group being young people with Internet access. Awareness-raising and the provision of access to information about elections, peace and the prevention of electoral-related violence are among the main areas of youth efforts to sustain peace and prevent violence observed in the survey. The use of online platforms for electoral-related awareness by the young respondents varies across regions.

Electoral Management Bodies: Programmes run by EMBs on peace and youth participation is not a main form of engagement for young people. Only 18 percent of the respondents report being aware of or having participated in such a programme. Activities highlighted by the respondents include election observation, training workshops, courses on electoral-related violence and sustaining peace, dialogues with contesting politicians, election monitoring and digital campaigns on non-violence. Overall, 17 percent of the respondents indicate having worked with EMBs to observe elections, and specifically for Africa, 30 percent of the respondents report having done this activity.

*"Provide the independent election management bodies with a mechanism for promoting peace during the election period. A citizen peacekeeping brigade. Support the initiatives of CSOs working for the promotion of peace and the involvement of young people."* Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

### Youth priorities for support

When asked about the top-three concrete and actionable priorities required to increase youth participation to promote peace during electoral processes, many of the young respondents mention "give youth a chance," "listen to young people," "trust young people" and "let young people participate." Evidently, many young people face barriers to their participation and articulate a feeling of not being perceived as belonging in contexts of elections. Access to information and influence on decisions are characteristics of quality stakeholder engagement, and the responses from young people to the SELECT youth survey indicate

barriers to quality youth engagement to sustain peace during elections.

Respondents indicate the top-three opportunities to strengthen youth engagement during elections are:

- Imparting education and awareness;
- Increasing youth representation;
- Introducing youth-friendly election laws and regulations.

Furthermore, increased support to CSOs, the promotion of civic space, and employment and job programmes were also a high priority, while peace committees, early warning mechanisms and addressing hate speech and online violence were somewhat priorities.

Young respondents were also asked about their three priorities for support and access to resources and capacity development to sustain peace during elections. The majority of the priorities centred on the overarching themes of political participation, capacity development, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and information integrity.

Political participation and support in this regard was articulated by young people as concerning youth-participatory decision-making processes such as youth engagement mechanisms, the development and implementation of policy and legal frameworks, and opening avenues for young people and their organizations to participate in decision-making processes, including at the local level and in relation to municipal development plans. Specifically for young women's participation and leadership, participants noted the need for dedicated efforts and ascertaining that the voices of young women were heard throughout the electoral process. Parliamentary support and political parties were mentioned in relation to youth representation in politics and the commitment of political actors to the prevention of electoral-related violence.

A young respondent articulated a priority thusly: *"That young people be included more in local development plans because only in this way will young people be interested in exercising the right and duty to vote since they will feel included [and] taken into account for the*



*development of our country.”* Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

Capacity development was highlighted by young respondents as a need for access to training, capacity development, education, and mental health and psychosocial support. This included introducing peace education and education on electoral processes in educational institutions as well as the availability of non-formal civic and voter education and training on youth leadership, conflict resolution, behavioural psychology and peacebuilding. Several respondents also indicated a need for greater access to financing of young people’s participation in elections, including for young people to run for office and to support the work of youth councils and youth peace efforts. In this regard, sustainability of financing and access for grassroots organizations were mentioned by some participants.

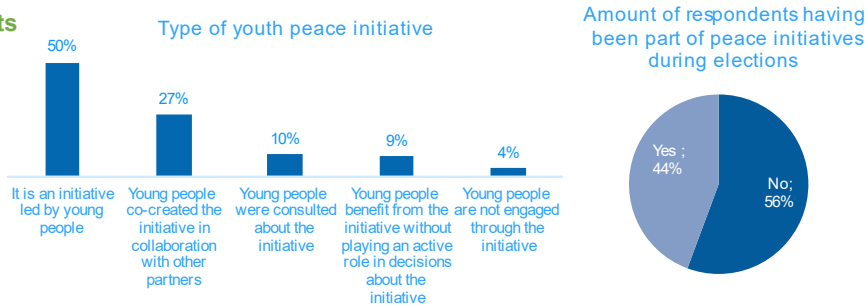
Peacebuilding and conflict prevention were emphasized by young people in relation to increasing support for peacebuilding initiatives and promoting dialogues and building trust, including through intergenerational dialogues and participatory dialogue spaces for young people to connect and promote non-violence and coexistence. Youth economic empowerment was mentioned by some respondents as a way of creating opportunities for youth to have the

means to engage in peacebuilding and reduce violence. Some respondents also noted fostering a culture of peace through support to initiatives relating to creative arts, sports and peace walks.

Information integrity was a priority for young respondents foremost in terms of access to information and awareness-raising such as digital campaigns to increase knowledge among youth of electoral processes and sensitizing young people about the importance of peace. Countering hate speech and misinformation was also indicated as a priority, though to a lesser extent, and included tackling misinformation and online violence and providing support to young people countering hate speech online.

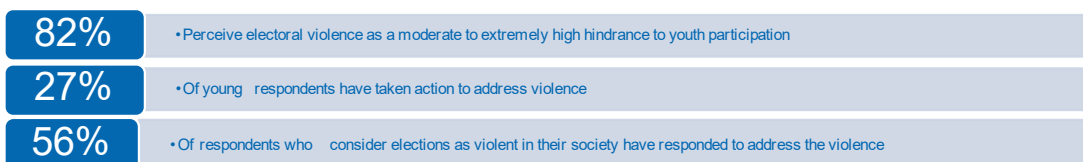
While to a lesser extent, the young respondents also shared priorities relating to support for youth-led campaigns and youth organizations, movements and networks as well as the protection of young people participating during electoral processes. Several respondents also noted the need for support through advocacy for the recognition of young people as positive agents of change for peace during elections.

## Youth peace efforts



Awareness -raising and access to information	• Local campaigning for raising awareness, mobilizing youth, community sensitization, gender inclusiveness, social media engagement
Peacebuilding and conflict prevention	• Peace activities including advocacy to change mindset, behavioural change, inclusion of youth to counter ethnic differences, art, sports for social cohesion and youth peace walks
Advocacy and campaigns	• Peace advocacy, non-violence campaigns, social media engagement, radio programmes, peace messaging
Access to training, capacity development and education	• Peace education, conflict resolution trainings, and capacity-building on election laws, democratic values
Dialogue	• Accountability dialogue, citizen forums, interethnic tolerance talks, multistakeholder dialogue, peace accords, community talks
Women's participation	• Increasing women's participation through district groups, gender-sensitive election information
Violence monitoring and reporting	• Early warning room, election monitoring, electoral violence reporting, election observation, vote counting
Political participation	• Peaceful demonstrations, parties' reconciliation, writing articles/blogs, election petition, pledging cards, political volunteering, participating in municipality, local elections
Countering hate -speech	• Campaigns and talks to counter hate -speech
Mental health and psychosocial support	• Counselling of young people during elections, mental health trainings
Economic empowerment	• Eradicate poverty and unemployment, generating employment for young people affected by violence

## The response to violence by young people



### Youth actions to address violence

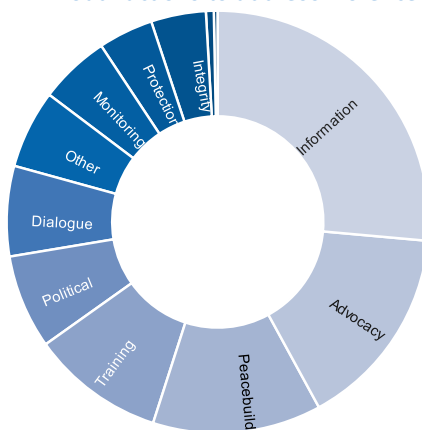
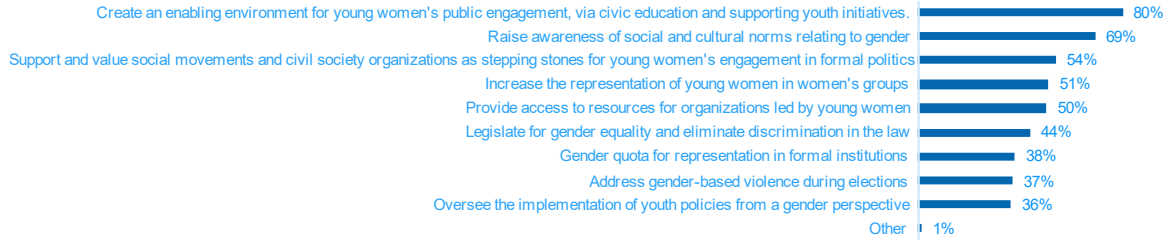


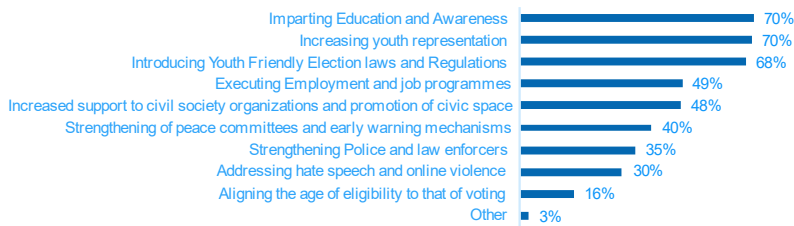
Figure 5: Youth peace efforts

## Young people's priorities for access to capacity development

### Priorities to support young women's leadership and promote gender equality



### Priorities to strengthen youth engagement during elections



### Priorities for support and access to resources and capacity development

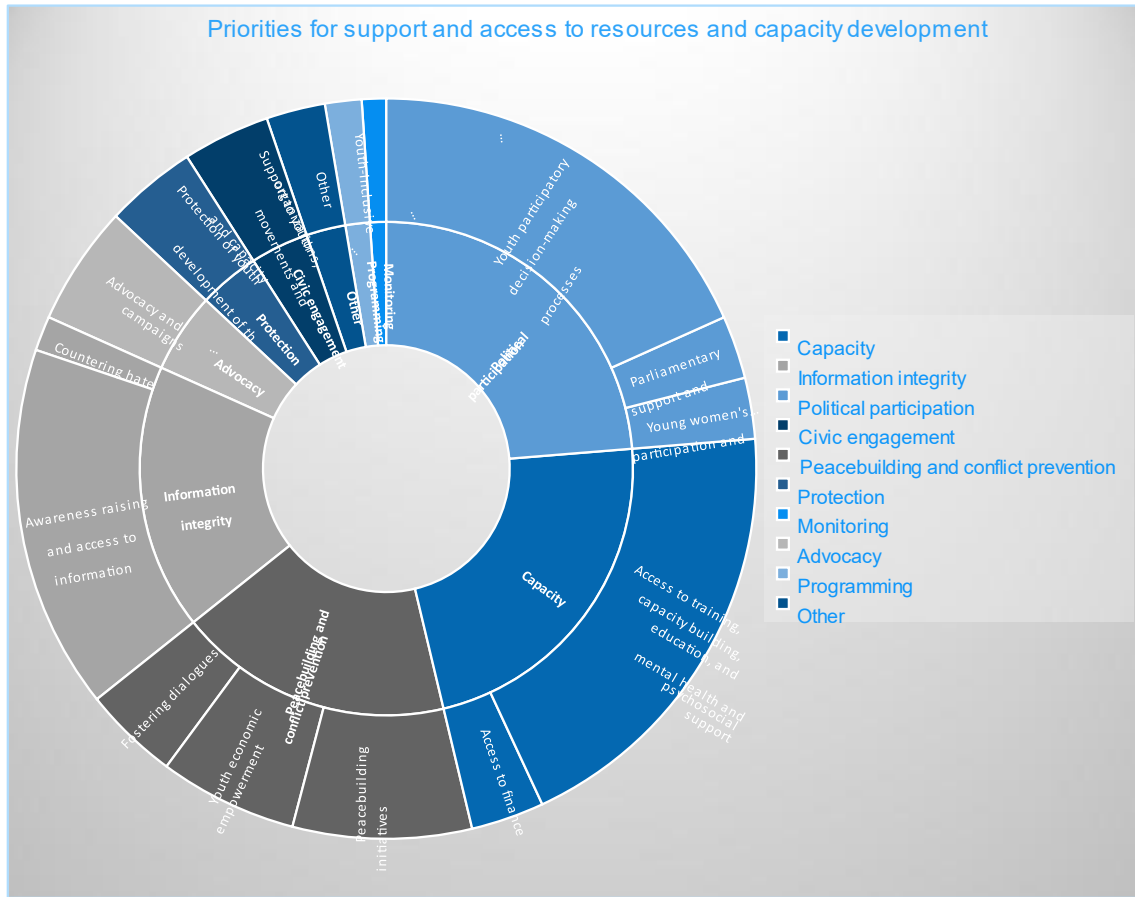


Figure 6: Young people's priorities

## Insights from the global consultations

UNDP hosted five regional multi-stakeholder consultations during July and August 2022 with around 180 participants to identify promising practices, trends and capacity needs for support to youth participation and to make programme support and research sensitive to different regions and development settings. UNDP also hosted two youth-dedicated consultations and two thematic discussion meetings between July and October 2022. The consultations highlighted challenges and opportunities to promote youth participation to sustain peace during elections and the importance of considering context-specific approaches.

## Regional consultations

The regional consultations provided rich insights for future programming. At the same time, participants articulated a need for increased capacities and support to promote youth participation to prevent electoral-related violence. Often, shared examples related to mobilization of youth for voting or young people's participation in peacebuilding or youth engagement mechanisms in governance processes. Fewer examples made the connection across the thematic areas of peace, prevention, youth participation and elections. This also indicates the importance for electoral-related programmes to consider the broader governance aspects, drivers of violence and conflict, and the multiple forms of youth participation.

Region	Date	Participants	Women	Men	Registrants
Africa	18 July 2022	29	14	15	49
Arab States	10 August 2022	52	24	38	74
Latin America and the Caribbean	16 August 2022	39	19	9	54
Asia-Pacific	23 August 2022	40	20	20	71
Europe and Central Asia	29 August 2022	23	12	11	25

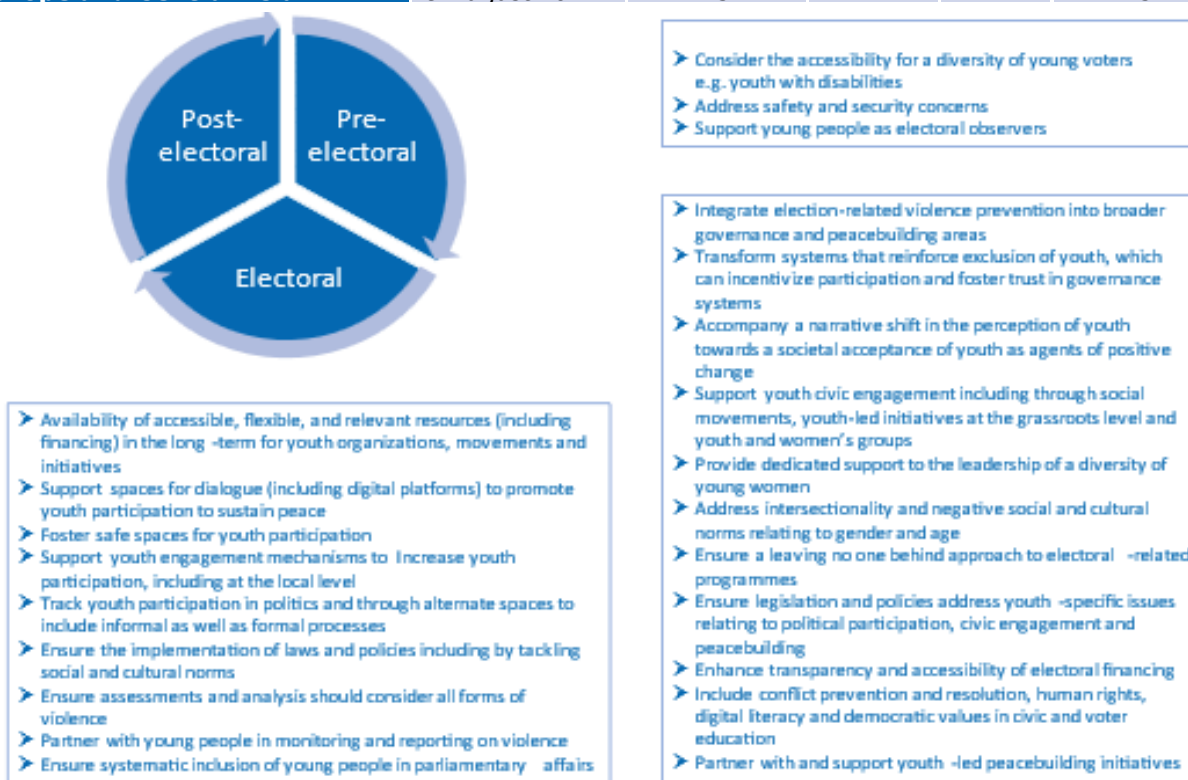


Figure 7: Considerations throughout the electoral cycle



In addition to the key consideration for the promotion of youth participation to sustain peace during elections, the regional consultations also identified challenges for youth participation. These include:

- Gender stereotypes and social norms are creating barriers to young women's leadership participation, and there is also a need to tackle broader governance issues.
- There is lack of access to relevant election financing for youth and limited financing for youth-led peace efforts.
- Hate speech, political manipulation and misinformation can create barriers.
- Political tensions in some conflict-affected societies may cause barriers for youth participation.
- There is a shrinking civic space.
- Protection issues limit youth participation, and there is a need to foster safe spaces for the participation of a diversity of young people.
- Legislative and policy issues and mistrust between young people and decision-makers can create barriers to youth participation in formal political processes. This is also true for social norms. In some contexts, young people are stereotyped as insufficiently mature to hold valuable opinions and discouraged from questioning authority.
- Youth are perceived as troublemakers in some societies.
- Some young people lack interest in political processes.
- There is low representation of youth in parliaments.

The regional consultations also identified capacity needs.

#### Capacities of institutions and public officials

- Enhance the readiness of national authorities and electoral stakeholders to work with and for youth, promote youth participation in decision-making processes and strengthen capacities of

electoral institutions to carry out inclusive and transparent processes.

- Prioritize strategic communication by national electoral stakeholders and international development partners to share information with young people and listen to youth perspectives.
- Support infrastructures for peace and youth engagement mechanisms;
- Support the opening and strengthening of avenues for systematic youth engagement by national authorities as a way for young people to raise their concerns and perspectives on their lives and societies;
- Organize consultations, intergenerational dialogues and trainings for public officials on youth, peace and security.

#### Policies, laws and frameworks

- Accompany the development and implementation of youth-friendly and gender-responsive policies and laws relating to elections, for example, support an enabling environment for youth and women's participation through the Youth Arab Network on Elections;
- Accompany the development of youth engagement policies, including considerations relating to the role of political parties and parliaments;
- Support the establishment of informal dispute and mediation committees at the local level to resolve electoral disputes during elections;
- Provide guidance on the development of youth, peace and security frameworks and national action plans.

#### Youth organizations, movements and networks

- Partner with young people and their organizations, movements and networks to raise awareness among youth including initiatives in communities to reach a broader and more diverse part of the population with information on elections, rights and messages of non-violence;

- Prioritize co-creation with young people in all efforts targeting youth engagement;
- Increase the availability of relevant and flexible financing for youth, organizations, movements and networks.
- Support youth efforts relating to the prevention of violence during elections and through sports and art for peace and civic engagement.

#### Access to education and training

- Provide access to skills training for young people and students on digital literacy, tackling misinformation and hate speech, dialogue and conflict prevention;
- Utilize creative approaches and technologies to reach the spaces where young people are.

#### Convening role

- Leverage the convening role of the United Nations to help connect young people and their organizations with relevant decision-makers, development partners and stakeholders across local, national and regional levels.

[Guide for Public Officials on the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda at the country-level.](#)<sup>105</sup>

#### Example:

##### Context-specific approaches

The SELECT consultations highlighted the importance of context-specific approaches. Countries and territories face different circumstances for electoral processes. Participants at the consultations highlighted circumstance from national elections not taking place to armed conflict, clan-based systems and ethnic conflict fostering division within society. Some participants also noted that violence takes many forms, and some societies are more often

faced with challenges relating to organized crime and gender-based violence rather than armed conflict. Other participants emphasized that in some contexts, young people are not considered as having the authority to speak on certain societal matters. Some participants took note of linkages between economic empowerment and peacebuilding, and highlighted that this may, in some contexts, strengthen programmes' contribution to the promotion of youth participation during elections through livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, several participants mentioned that the situation for young people evolves and that therefore, it is important to conduct continuous research and analysis for evidence-based approaches to policy and programmes relating to youth.

#### Youth consultations

The first youth consultation had 30 young participants from across the world, the majority of whom were from Africa. Their resulting insights:

- Confirmed the relevance of principles for meaningful youth engagement in relation to the electoral cycle. Emphasis centred on preparation of youth structures and organizations to contribute to the prevention of electoral-related violence;
- Showcased youth-led peace efforts during elections;
- Emphasized a strong focus on intersectionality and gender and barriers to young women's participation due to legislation and cultural and social norms and addressing gender-based violence;
- Identified other challenges including lack of access to information, a shrinking civic space, limited election-related financing and political manipulation;
- Highlighted opportunities including youth observation rooms, capacity-building of youth structures and organizations, civic education, recognition of youth leadership and context-specific approaches for electoral assistance.

The second youth consultation had participants from across regions and was held in three languages. The focus was on validation of the youth survey, with the following key takeaways:

<sup>105</sup> Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level, A guide for Public Officials (2022) Available at: [YPS-guide-for-public-officials-1.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

- The initial findings of the youth survey resonate with the young participants' experiences.
- Some participants noted that the engagement of youth in the SELECT research process was a meaningful experience.
- The SELECT report and programmatic options should reflect the link to inclusive governance such as youth participation in decision-making processes, an electoral cycle approach, trust/mistrust and youth participation in monitoring and reporting.
- Participants called for a focus on a leaving no one behind approach; recognition of young people as agents of change; an enabling environment for youth participation including access to financing and relevant information, training and education; and protection of young people defending democracy.
- ✓ The research report should clearly articulate the different forms of youth participation to prevent violence and sustain peace during elections.
- ✓ The outputs of the SELECT project should be made available and accessible to multiple stakeholders.

### Digital technology and online participation

All the regional consultations mentioned digital platforms and technology and online youth participation as opportunities to promote youth participation during elections. However, participants also noted that digital tools can be used not only by young people in their peace efforts but also against young people. Threats towards young people in the digital sphere must be addressed in order to foster a safe, gender-responsive and enabling environment for youth participation. While all consultations mentioned the digital realm, discussions during the consultation for Asia-Pacific were more focused on this topic.

Insights from the consultations highlighted online forms of youth participation during political and electoral processes such as online campaigning and online activism including to prevent misinformation and disinformation and

promote peaceful narratives in the digital sphere. Digital platforms provide alternative avenues for young people to voice their perspectives on electoral, political and civic matters and engage in dialogue on matters relating to peace. Digital technology can be leveraged to increase the reach of electoral-related programmes to a diversity of young people. For instance, innovative approaches to technology use can increase outreach to youth as part of civic education initiatives. Notwithstanding these opportunities of using technology, a combination of online and offline approaches and spaces for youth participation is often needed to leave no youth behind in the context of the digital divide.

Highlighted youth capacity needs included access to enhance skills in digital literacy, knowledge of digital rights and training on the utility of digital tools for sustaining peace. A thematic discussion meeting further explored digital technologies in relation to youth participation to sustain peace during elections.

Key messages from the thematic discussion meeting on digital technology and online youth participation.

### Intersectionality, gender-equality and young women's participation

Intersectionality impacts youth participation in electoral processes, and the consultations highlighted the importance of promoting the participation of a diversity of young people during elections. Shared examples of supporting this diverse participation ranged from support to indigenous youth in Latin America to young women with disabilities in Europe and Central Asia and younger youth in Asia-Pacific.

While an enabling environment for diverse young people's participation can be supported through relevant policies and legal frameworks, social norms might continue to create barriers to their realization. The regional consultations highlighted the need to consider not only accompaniment of national authorities' development of relevant legislation and laws but also the implementation of these, including by tackling gender stereotypes, unconscious bias

and gender dynamics. For instance, while some participants at the regional consultations highlighted women and youth quotas as an approach to foster an enabling environment for youth participation in elections, other participants from countries with quotas in place reported limited impact of the quotas due to social and cultural norms contributing to the exclusion of women, in particular young women, because policymaking and political debate were still considered exclusively a role for men with years of experience.

**Key messages from the thematic discussion meeting on intersectionality and gender equality hosted by UNDP and UN Women**

The discussion meeting aimed to (1) discuss priority areas for developing programmes toward supporting the role of youth in prevention of electoral-related violence in relation to intersectionality and gender equality and (2) identify concrete options for election-related programmatic efforts to address intersectionality and gender equality angles that promote youth participation. Key messages included:

The important role of young women as agents of change and in public affairs has been acknowledged by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 65 Agreed Conclusions.

Inequality and discrimination against young people need to be addressed through programming that strengthens young women's participation, fosters inclusive elections and sustains peace.

Mexican legal reforms have aimed to address the online sexism and violence that young women politicians are

frequently experiencing. 'Ley Olympia' (Olympia's Law) is criminalizing acts of digital violence perpetrated against women.

Platforms for youth engagement exist, but the lack of civic education and stereotypes, in particular, around the role of young women in politics continues to undermine youth participation in decision-making processes.

There is a need for continuous promotion of capacity development, mentorship and advocacy for young women's leadership and participation.

Programming can support both networks of young women to build their agency and national stakeholders to increase their understanding of the obstacles faced by young women politicians and work on removing those.

Youth engagement in CSOs may be a pathway to political engagement. For example, women's or youth coalitions can provide platforms for developing leadership skills.

An intersectional approach is important to address violence in elections and to acknowledge the experiences of LGBTQI+ groups as well as indigenous and Afrodescendent women in this regard.

Men can play a role as gender equality advocates and allies in election violence prevention.

See the summary note for further information.



# Chapter 4 Thematic priority areas

All people have the right to participate in public affairs<sup>106</sup> and all States are called upon to “promote and ensure the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for youth....”<sup>107</sup> The United Nations is committed to supporting diverse and inclusive participation of young people among other specific population groups and is working to promote inclusive participation channels.<sup>108</sup> Fostering a safe, gender-responsive and enabling environment is also a critical aspect of promoting youth participation in matters relating to peace and security.<sup>109</sup>

This section introduces a range of areas that could be considered for the promotion of youth participation to sustain peace during elections. The areas were identified on the basis of the consultative process<sup>110</sup> for the youth participation workstream of the Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project and are by no means exhaustive.

**Inclusive processes and dialogues for peace**  
Stakeholder consultations and inclusive dialogue processes have proven to be effective approaches to conflict prevention in relation to electoral processes.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, the promotion of a culture of tolerance and

<sup>106</sup> United Nations (1948). Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

<sup>107</sup> The United Nations Human Rights Council resolution 41/13 (2019) on youth and human rights.

<sup>108</sup> The United Nations guidance note on protection and promotion of civic space (2020) was prepared pursuant to the Secretary-General’s call to action for human rights and has a focus on efforts to ensure the meaningful participation of civil society actors through strengthened partnerships, the protection of civil society actors and the promotion of civic space. The system-wide strategy ‘Youth2030’ commits the United Nations to promote youth participation and address the underrepresentation of young people in decision-making processes.

<sup>109</sup> 2020 Report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security.

<sup>110</sup> The components of the consultative process informing the selection were Joint Working Group meetings, regional and youth-dedicated consultation meetings, desk research and the pre-defined areas of SELECT.

<sup>111</sup> UNDP (2009). Elections and Conflict Prevention: A guide to analysis, planning and programming.

intercultural dialogue fall under the prevention pillar of the UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015).

Both the SELECT youth survey and the regional consultations<sup>112</sup> identified dialogues for peace as a priority to support youth participation during elections. Insights from the survey confirm that young people are bridging divides within and between communities and also during elections. Their efforts include creating space for multi-stakeholder dialogue on peace and providing young people with platforms to share their perspectives. Young respondents identified dialogues as critical to foster tolerance and respect for different opinions, amplify youth visions for peace and increase youth participation in matters relating to peace. See programmatic option ***dialogues for peace*** for further information.

*“Through my organization, which consists of young people, we have initiated youth conversations and peace forums in especially this election period just to sensitize our young people to desist from violence but participate in [the] electoral process.”* Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

*“Dialogue may include youth as well as avoid wars, everything is better with good dialogue.”* Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

As outlined in the report by the UN Secretary-General on ‘Our Common Agenda’, there is a need for solidarity across generations and recognition of responsibilities on behalf of future generations to tackle the compounded risks in today’s world and to foster a new social contract.<sup>113</sup> The facilitation of intergenerational dialogue between young people, national authorities and other electoral stakeholders can

<sup>112</sup> See Sections Key insights from the youth survey and Insights from Consultations for more information.

<sup>113</sup> United Nations (2021). Our Common Agenda—Report by the Secretary-General.

bring to the fore youth perspectives on peace and visions for the future of societies, support co-creation of priorities of electoral-related programmes and enhance trust between young people and public institutions.<sup>114</sup>

Another approach is deliberative processes. Deliberative processes are increasingly used by authorities for public decision-making processes to enhance citizen participation.<sup>115</sup> Such processes can provide the diversity of people within the society with an equal opportunity to participate because the processes use random selection. This provides an opportunity for youth-inclusive decision-making processes as well as youth-dedicated deliberative processes.<sup>116</sup> There is a need to better understand the impact of youth-inclusive deliberative processes.

#### **Example:**

**Burundi** : In the lead up to the 2015 election in Burundi, Search for Common Grounds supported the mobilization of young people for peaceful elections by engaging young people in a series of workshops and trainings on conflict resolution and dialogue to provide a platform for young people to share grievances and discover commonalities towards fostering a culture of non-violence. In addition, a radio drama series raised awareness of the risks of political manipulation and importance of peaceful elections. In addition, to the pre-electoral phase, Search for Common Ground has also supported post electoral healing and reconciliation efforts as a way of using dialogues to foster tolerance and bridging divides between candidates and encouraging people in favor of the losing candidate to accept electoral results.

<https://www.sfcg.org/youth-inspired-now-and-tomorrow/>

<https://www.sfcg.org/mobilizing-burundis-youth-for-peaceful-elections/>

#### **Programmatic option:** [Dialogues for peace](#)

<sup>114</sup> See for example OECD (2020). Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience.

<sup>115</sup> OECD (2020). Catching the Deliberative Wave; UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

<sup>116</sup> SALTO (2013). Deliberation models featuring youth participation.

#### **Programmatic option:** [Youth engagement mechanism](#)

##### [Partnerships with youth organizations, movements and networks](#)

Partnerships with youth organizations, movements and networks are a way of promoting youth participation to sustain peace. It is a pillar of the UN Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security and concerns the engagement of young people during and after conflict when developing peacebuilding strategies, along with community actors and UN entities. One of the three mutually reinforcing strategies set forward by the progress study on youth, peace and security (2018) is partnerships and collaborative action, where young people are viewed as equal and essential partners for peace. Also, the UN 'Our Common Agenda'<sup>117</sup> calls for meaningful engagement and partnerships with young people.

While young people are often engaged by decision-makers, development partners and other stakeholders through formal and informal processes, there still is a need for increased prioritization and commitment to partnerships with youth organizations, movements and networks based on trust and overcoming tokenism.<sup>118</sup> Young people face barriers to engaging in civic space, and young people have highlighted entry points for supporting the participation of a diversity of young people such as intergenerational dialogue, the provision of accessible infrastructures (e.g. access for youth with disabilities) and addressing the prominent barriers displaced youth face to their participation.<sup>119</sup>

Social movements and peaceful protests are a form of youth participation through informal processes and an alternative avenue for young people seeking to raise their voices on societal matters.<sup>120, 121</sup> Young women are often at the

<sup>117</sup> United Nations (2021). Our Common Agenda—Report by the Secretary-General.

<sup>118</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>119</sup> United Nations (2021). If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space.

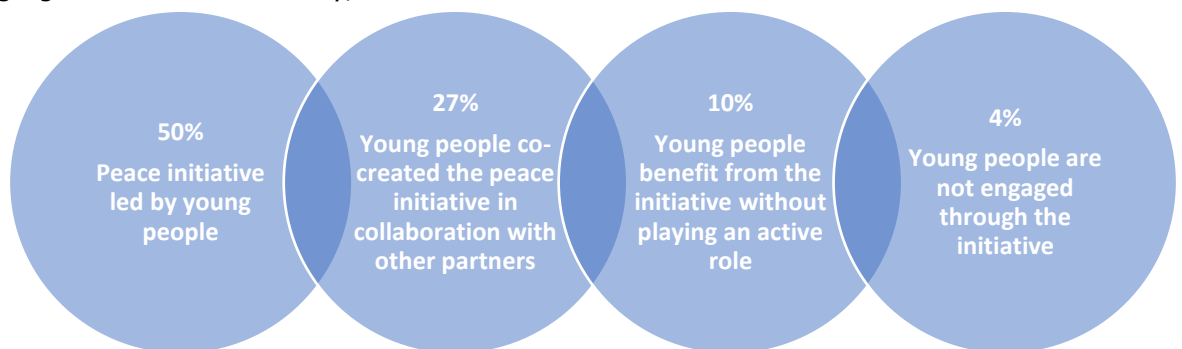
<sup>120</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO; The Body Shop and the United Nations Office of the

forefront of social movements, and women’s participation has been correlated with non-violence.<sup>122</sup> Young people are taking to the streets to demand equality, justice and accountability. In 2019, young people and youth groups were a major component of protests.<sup>123</sup> Participatory approaches to governance and peacebuilding can address and settle concerns and grievances.

Principles for meaningful youth engagement can help guide partnerships with youth organizations, movements and networks. The principles on meaningful youth engagement by the Major Group for Children and Youth<sup>124</sup> relates to engagement that is self-organized by youth, legally mandated/rights-based, designated, well-resourced and accountable. The checklist on meaningful youth engagement by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY)<sup>125</sup> highlights that inclusivity, preparation, protection and follow-up are key components for meaningful youth participation and require

appropriate time and resources that should not be borne by the youth themselves. A key message is that opportunities for engagement and partnerships should be impactful for the youth organizations, movements and networks and their communities. See Annex 3 for more information.

A respondent highlighted three priorities for support to youth participation: “Disseminate the legal instructions and strategic plan relating to youth, peace and security through workshops, forums, conferences with young people, including the authorities of each country. Set up a national youth fund for peace and security. Provide support to strengthen the dynamics, organization and initiative of young people before, during and after each election.” Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.



Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth (2022). Be Seen, Be Heard: Understanding young people’s political participation.

<sup>121</sup> For more information on young people contributing to inclusive political processes and peacebuilding through social movements and peaceful protests, see e.g. UNDP and the European Commission (2017). Youth Participation in Electoral Processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies; Sub-Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (2014). Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding; Peacebuilding Support Office—UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (2020). United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace; United Nations (2020). United Nations Guidance Note: Protection and Promotion of Civic Space.

<sup>122</sup> Erica Chenoweth (2019). Women’s participation and the fate of nonviolent campaigns: a report on the women in resistance (WiRe) data set.

<sup>123</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

<sup>124</sup> Major Group for Children and Youth (2017). Principles and barriers for meaningful youth engagement.

<sup>125</sup> United Network of Young Peacebuilders (2021). Checklist for meaningful youth engagement. <https://unoy.org/downloads/mye-checklist/>

### Insights from SELECT youth survey

Young people are leaders in sustaining peace during elections: 44 percent of the young respondents have participated in peace initiatives during elections and 50 percent of those were youth-led

Figure 7: Insights from SELECT youth survey on participation in peace initiatives

**Programmatic option:** Providing access to resources and capacity development for youth organizations, movements and networks

### Financing youth-led peace efforts

Limited access for youth organizations, movements and networks to flexible, relevant and agile financing is a challenge for building and sustaining peace<sup>126</sup> and the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda.<sup>127</sup> Yet, there has been limited attention to improve the quantity and quality of resources.

The overview paper on financing for young people in peacebuilding<sup>128</sup> identifies some trends and recommendations. Challenges include limited collection, tracking and analysis of financing of youth efforts across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding portfolios as well as enabling financing to contribute to leave no youth behind. Another risk is funds for youth-led peacebuilding may disregard the unique characteristics of local youth peace efforts by providing a pre-defined type of funding instead of one tailored to their needs and innovative ideas in a given context and situation.

Youth-led efforts are often highly voluntary driven with 97 percent of staff being volunteers, and youth-led organizations are estimated to operate with budgets of 5,000 USD per annum.<sup>129</sup> Development partners may consider increasing accessible, flexible, longer-term, impact-oriented types of funding opportunities.

#### Example:

The European Union's Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) is a tool for directing funds to young people in peacebuilding. In 2019, it had supported over 60 youth-focused efforts relating to

peacebuilding, crisis management and violent conflict situations.

UNOY (2019). Mapping the progress of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in the EU in UNICEF et al. (2021). Financing for young people in peacebuilding: An overview.

[https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/eus-instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace-icsp-2014-04-03\\_en](https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/eus-instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace-icsp-2014-04-03_en)

### Leveraging digital technology to amplify youth voices

Digital technologies provide opportunities for participation, accountability and transparency and are transforming economies and societies around the world. At a time where many people, including many young people,<sup>130</sup> lack trust in governance institutions, there is an opportunity to explore how technology can contribute to making democratic governance more resonant and relevant for people, including through community parliaments, citizen assemblies and local and community-level participatory democracy,<sup>131</sup> and how such engagement can foster genuine inclusion of youth aspirations and needs.<sup>132</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly resolution 74/158 (2020) recognizes that electoral technology can support the electoral process of developing countries, and resolution 76/137 (2022) on policies and programmes involving youth urges Member States to address digital barriers—among other barriers—that limit youth participation and representation. The United Nations may assist Member States with the introduction and implementation of new technology in electoral processes.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>126</sup> UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/305 on financing for peacebuilding.

<sup>127</sup> 2020 report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security.

<sup>128</sup> UNICEF et al. (2021). Financing for young people in peacebuilding: An overview.

<sup>129</sup> United Network of Young Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground (2017). Mapping a sector: Bridging the evidence gap on youth-driven peacebuilding.

<sup>130</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>131</sup> OECD (2020). Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions.

<sup>132</sup> United Nations (2020). Report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security, S/2020/167.

<sup>133</sup> UNDPPA (2021). Policy: Principles and types of UN electoral assistance. Revision of FP/01/2012.

While digital platforms, technologies, and information and communication technologies are widely used, there is a need for more research to understand how digital technologies can enable youth inclusive processes relating to peace,<sup>134</sup> civic engagement<sup>135</sup> and elections.<sup>136</sup>

Digital technologies can support youth civic activism, and youth civic engagement is increasingly taking place in the digital realm. A recent UNDP rapid analysis in the Europe and Central Asia region<sup>137</sup> revealed that young civic actors saw the digital realm as positively enabling their direct engagement and that online activism gave higher visibility to important issues as well as making cross-border connectivity easier. The potential of digital technologies and platforms is seen across the world in relation to youth mobilization for peace, youth civic participation and youth-led demands for accountability.<sup>138</sup> Social media can be a tool to support youth mobilization through digital movements such as the promotion of peaceful narratives in Bangladesh through online youth-campaigns.<sup>139</sup> Online mobilization can also facilitate mobilization in the offline sphere.

While digital technology can promote peace and youth civic engagement, these same tools can be used to intimidate young people and can exacerbate inequalities. Young people have highlighted that online channels can amplify youth voices on matters relating to governance, but that they still need to proactively claim a space to have influence on decisions about their own lives and societies.<sup>140</sup> The young activists in the Europe and Central Asia region described digital activism as possible for only a minority of youth: lack of digital skills or Internet access, Internet restrictions and a lack of funding to support digital activism were cited as obstacles for youth civic engagement. In 2021, a survey of

<sup>134</sup> Altioik and Grizelj (2019). We are here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes.

<sup>135</sup> UNICEF (2020). Youth Digital Engagement.

<sup>136</sup> SELECT Project Document (2021).

<sup>137</sup> UNDP (2021). Civic participation of youth in the digital world.

<sup>138</sup> UNDESA (2016). World Youth Report; Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>139</sup> Partnerships for a tolerant and inclusive Bangladesh. Accessed 13 November 2022: <https://www.undp.org/bangladesh/projects/partnerships-tolerant-and-inclusive-bangladesh-ptib>

<sup>140</sup> UNDP (2022). Youth perspectives on tech for democracy.

threats towards young people engaging in civic space found 78 percent of the young respondents had experienced some form of digital threats and 18 percent experienced this constantly.<sup>141</sup> It also highlighted that the increased use of technology can make young people more prone to experience online harassment and spark a rise in violations of data privacy and digital surveillance. This echoes previous analysis arguing that the use of digital technology creates vulnerabilities for young people.<sup>142</sup>

### Example:

In **Peru**, the UNDP supported digital platform **Redpública.pe** is fostering political and civic participation. More than 100 civil society organizations are a part of the platform, which collects citizens proposals and supports youth engagement in decision-making processes. The platform has devoted particular attention to the political participation of indigenous youth.

- <https://redpublica.pe/>
- <https://pnudperu.medium.com/youth-and-indigenous-people-activists-towards-greater-political-representation-in-peru-b35043ed1c4e>

### Insights from the SELECT consultation for Asia-Pacific:

Youth participation through digital technologies and platforms were emphasized by participants, including how young people are tackling hate speech and misinformation on social media through fact checking and peace messaging campaigns and raising their voices on political and electoral matters through virtual spaces. As one participant noted, in some contexts, online participation can overcome safety and security concerns relating to in-person participation.

<sup>141</sup> United Nations (2021). If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space.

<sup>142</sup> Farrah, de Boer and Muggah. (2017). Digitally-enabled peace and security: Reflections for the youth, peace and security agenda. SecDev Group.



**Programmatic option:** Leveraging digital platforms to amplify youth voices

### Early warning and violence monitoring: Young people's local know-how

Human rights violations can be early warning signals of crises, and the identification of these can enable actions to prevent and address violence.<sup>143</sup> Young people have knowledge of their communities, which can inform early warning and risk assessments.<sup>144</sup> Youth political participation and civic engagement play a role in documenting and monitoring violations of human rights and agreements relating to peace.<sup>145</sup> During electoral processes, young people and their organizations, movements and networks can provide unofficial data and information in order to understand risk factors that may lead to violence.

*"We conducted a series of interviews to measure the perception of the population regarding elections, democracy, etc. in order to be able to make recommendations to civil society and also authorities."* Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

Risk analysis and early warning methodologies can advantageously pay particular attention to the prevention of all forms of violence against women.<sup>146</sup> Women's participation in early warning mechanisms can enable identification of gender-sensitive indicators and drivers of violence against women in elections, raise awareness and increase capacities to respond to early warnings, enhance gender-sensitive verification processes that recognize challenges of verification of violence towards women and include victim services to respond to reported

<sup>143</sup> On the linkages between early warning and prevention of electoral-related violence, please see UN Department of Political Affairs (2016). Policy directive: Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence.

<sup>144</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>145</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>146</sup> United Nations (2020). The Secretary-General's Call to Action on Human Rights.

and verified cases.<sup>147</sup> The inclusion of young women and young people from sexual and gender minorities could be a way of strengthening age- and gender-sensitivity.

### Insights from the SELECT youth survey on monitoring:

40 percent of the young respondents consider the strengthening of peace committees and early warning mechanisms a priority to bolster youth engagement during elections. Compared to other regions, young respondents from Africa more often use monitoring, observation and reporting of violence in their efforts to sustain peace during elections. **End**

The young respondents' priorities relating to support for monitoring are summarized below:

- Establish early warning mechanisms and situation rooms including at the local level and develop early warning and response indicators;
  - Support the violence monitoring and reporting by CSOs, including youth-led organizations and youth observation bodies;
  - Support the meaningful engagement of young people in the monitoring of violence and elections;
  - Provide access to monitoring tools and capacity development relating to early warning;
- Consider international monitoring of the electoral process to ensure integrity and safety.

### Example:

#### Accountability Lab Niger

Accountability Lab Niger has created digital civic tools to report on and monitor violence during

<sup>147</sup> National Democratic Institute (2016). Votes without violence: A citizen observer's guide to addressing violence against women in elections.

the electoral cycle. This is part of the Civic Action Teams (CivActs) program, which is a global initiative by Accountability Lab that centers community feedback, dialogue and local solutions to ensure accountability in the development process. CivActs have collected information from communities across Niger solving daily problems for citizens and closing the loop on challenges such as the spread of misinformation and the rise of violence during elections. Effective feedback mechanisms included youth-focused comic books about misinformation and widespread community radio programming

<https://accountabilitylab.org/civic-action-teams/>

### **Safidy Observatory - Madagascar**

In Madagascar, the Rohy platform, brings together civil society organizations across the country and has set up the Safidy Observatory as a local election observatory established by the EU. It will consolidate local election observation capacities in view of the 2023 presidential elections. Other partners such as UNDP supports the Observatory through strengthening the leadership of the young people of the observatory to become agents of change and promoters of peace recognized by the authorities and credited with the trust of the communities. Thousands of young people have been engaged from across the country.

<https://safidy-observatoire.net/>

<https://open.undp.org/projects/00134609>

### **Youth as electoral observers**

Young people can engage during elections as electoral observers. The benefits of having youth observers have been described emphasizing that young people often have (1) the skills to use new technology to monitor electoral processes, (2) a good understanding of other young people and a good position to gather data and information about youth

perspectives and (3) a positive impact on the reach to young people because they may inspire other young people to vote and engage.<sup>148</sup>

### **Insights from the SELECT youth survey on observation:**

Young respondents noted that the role of young people as electoral observers can be enhanced through support to young observers, monitors and electoral specialists, including young volunteers and youth participation in electoral observer missions; can include a focus of observers on youth allocations and needs; and can support young people in having a role in oversight of the electoral process and peaceful conduct of elections.

### **Protection of young people defending democratic governance and advocating for peace**

Young people that are defending democratic governance and human rights are at risk of experiencing threats and reprisals for their work. It is critical for electoral-related programmes to consider protection issues for young people and the promotion of youth rights, including their rights to freedom of expression.

Youth participation during electoral and political processes in fragile and conflict-affected societies risk being embedded in conflict dynamics and power struggles, which may put young people at risk of violence or assumptions of being a party to the conflict.<sup>149</sup> Young people, national authorities and providers of electoral assistance may advantageously increase their awareness of the risks of engagement including violence, human rights violations, harassment

<sup>148</sup> UNDP and the European Commission (2017). Youth participation in electoral processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies.

<sup>149</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

and mental health issues. Yet, it is key to support young people in having a say about peacebuilding priorities and the future of their society, also in situations where the stakes are high. Considerations for programming in this regard include the types and levels of youth participation that can promote youth participation while considering the protection of young partners. There is a role to play for international organizations and other partners in conflict and crisis-affected societies,<sup>150</sup> while it is the responsibility of States to protect their population.

One young respondent explained protection as a priority by noting the need to “*promote the safety of young people in areas with a high rate of conflict. Due to this, in many areas of the country, the inhabitants do not go out to vote or are forced to vote for those who choose groups outside the law*” Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

Another respondent stated, “*An enabling friendly environment where youth can express their opinion without fear of victimizing by those authorities. There should be equal opportunities for everyone irrespective of their gender, tribe or religion. That is, the discrimination gap should be bridged.*” Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

Young people lack access to protection following the experience of threats that can take the form of harassment, surveillance, reprisals, use of force and gender-based violence, among others.<sup>151</sup> Also, there often is a need for dedicated support to young women, young people with disabilities and young people from sexual and minority groups who can face additional barriers in accessing support.

The integration of mental health and psychosocial support in peacebuilding processes

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<sup>150</sup> Young people have expressed a need for continuous support from and partnerships between international organizations and youth organizations, movements and networks during conflict and crisis. This was mentioned during the SELECT youth consultations (2022). See also UNDP (2021). 16 x 16 Dialogue Series: Youth leadership for peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

<sup>151</sup> United Nations (2021). If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space.

and programmes is limited,<sup>152</sup> but mental health and psychosocial support can bolster young people’s leadership and resilience in crisis and conflict-affected situations.<sup>153</sup> Youth organizations may be particularly well placed to promote age- and gender-sensitive trauma healing and reconciliation. Furthermore, there is a need for legal aid advice and a provision for victims of violence against women in elections.

### Example:

#### ISIRIKA – Kenya

The members of the youth organization ISIRIKA in Kenya had concerns of violence during the national election in 2022, and noticed that many young people registered as voters, while they were considering not voting due to fear of violence and voter-apathy. They decided to try to change this through their work in the youth organization with a focus on two priority areas: Safety and protection and education on peace. 120 volunteers contributed to the efforts through four groups on 1) collection of information online (including false information from political actors), 2) counter misinformation about violence to avoid escalation in violence and conflict, 3) availability of medical aid, and 4) access to legal professionals in cases of e.g., harassment. The organization documented 75 cases of electoral-related violence, and it also compiled and issued information on protection. A young member of the organization noted that lessons learned emphasized youth agency for the peaceful conduct of elections and the importance of listening to the concerns of young people in order to respond to violence.

<https://isirika.org/>

#### Insights from youth survey on protection

Young respondents noted a number of threats that young people and their communities face during elections such as propaganda, online violence, hate speech, cyber-attacks, threats from armed groups, harassment, killings including politically

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<sup>152</sup> UNDP (2022). Integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support into Peacebuilding.

<sup>153</sup> 2022 Report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security.

motivated killings, presence of small arms and light weapons, political bullying and intimidation towards young candidates. Several respondents articulated a need for better protection of young people working to sustain peace and a safe environment for participation during elections. Priorities highlighted by respondents in this regard include:

- Ensure safe voting, including safe transport.
- Implement security measures, protocols and laws that protect young people engaging in politics and civic space, including protocols with political parties on the promotion of the safe participation of young people in elections and particular considerations for the safety of young people in conflict-affected settings.
- Provide guarantees for non-violence and security during elections to safeguard the lives of young people.
- Support freedom of speech without intimidation and raise awareness of human rights, the law and safety means.
- Conduct international monitoring of elections to protect young people.
- Promote a safe space for young people to express their views and perspectives on the society, and listen to civil society recommendations on protection.
- Support youth efforts in the implementation of safety means as well as in raising awareness and delivering community safety recommendations.
- Create spaces for reconciliation.
- Initiate campaigns for the protection of human rights defenders.
- Support first responders such as ambulance crews.
- Support the capacity of security forces relating to independence, impartiality and fairness.

**Featured resource:** The Protection Resource Library by the United Network of Young

Peacebuilders (UNOY) provides an overview of protection mechanisms and tools for young people in civic space.<sup>154</sup>

### Bringing peace and digital literacy into civic and voter education

Civic and voter education is a common approach to youth engagement during elections and often considered a way of preparing young people to participate in political and electoral processes. However, the impact of civic and voter education on the prevention of electoral-related violence is ambiguous. Some reports find that civic education can decrease young people's support for violent groups,<sup>155</sup> while other studies<sup>156</sup> are less conclusive on the role of civic education in preventing violence.

The SELECT consultations highlighted numerous initiatives promoting youth participation through civic education, and the SELECT youth survey also indicated that young people perceive civic education as an important component of efforts to prevent electoral-related violence as well as one—among multiple—areas that can contribute to an enabling environment for youth participation to sustain peace.

The SELECT consultations also highlighted the importance of providing access for young people and their organizations to trainings, skill development and education relating to conflict prevention and management, tackling hate speech and media and digital literacy. To strengthen the effect of civic education on the prevention of electoral-related violence, it may be considered to integrate peace education and digital literacy.

### Insights from the youth survey on civic

<sup>154</sup> United Network of Young Peacebuilders (2021). Protection Resource Library for young people in civic space.

<sup>155</sup> See for example a survey by Mercy Corps of 1,220 young people in Puntland and South Central Somalia, which found that both secondary education alone and secondary education combined with civic engagement opportunities decreased Somali youth support for violent groups. Mercy Corps (2018). If youth are given the chance: Effects of education and civic engagement on Somali youth support for political violence.

<sup>156</sup> See for example Claes and von Borzyskowski, United States Institute for Peace (2018). What works on preventing election violence: Evidence from Liberia and Kenya.

## education:

Civic education was acknowledged by the respondents as a priority. Some 70 percent of the respondents indicated that imparting education and awareness is a priority to strengthen youth engagement during elections, while 80 percent of the respondents prioritized the creation of an enabling environment for young women's public engagement, via education and supporting youth initiatives. In addition, providing access to training and education on peace and human rights were among the reported actions that young people take to address violence during elections.

*"Support education and capacity-building for peace. Access to education is fundamental for facilitating young people's positive engagement in peace. Youth [have] suggested specific and practical ways this could be realized, including reforms to civic education, and the introduction of peace education."* Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

Peace education can be understood as "the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior change that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace whether at an interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level."<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, human rights education involving youth brings a focus on education and training in equality, human rights and non-discrimination, inclusion and respect for diversity with the aim of building inclusive and peaceful societies.<sup>158</sup>

Media and digital literacy are not only important for employability but also for young people's access to information about elections and human rights and access to digital tools for civic

and political engagement.<sup>159</sup> While many youth empowerment programme activities already incorporate digital literacy, there is a strong call among youth to invest in digital skills and literacy for quality education<sup>160</sup> and civic activism.<sup>161</sup> The inclusion of digital literacy in youth civic education throughout the electoral cycle can increase young people's capacity to leverage digital technologies in their peace efforts, monitoring of violence and political participation.

## Digital Literacy:

In line with UNESCO's Digital Literacy Global Framework, digital literacy can be understood as "the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competences that are variously referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy."<sup>162</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly resolution 76/137 (2022) calls upon Member States to ensure that "...information and communication technologies are fully and appropriately integrated into education and training at all levels...", and it also stresses "...the importance of educating young learners of the digital age on the responsible use of technologies and raising their awareness around harmful use of sensitive contents, to promote safety on the Internet so that it can continue to be a vibrant force that generates economic, social and cultural development."

For civic education to be effective, it is essential to ensure inclusivity, a comprehensive approach and maximum reach, particularly to communities

<sup>157</sup> Fountain, UNICEF (1999). Peace education in UNICEF.

<sup>158</sup> OHCHR, Human Rights Education and Training Accessed 9 November 2022:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training>

<sup>159</sup> UNDESA (2016). World Youth Report: Youth civic engagement.

<sup>160</sup> Youth declaration on transforming education (2022).

<sup>161</sup> UNDP (2022). Youth perspectives on tech for democracy.

<sup>162</sup> UNESCO (2018). A Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills for Indicator 4.4.2.



at risk of violence. Furthermore, it is important to target the youth population group in question. This could, for example, be training to promote the participation of young women from groups at risk of being left behind in decision-making processes at the local level.<sup>163</sup> It could also be peer-to-peer training where young women work with other young women to increase awareness of rights and safe spaces for participation in elections.<sup>164</sup>

Civic education provides an opportunity for national authorities and electoral stakeholders to connect with students and youth organizations on matters of peace, conflict prevention and human rights. For such efforts, it is critical that these are long-term and continuous engagements with the resources to reach a diversity of young people and provide access to information and learning on the prevention of electoral-related violence. Support to youth-led civic education initiatives can also make these more targeted to young people, including through the use of creative arts and sports.

A whole-of-government approach may be helpful in order to bridge sectors and different departments in order to foster a comprehensive approach to civic engagement. Both formal and informal education are relevant entry points for promoting peace, civic and voter education and digital literacy. Furthermore, CSOs including youth-led organizations may fill a gap for the young people who did not have access to learning about peace, human rights and civic education through educational institutions. Partnerships with youth organizations are not only important in order to provide education and reach young people, but also to ensure young people's perspectives inform civic education.

#### **Example:**

#### **Arab Network for Civic Education (Anhre) – Arab States**

Anhre brings a holistic approaches to civic education that takes into consideration political, cultural and socio-economic dimensions and uses innovative and interactive activities such as

parliament simulations. It is a regional network working in the Arab region which promotes the values of citizenship and a culture of human rights, including with a focus on gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities and the rights of the most vulnerable groups to tackle discrimination and exclusion through coordination of efforts and capacity-building. It supports young people through increasing access to civic education and partnerships with youth civil society organizations.

<https://anhre.org/index-en.html>

#### **Digital Civic Center - Western Balkans**

The Digital Civic Center will provide civic education through dialogue and information on social and political issues and support to civil society and educational institutes in the Western Balkans including through a structural dialogue with decision-makers as well as training. The group "One Way Ticket No More" consists of young citizens from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, and Serbia who have been working together since 2020. The project is implemented by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) with financial support from the German Federal Foreign Office and seeks to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, diversity and peaceful dialogue, including cross-border dialogue among young people.

[http://www.civiccenterwesternbalkans.digital/?fbclid=IwAR3hppw3A\\_etoUvkDCUZOy5eLWFotSL5i9-9xwcSESatbBBiT\\_yuEBTsrU4](http://www.civiccenterwesternbalkans.digital/?fbclid=IwAR3hppw3A_etoUvkDCUZOy5eLWFotSL5i9-9xwcSESatbBBiT_yuEBTsrU4)

**Featured resource:** The fourth phase (2020–2024) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education has a focus on youth empowerment. In consultation with States, intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society, including youth groups and youth-led networks, OHCHR elaborated a plan of action for the fourth phase of the World Programme (A/HRC/42/23).<sup>165</sup>

#### **The role of youth political parties in prevention**

Young people under 30 years of age are less likely than older generations to be members of

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<sup>163</sup> Council of Europe (2020). Participation of young women and girls from disadvantaged groups in political and public decision-making processes at local level.

<sup>164</sup> Regional consultations for the SELECT youth participation workstream, July and August 2022.

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<sup>165</sup> The plan of action was subsequently adopted by the Human Rights Council through resolution 42/7 (2019).

political parties, and youth wings are often regarded as dependent on the parent party and rarely have access to their own budget.<sup>166</sup>

A common approach to support youth wings and youth political parties is the provision of training in conflict prevention and civic education. Other opportunities include cross-party platforms and coalitions within and between countries to strengthen capacities for conflict prevention<sup>167</sup> and youth mobilization on issues such as anti-corruption.<sup>168</sup> Political parties can promote peaceful elections by committing to adhering to principles of non-violence, avoiding inflammatory language and supporting safe elections through codes of conduct,<sup>169</sup> and there may be an opportunity to engage youth wings in this regard.

A SELECT youth survey respondent noted that one way to prevent violence in the young person's particular community was done by "*carrying out a discussion between the electoral candidates and the youth community to reach some agreements, in addition to making the candidates of the territory sign an agreement of non-violence during and after the electoral campaign.*" Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

In addition, the organization of dialogues at the grassroots level with political parties, the election administration, CSOs and other stakeholders can promote peace and identify non-violent solutions to concerns.<sup>170</sup> Several participants in the SELECT consultations and survey shared experiences with the organization of dialogues for peace with young politicians and

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<sup>166</sup> The Body Shop and the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (2022). *Be Seen, Be Heard: Understanding young people's political participation.*

<sup>167</sup> Kumar and De Zeeuw (2008). *International support for political party development in war-torn societies*, in *Political parties in conflict-prone societies: Regulation, engineering and democratic development*, Reilly and Nordlund (eds.), United Nations University Press.

<sup>168</sup> International IDEA and National Consultative Forum of Political Organizations (2018). *Youth Participation in Political Processes: Second Annual Summer School for Young Leaders from African Political Parties.*

<sup>169</sup> UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (2016). *Policy directive: Preventing and mitigating election-related violence.*

<sup>170</sup> UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (2016). *Policy directive: Preventing and mitigating election-related violence.*

between youth organizations, political parties and other stakeholders.

**Example:**

**Interpeace** provides conflict prevention training for youth political parties, aiming to bring young political leaders together with a focus on conflict resolution and mediation; support volunteer activities in communities to change the narrative of youth political parties towards contributors to the communities; work with political parties to identify youth members to be part of local councils; and facilitate common agreement across the political spectrum on addressing the needs and aspirations of youth.

<https://www.interpeace.org/>

**The UN Verification Mission in Colombia**

has supported youth participation in peacebuilding and political processes, including the facilitation of youth engagement in nonviolent campaigning in local elections through cross-party youth dialogue.

<https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformation/artikel/detail/-/content/the-youth-peace-and-security-agenda-in-the-context-of-the-united-nations>

**Parliamentary support for youth-inclusive electoral processes**

As highlighted by some participants at the SELECT consultations, parliaments have a role to play in fostering systematic engagement with young people, women and underrepresented groups to realize inclusive and accountable governance. Yet, across generations, there are more men than women members of parliament. Globally and in 2020, less than one percent of members of parliament were young women.<sup>171</sup> Young people who belong to minority cultural and religious communities also lack representation in many instances.<sup>172</sup>

*"We want to be listened to [and] a secure place to express the way that we see the reality of our community. We need to actively participate in the parliament. We need people who want to*

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<sup>171</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021). *Youth Participation in Parliaments.*

<sup>172</sup> The Body Shop and the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (2022). *Be Seen, Be Heard: Understanding young people's political participation.*

*create, innovate and do some actions out of the conventional way that the government always [does]; we want to make the difference.*” Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

Parliaments play a key role in creating an enabling legislative and regulatory environment for youth participation and overseeing the implementation of legislation as well as for the approval of national budgets in many societies. Thereby, parliamentarians may support youth-inclusive electoral legislation and financing of youth, peace and security frameworks and policies relating to youth participation<sup>173</sup> as well as promoting youth-sensitive budgeting<sup>174</sup> relating to peace and participation.

#### **Example:**

The **UNDP Bangkok** Regional Hub supports youth to be proactive in setting parliamentary agenda and influencing policy alternatives. UNDP facilitated online conversation with young people, on an open-source platform in **Bhutan, Pakistan** and **Timor-Leste** during which 19,313 participants casted a total of 446,955 votes. This was in collaboration with Singapore Global Centre for Technology, Innovation and Sustainable Development.

- Timor-Leste: <https://www.cogco.co/wp-content/experiments/undp2022/timor-leste.html>
- Bhutan: <https://www.cogco.co/wp-content/experiments/undp2022/bhutan.html>
- Pakistan: <https://www.cogco.co/wp-content/experiments/undp2022/pakistan.html>

#### **Youth-led information integrity initiatives**

Digital technologies including social media can contribute to transparency and enhance access to information and promote the right to freedom of expression. However, misinformation, harassment and breach of privacy are challenges for creating digital spaces that contribute to a safe, gender-responsive and

enabling environment for youth civic engagement.<sup>175</sup> Young people also describe this double-edged function of technology as a means to bridge divides and promote peace as well as a tool that can fuel hate speech, discrimination and incite violence.<sup>176</sup> The United Nations General Assembly resolution 76/137 (2022) on policies and programmes involving youth encourages Member States to “take the necessary and appropriate measures, with respect for human rights, to address disinformation and advocacy of hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence on the Internet, particularly on digital platforms used for educational purposes” and further notes the need for preventive measures and remedies in relation to young people’s right to privacy, promotion of digital literacy and the importance of technical skills for protection.

#### **Digital divide**

The world is facing a persistent digital divide that excludes parts of the global population from opportunities provided by digital technology. In 2019, 25 percent of the population in least developed countries (LDCs) and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) did not have access to a mobile broadband network,<sup>177</sup> and two in three children and young people (age 25 years or less) do not have Internet access at home.<sup>178</sup> The accelerating digital transformation is threatening to leave the most vulnerable further behind.

As a population with a significant online presence and tech-savviness as well as local know-how within communities, young people are partners in preventing and mitigating disinformation, misinformation and hate speech. For instance, young people are often key partners in the implementation of fact-checking

<sup>173</sup> UNDP (forthcoming). Youth, peace and security: Fostering youth-inclusive political processes.

<sup>174</sup> OECD defines youth-sensitive budgeting as a process to “integrate a clear youth perspective within the overall context of the budget process, through the use of special processes and analytical tools, with a view to promoting youth-responsive policies.”

<sup>175</sup> United Nations (2020). Report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security, S/2020/167.

<sup>176</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>177</sup> ITU (2020). Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2020.

<sup>178</sup> ITU and UNICEF (2020). How Many Children and Youth Have Internet Access at Home?

tools such as iVerify.<sup>179</sup> UNDP supported the Zambian-based PANOS Institute through this fact-checking tool, including a number of young fact-checkers, and Honduras where the tool was implemented by UNITEC and a group of master's students.

### The Information Integrity workstream of the SELECT project

The report on information integrity provides insights to the promotion of information integrity and mitigation of disinformation and hate speech in elections through insights for programmatic responses on the employment of digital technology to promote information integrity and the facilitation of the identification, analysis and response to cases of disinformation through multi-stakeholder platforms.<sup>180</sup>

### Insights from the SELECT consultation for Africa

During the conversation, digital technologies and social media emerged as tools to prevent misinformation and disinformation. Participants noted that since these tools can be used to promote peace as well as violence, it is critical to provide access to capacity development on using digital technologies to prevent violence and misinformation and to foster safe spaces for youth to express themselves and engage in dialogue on elections.

**Programmatic option:** Youth-inclusive strategic communication by Electoral Management Bodies

### Promoting young women's participation

Young people are experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and gender stereotypes continue to challenge the promotion of gender equality and women's participation.

<sup>179</sup> See more at <https://www.undp.org/digital/iverify>.

<sup>180</sup> UNDP (Forthcoming). SELECT: Information integrity.

Assistance to fostering inclusive electoral processes can give voice to people from marginalized groups and strengthen women's political participation.<sup>181</sup> The promotion of youth participation in peacebuilding requires that the discrimination young people experience is addressed.

The effectiveness of women's participation is known through research and noted in resolutions,<sup>182</sup> but there is still a need to better understand young women's perspectives, aspirations and needs in relation to peace and their political rights.<sup>183</sup> Investment in dedicated efforts must also occur to promote young women's participation throughout the electoral cycle because young women are often experiencing a form of 'double discrimination' due to their age and gender. Moreover, they face barriers such as unsafe environments, challenges with voter registration and participation, and underrepresentation.<sup>184</sup>

While an enabling environment for youth participation can be supported through relevant policies and legal frameworks, social and cultural norms might create barriers to the realization of these, and the SELECT regional consultations highlighted the need to consider not only accompanying national authorities' development of relevant legislation and laws but also to address the implementation of these, including by tackling gender stereotypes. The regional consultations also highlighted how youth-friendly policies must support women's participation in elections and political processes and tackle gender inequalities. Youth participation was clearly connected to women's participation, and there was a call for dedicated efforts to support young women's leadership and participation. This is in line with the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of

<sup>181</sup> UNDP Independent Evaluation Office. Lessons from evaluations: UNDP support to electoral processes.

<sup>182</sup> UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

<sup>183</sup> United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook.

<sup>184</sup> UNDP and the European Commission (2017). Youth participation in electoral processes: Handbook for Electoral Management Bodies; Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016). Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians; UNDP (2013). Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle—a good practice guide.

Women (CSW) 65 that recognize that young women are disproportionately excluded from consultations on issues that affect them and stress “the importance of investing in women’s and girls’ development and of strengthening their participation in order to break the cycle of gender inequality, discrimination, violence and poverty and to realize sustainable development, peace and human rights.”<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, the conclusions highlight that role models and access to decision-making spaces spur young women and girls’ engagement in political and public affairs.

### Example:

#### "Matilde"- Mexico

Matilde is a play about the political violence against women in Mexico. The play focuses on a young woman who struggles to become a politician in a rural area of Mexico. The National Electoral Institute and UNDP Mexico created it to support women’s political participation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOalyPKJh0&t=5s>

#### Preventing violence against vulnerable youth in elections

As noted in a report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the underrepresentation of women in political and public affairs is caused and exacerbated by discrimination, harmful stereotypes and gender-based violence.<sup>186</sup> The CSW also emphasizes that the promotion of full and equal participation and leadership of women in public life and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls are interconnected.<sup>187</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women commits States Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the

political and public life of the country, and the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution 41/13 (2019) urges Member States to “...address gender stereotypes that perpetuate all forms of discrimination and violence against girls and young women, including harmful practices, and the stereotypical roles of men and women that hinder social development...”<sup>188</sup>

An estimated one in four young people were living in settings affected by violence or armed conflict in 2016.<sup>189</sup> Electoral-related violence affects women and men in different ways. For instance, young women have particular needs and experiences including in relation to gender-based violence<sup>190</sup> and violence against women in politics and elections. Young women are also disproportionately affected by increasing wealth and income inequalities with gender disparities being one of the most persistent forms of inequalities.<sup>191</sup> At the same time, gender stereotypes relating to young peoples’ experience of violence are challenging the recognition of their agency and the inclusion of their needs in matters relating to peace.

Young women can be deterred from political participation and civic engagement due to intimidation, harassment and violence against women who exercise their political rights.<sup>192</sup> Violence against women affects the broader society including the credibility and legitimacy of political and electoral processes and institutions.<sup>193</sup> Violence against women can be described as “any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to

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<sup>185</sup> ECOSOC (2021). Commission on the Status of Women on Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. E/CN.6/2021/L.3.

<sup>186</sup> UNGA (2018). Note by the Secretary General: Violence against women in politics. A/73/301.

<sup>187</sup> ECOSOC (2021). Commission on the Status of Women on Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. E/CN.6/2021/L.3.

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<sup>188</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council resolution 41/13 (2019) on youth and human rights.

<sup>189</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO.

<sup>190</sup> United Nations (2006). Integrated DDR Standards: Module 5.20: Youth and DDR.

<sup>191</sup> UNDP (2019). Human Development Report 2019: Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century.

<sup>192</sup> 2020 Report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security.

<sup>193</sup> UN Women (2021). Guidance note: Preventing violence against women in politics.



enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member and or by the State.”<sup>194</sup> Data from 2020 indicates an increase in political violence targeting women in politics in most parts of the world.<sup>195</sup> Violence against women in politics can be divided into three types of violence:<sup>196</sup>

- Physical violence: including assassinations, kidnappings and beatings—often with the intent to force women to resign or withdraw from political life.
- Sexual violence: including sexual harassment, unwanted advances and sexual assault, rape, sexualized threats, altered pornographic or sexualized images intended to publicly question women’s competencies and shame them.
- Psychological violence: including threats, character assassination, stalking, online abuse and hate crimes, as well as economic violence such as denial of salary or political financing, property theft or damage.

The incorporation of violence against women prevention in electoral programmes as well as gender-sensitive arrangements can improve the readiness of electoral stakeholders to prevent violence.<sup>197</sup> The SELECT consultations noted the importance of young women feeling safe to participate in elections, the role of States in protecting women candidates, introducing legislative changes supporting young women’s representation and increasing avenues for young women to be heard in decision-making and electoral processes.

### The invisible youth

Too often, the peace efforts of young people go unnoticed, the perspectives of young people on public and political affairs remain unheard and

<sup>194</sup> UN Women and UNDP (2017). Preventing violence against women in elections: programming guide.

<sup>195</sup> ACLED (2021). Violence Targeting Women in Politics: Trends in Targets, Types, and Perpetrators of Political Violence.

<sup>196</sup> UN Women (2021). Guidance note: Preventing violence against women in politics.

<sup>197</sup> UN Women and UNDP (2017). Preventing violence against women in elections: Programming guide.

the needs of young people are unaddressed. There are many contributing reasons for this, including a lack of recognition of young people as agents of change, limited availability of disaggregated data and limited capacities to conduct youth-sensitive and youth-inclusive assessments and analysis.

The indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16, provide an opportunity to increase data relating to ending all forms of violence and participation in decision-making processes,<sup>198</sup> also for youth-inclusive governance.<sup>199</sup> However, there are no internationally agreed-upon indicators for youth, peace and security. In addition, internationally agreed-upon indicators and data collection methods to measure incidence or prevalence of violence against women in politics do not yet exist.<sup>200</sup>

*“To increase the participation of young people and promote peace during electoral processes, it is very important to listen to young people, be empathetic with them and help solve their problems.”* Young respondent, SELECT youth survey, July 2022.

### Example:

#### Global – Europe

The Youth Development Index by the Commonwealth tracks progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) associated with youth development. In 2020, the index measured progress in 181 countries. A recent update of the index is the introduction of indicators on peace, security, equality and inclusion.

The Commonwealth (2020), Global Youth Development Index and Report 2020

<sup>198</sup> UN Women and UNDP (2017). Preventing violence against women in elections: Programming guide.

<sup>199</sup> Plan International, Restless Development, UNDP, Children’s Environments Research Group at CUNY, Centre for Children’s Rights at Queen’s University Belfast Working Group on Youth-Inclusive Governance Indicator (2016). Critical agents of change in the 2030 Agenda: Youth-inclusive governance indicators for national-level monitoring.

<sup>200</sup> UN Women (2020). Data and violence against women in politics: Expert group meeting report and recommendations.

<https://youth-development-index.thecommonwealth.org>

### **The “Women 4 Leadership” project - Moldova**

The project aimed to support representation for women from diverse groups: different communities, women with disabilities, young women and others who tend to have limited access to decision-making processes. It supported women from rural communities to take leadership roles and advocate for their needs and interests with the local public administration.

The project was implemented by “Institutum Virtutes Civilis” Association and the CONTACT-Cahul Centre in partnership with UN Women in Moldova and funded by Sweden.

<https://moldova.unwomen.org/en/noutati-si-evenimente/noutati/2019/03/round-table>

**Programmatic option:** Youth-inclusive and youth-responsive assessment and analysis

#### **An intersectional lens to youth participation**

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>201</sup> came the commitment to leave no one behind (LNOB). In line with the LNOB principle,<sup>202</sup> electoral-related programmes may address the inequalities, exclusion and discrimination that young people experience. The youth, peace and security agenda provides an opportunity to advance a gender-transformative approach, which recognizes young people as agents of change

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<sup>201</sup> United Nations General Assembly (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/res/70/1).

<sup>202</sup> In accordance with the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination endorsed United Nations system framework for ‘Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development’ (2016), the principle of leaving no one behind can be operationalized with three interrelated elements: (1) equality (the imperative of moving towards substantive equality of opportunity and outcomes for all groups), (2) non-discrimination (the prohibition of discrimination against individuals and groups on the grounds identified in international human rights treaties) and (3) the broader concept of equity (understood as fairness in the distribution of costs, benefits and opportunities).

for peace and addresses patriarchal power structures. However, this requires programme implementation to consider how gender shapes young people’s realities, perceptions and actions. At the SELECT consultations, participants noted that violence takes many forms, and approaches to the prevention of electoral-related violence may consider addressing all forms of violence, from organized crime to gender-based violence and threats in the digital sphere. Participants also articulated a need to tackle intersectionality through programmes aimed at preventing electoral-related violence,<sup>203</sup> and the importance of tackling intersectionality is also noted in relation to the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda.<sup>204</sup>

It is important to understand the varying and intersecting identities of young people and how this may require specific approaches to promote the participation of some young populations.<sup>205</sup> Young people participate in public life through diverse ways, and electoral-related programmes have to provide innovative approaches that encompass those ways. Intersectionality can impact participation in electoral processes.<sup>206</sup> The promotion of the participation of a diversity of young people in elections was noted across the SELECT consultations where participants shared examples of supporting the participation of a diversity of young people in elections from indigenous youth in Latin America to young women with disabilities in Europe and Central Asia and younger youth in Asia-Pacific.

The intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination that young people experience impact the threats they may face when engaging in civic space. Young people with intersecting identities interviewed for the global

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<sup>203</sup> Regional consultations for the SELECT youth participation workstream, July and August 2022.

<sup>204</sup> Search for Common Grounds, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Transcend (2022). Celebration, Pride, and Violence: Queer Experiences in Youth, Peace, and Security. Independent thematic paper for the report by the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security

<sup>205</sup> United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook

<sup>206</sup> Intersectionality can be understood as individuals’ unique experiences of discrimination resulting from the interconnected nature of multiple social identities. See IFES (2020). Intersectionality Assessment of Political and Electoral Participation in Ukraine.

study 'If I Disappear' (2021)<sup>207</sup> describe that they often feel unsafe, unprotected and exposed to threats and dangers. Young people belonging to minority groups described barriers to civic engagement such as racial profiling and sociocultural stigma, exposure to physical violence by security forces, death threats and lack of resources to defend themselves, among others. Young people with disabilities reported difficulties in accessibility, consequently limiting their activism and peace efforts. LGBTQI+ youth members and advocates for LGBTQI+ communities described a lack of protection structures. Youth in rural areas are experiencing many particular and complex challenges towards exercising their civil and political rights.<sup>208</sup>

**Featured resources:**

IFES (2020). [Intersectionality Assessment of Political and Electoral Participation in Ukraine](#).  
United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY), [Gender toolkit: A manual for youth peace workers](#).

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<sup>207</sup> United Nations (2021). If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space.

<sup>208</sup> United Nations (2021). If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space.

# Chapter 5 Considerations and Recommendations

The consultations, youth survey and research conducted through the SELECT youth participation workstream have identified opportunities and challenges for electoral-related programming involving youth including programmatic entry points for the promotion of youth participation to sustain peace during elections.

Among the findings was the importance of working with young people throughout the programming cycle—from the design phase to the implementation and evaluation phases—as well as throughout the electoral cycle because young people play a key role in the prevention of violence and conflict, sustaining the conducive environment for peaceful elections and the bridging of potential divides in the pre- and post-electoral periods. Applying an integrated approach to the prevention of electoral-related violence through the creation of synergies between programmes on elections, youth empowerment, inclusive governance and peacebuilding deserves consideration.

Electoral-related programmes can promote youth participation at different levels and degrees. For instance, some programmes may adopt a youth-inclusive approach, which relates to young people having the right to engage throughout the programme cycle whereby their perspectives are taken into account. Other programmes may adopt a youth-sensitive approach, meaning that initiatives respond to, and are based on, the realities, needs and aspirations of young people.<sup>209</sup>

Quality assessments and analyses provide the starting point for programming to effectively promote youth participation. Therefore, increased attention may be given to conducting youth-inclusive and youth-sensitive needs assessments and conflict analysis to inform

programming relating to electoral violence prevention with the aim of understanding the lived experiences of young people, the challenges they face and the opportunities for peace they identify, while considering youth in its diversity. These assessments may form part of a larger assessment and/or analysis or may be specifically conducted to inform inclusive programming around elections.

The following recommendations are suggested as entry points for strengthening the capacity of electoral-related programmes to work with and for young people. The recommendations are structured around a slightly modified version of the three mutually reinforcing strategies set forward by the independent progress study on youth, peace and security.<sup>210</sup>

## **Include the diversity of young people by addressing structural barriers and fostering an enabling environment for youth participation.**

1. Apply **youth-inclusive design and implementation at every stage of the electoral cycle** and at various levels, from local elections to parliamentary and senatorial to presidential elections. Furthermore, consider the role of young people in the post-electoral period, including in post-electoral 'healing' to foster acceptance of the results by youth and as potential newly elected representatives in parliament. Support youth participation during peace and transition processes, including as mediators.
2. Include considerations relating to the **protection** of young people in electoral-related programmes to

<sup>209</sup> United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy (2021). Youth, peace and security: A programming handbook, p. 11.

<sup>210</sup> Simpson (2018). The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA/PBSO, pp. 19–21.

- promote a safe environment for youth participation to sustain peace.
3. Support dedicated efforts to **promote young women’s participation** and address power dynamics, as well as gender stereotypes through awareness-raising and education activities and introduce mechanisms to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.
  4. Apply a **comprehensive approach to civic and voter education that brings peace education and digital literacy** into civic and voter education, considering both formal and non-formal education incorporating the political, civic, cultural and socioeconomic issues affecting the situation of youth.
    - Support the design and development of youth-friendly digital literacy, peace, civic and voter education materials, with a focus on accessibility and relevance to young people. The materials can be co-created with—or developed fully under the leadership of—young people.
  5. Provide training opportunities and availability of guidance materials to **increase the capacities of public officials, political leadership and electoral institutions** to work meaningfully with young people to sustain peace during elections, including at the local level.
  6. Apply an **intersectional lens** to increase capacity to address all forms of violence—and particularly gender-based violence—during the electoral cycle. This entails understanding the varying and intersecting identities of young people and how stigma, discrimination and violence may be experienced as a result of this.
  7. Advocate for the **recognition of youth agency and leadership** in building and sustaining peace during elections, including by tackling gendered social norms and negative stereotypes relating to age, and support youth leadership on

peace and elections through campaigns. Engaging the media is key.

8. Consider the initiation of **youth perception studies** to better understand young people’s experience of peace and violence and as a way of amending the exclusion of young people from formal electoral and political processes as well as the limited availability of gender and age-disaggregated data.
9. Increase the availability of insights on youth in **evaluations** and post-electoral **lessons-learned exercises** to further strengthen the evidence base for electoral-related programmes and their impact when involving youth.

#### **Invest in youth peace efforts during elections**

10. Consider that many activities of an electoral-related programme may be rolled out **by young people**. For example, young people serve as observers of elections, candidates (including young women candidates), educators on peace and electoral rights, voters, electoral officials, monitors of violence as well as agents of change in building and sustaining peace.
11. Young people are agents of change and key in (re)shaping our future. Electoral-related programmes may **support youth-driven efforts in communities by:**
  - **Supporting youth organizations, movements and networks** in communities including on activities relating to dialogue for peace, civic education, youth-led thematic campaigns and monitoring of violence;
  - Investing in youth activities through **peer-to-peer approaches** that can mobilize young people for non-violence during elections and raise awareness of the electoral processes because young



- people have particular know-how regarding their communities and are often well placed to communicate with other youth;
- Investing in **young women-led initiatives** during elections given the specific challenges that young women face, alongside the vital role they play in societies;
  - Supporting young people in **crafting their own solutions** to concerns relating to elections or violence. Such an approach may empower young people and cultivate a feeling of inclusion and belonging, making governance-related work relevant to the youth;
  - Supporting **youth efforts in the digital sphere** relating to peace messaging and raising awareness of electoral processes, taking advantage of how many young people easily navigate digital technologies, while being mindful of the digital divide.

electoral cycle and **partnerships between the EMBs and youth organizations, movements and networks** on activities relating to youth participation and the prevention of electoral-related violence.

15. Bring together **communities of practices** on electoral support and youth, peace and security as a way of strengthening capacities and networks to support youth participation to sustain peace during elections. This relates to matters across sectors and not only social issues.

#### **Partner with youth organizations, movements and networks**

12. Go beyond ticking the box for youth involvement by supporting genuine and **meaningful engagement** of a diversity of young people, including by using relevant principles and strategies (see Annex 3).
13. **Support and/or initiate youth engagement mechanisms, multi-stakeholder forums and intergenerational dialogues** to enhance the opportunities for public officials, electoral stakeholders and development practitioners to meaningfully listen to and engage with young people to enable young people's agency.
14. Seek continuous, long-term engagement with young people throughout the

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