

Time for the EU to implement the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda: Could Finland serve as a role model?



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Executive Summary

Background

Looking at the Finnish experience with the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) for the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda as well as the way they have promoted the agenda as part of their foreign policy, this policy paper identifies several recommendations for the EU on how to better implement the YPS agenda, not only within institutions but also in their external actions.

The starting point for the YPS agenda was the adoption of Resolution 2250 by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2015, recognising the important and positive role of young people in promoting peace, stability and conflict resolution. This recognition marked a societal shift in the perception of youth and was crucial to overcoming the stereotype of youth as perpetrators or threats, which associates them with various forms of violence. Sustainable peace requires the involvement of the whole of society, which means the participation of young people is also required and should not be considered optional. Young people are especially affected by conflict and war because they constitute the demographic majority in many conflict-prone countries, which makes it even more essential to create space for meaningful youth engagement.

The United Nations (UN) member states, as well as regional organisations like the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU), committed themselves to the YPS agenda. However, widespread implementation of action plans and concrete measures to fulfil the goals of the agenda are still absent. Finland was the first country in the world to adopt a NAP for the YPS agenda, relying on meaningful youth participation and young people's demands. In a recent development, the EU has also extended its commitment to the YPS agenda. With the Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022-2027, the European Commission launched the first action plan to take the YPS agenda into consideration. The aim of implementing the YPS agenda is one element of the YAP, which sets out initial actions to take the agenda into account in EU policy-making. However, a more holistic approach is needed, which also dedicates specific funding and human resources to the agenda in order to achieve the goals of the YPS agenda in the EU's external action and promote its implementation within the EU's internal and institutional dimensions.

Finland's implementation of the YPS Agenda and the lessons learned

Qualitative interviews with a representative from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland responsible for the YPS agenda, the International Advocacy Specialist at the Finnish Youth Council Allianssi and secretary of the Finnish 2250 Network as well as with a founding member of the Finnish 2250 Network showed that, in Finland, the importance of the YPS agenda was given impetus by young people and youth organisations. Several years of advocating for a NAP led to written commitments by politicians to implement the YPS agenda.

Taking into consideration young people's opinions and demands regarding peace and security ensured the translation of the YPS agenda into the local context of Finland. The development process of the NAP allowed young people to actually co-create the content of the Finnish NAP.

Viewing the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting element, the Finnish Foreign Ministry involved several other ministries and entities in the drafting process as well as in implementing concrete actions and measures. However, coordination of the activities and commitments of the various actors proved difficult. A major challenge in the consultation and development process was the insufficient diversity among the young people participating in the consultations for the NAP. This underscores the need for sufficient resources and capabilities to foster diversity and inclusion among young people. Despite some difficulties in the NAP development process, Finland can be considered a role model in its implementation of the agenda and its meaningful youth participation in policy-making. Other actors can learn from the achievements and challenges of Finland and build on these experiences.

Recommendations for the EU

The recommendations of this policy paper are addressed to different levels within the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), mainly the Commissioners group for 'A Stronger Europe in the World', as the European Commission and the EEAS were explicitly tasked by the Council Conclusion on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe (2018) and the Council Conclusion on youth in external action (2020) with better implementing the YPS agenda through their activities. The focus of the YPS agenda is on peace and security, but it cannot be viewed in isolation; it should instead be understood as a cross-cutting element focusing on different aspects of youth participation and engagement. Young people often perceive peace and security in relation to their personal experiences, which are not part of the traditional understanding of security. Therefore, the lessons learned from the Finnish process of developing a NAP for the YPS agenda can also be applied on a broader scale in terms of meaningful youth participation in policy-making processes.

President of the EU Commission

Political commitment at the highest level and **coordination of the various actions** relating to youth and the YPS agenda are important for mainstreaming youth across different policy areas. After the Year of European Youth 2022, the EU Commission should stay committed to youth engagement at the highest level. For this reason, the paper suggests that a new position of **EU Youth Advisor** should be established within the Cabinet of the President. This person would be only responsible for coordinating the actions taken within the EU Commission and the different Directorates-General (DGs) regarding youth empowerment and inclusion as a cross-cutting element in different policy areas.

DGs and EEAS under the Commissioners group for A Stronger Europe in the World

Written commitments to and implementation of the YPS agenda is key to mainstreaming the YPS agenda. Even though the YAP signals high-level commitment to the YPS agenda, other key policy documents like the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (2022), the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 or the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 should feature the agenda to implement its cross-cutting nature. In addition, the EU should actively support the implementation of NAPs in member states and should aim for participatory **development of NAPs in 50% of member states by 2027**, when the current EU Youth Strategy and YAP will end.

Institutionalisation of positions and responsibilities for youth engagement regarding the YPS agenda and, more broadly, the overall external action under the Commissioners groups for A Stronger Europe in the World is needed with a **Youth Coordinator** in each DG and the EEAS. These Youth Coordinators, together with the EU Youth Advisor in the Cabinet of the President and Youth Representatives for YPS in each DG and the EEAS, should form a cross-institutional **YPS Working Group** with meetings every three months.

Opportunities for cooperation with other regional organisations like the AU and ASEAN regarding the implementation of the YPS agenda should be used. The **AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub** could be used by young people to promote and support the process of developing NAPs, for example by preparing surveys to ask young people about peace and security within the Peace and Security cluster of the Youth Cooperation Hub. A Youth Cooperation Hub should also be created in cooperation between ASEAN and EU youth, with one cluster on Peace and Security to promote the YPS agenda.

EU Delegations

Institutionalisation of responsibilities should also be achieved in the EU Delegations, appointing a **Youth Coordinator** in every delegation who will coordinate youth activities across different policy areas and the promotion of the YPS agenda.

Cooperation with youth should be fostered with the establishment of **national Youth Sounding Boards (YSBs)** in more countries, like the ones that have been established in the EU delegations to Zimbabwe or Nigeria, to give local youth a voice in EU cooperation with their countries. Within the YSB, one member should be a **Youth Representative for YPS**. Through the national YSB in EU delegations, a contact with local youth will be established, which will enable the collection of ideas from the broader youth population in the country to ensure an intersectional approach.

1. Introduction

“The active engagement of young women and men can make a critical difference in averting violence and war.” António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations¹

Young people make up a large part of the world’s population. However, their voices are often not heard or taken into account in decision-making processes. This is especially the case when it comes to political decisions and negotiations related to peace and security. Observing the lack of youth engagement in this area, in 2015 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2250, the starting point for the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. The YPS agenda recognises that “young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security”.² The two follow-up resolutions, UNSC 2419 in 2018 and UNSC 2535 in 2020, reinforced the importance of meaningful youth participation in peace processes and encouraged member states to build on these strategic documents to develop national approaches on how to integrate the YPS agenda into national strategies and legislation. In this regard, lessons can be learned from the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which have shown the important role of NAPs as a vehicle to coordinate and institutionalise actions to fulfil the goals of the agenda. Whilst by now almost 50% of all countries have developed NAPs for the WPS agenda, the development of NAPs for the YPS agenda is in the early stages.³ The first country in the world to launch a NAP for the YPS agenda was Finland, in August 2021.⁴ Viewing intersectionality as a cross-cutting element, the Finnish NAP was developed in close cooperation with youth networks to provide a roadmap for youth ownership and engagement in peace and security.

With the newly published Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU’s external action 2022-2027, the European Commission provides a new framework for partnership with youth and empowerment of young people across the world. As this is the first action plan that aims to implement the YPS agenda, it is important that other policy documents, including ones without a specific focus on youth, make the link between young people and peace and security. If this division is not overcome, the YPS agenda and youth engagement will not be mainstreamed. To achieve youth participation at various levels for international security, the EU should also work more closely with its external partners towards the goals of the YPS agenda.

This policy paper will look at how the EU can better institutionalise and promote the YPS agenda as well as the development of NAPs in other countries within its external action since the WPS agenda showed the importance of NAPs for

1 United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (2018): *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security*, available at <https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy>.

2 United Nations Security Council (2015): Resolution 2250, available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2250>.

3 Caitlin Hamilton, Nyibeny Naam and Laura J. Shepherd (2020): *Twenty Years of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans: Analysis and Lessons Learned*, The University of Sydney.

4 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2021): Youth, Peace and Security: Finland’s National Action Plan 2021-2024, available at <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-281-368-8>.

the successful implementation of specific agendas. Finland has set an example for the concrete implementation of the YPS agenda through a self-defined collaborative process with youth. Therefore, the development process for the Finnish NAP will be examined through document analysis and qualitative interviews with representatives from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi and the Finnish 2250 Network. Lessons learned from the Finnish NAP development process will be identified, with the aim of providing recommendations to EU institutions on how to better implement the YPS agenda and promote the inclusive development of NAPs with meaningful youth participation in European and in global partner countries.

1.1 Young people and peace – what is the connection?

Aggressive, rebellious, easily influenced: these are only a few of the stereotypes often associated with young people.⁵ Especially with regard to peace and security, youth, and young men in particular, are perceived as perpetrators or a threat, since they make up the majority of soldiers, combatants or members of militant groups in many conflicts.⁶ The constructive and positive role young people can play in conflict situations, peacebuilding and reconstruction is often underestimated or not taken into consideration.

As youth is the stage of transition from childhood into adulthood, conflict situations and violence significantly disrupt that process by damaging and destroying structures for stability, and educational and job opportunities. In many countries with conflict and ongoing peace processes, young people are the demographic majority and therefore disproportionately affected by violence. In 2021, one-quarter of young people between 15 and 29 years of age were directly affected by armed conflict or organised crime.⁷ Based on their experiences, young people have specific knowledge about violence and how it affects their lives, communities and countries.

Looking at the different experiences young people have, it is essential to see the diversity of young people and to not view youth as a homogeneous group. Being characterised as a transitional phase, 'youth' is not a form of identity but a broader concept related to age. Therefore, 'youth' is a diverse body that includes, for example, all different kinds of ethnicities, cultures, genders and socio-economic statuses, resulting in the need to take various views and backgrounds into account as youth cannot speak with one unified voice.⁸ In conclusion, an intersectional approach is needed, which considers

5 This paper understands youth as young people between 15 and 29 years of age, following the EU definition of youth and the understanding in Finland's NAP for the YPS agenda. However, it is important to point out that the term 'youth' is often understood differently, and that there is no universal definition.

6 Irena Grizelj and Ali Saleem (2022): *"We are in this Together: Operationalizing a Five-Year Strategic Action Plan for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes"*, Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security.

7 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2021): *Youth, Peace and Security: Finland's National Action Plan 2021-2024*, available at <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-281-368-8>.

8 United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (2018): *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security*, United Nations publication.

the intersecting differences of young people and their relationships to each other.



The relationship between peace and security is also intersectional, encompassing a range of aspects from human rights to development to climate change. Young people offer different perspectives on these interdependent aspects, contribute to sustainable peace through their activism and strive for a better future. In 2018, the work of 399 youth-led peacebuilding organisations around the world was documented, showing the huge capacity of young people to mobilise for conflict resolution, the reduction or prevention of violence and reconciliation. Most of these youth organisations work with less than USD 5,000 per year, and 97% of youth work in these organisations on a voluntary basis; these limited resources underscore the will and potential of young people to create positive change.⁹ Hence, youth should be seen not only as beneficiaries of violence prevention, peacebuilding and development, but as essential partners and co-leaders.¹⁰ The inclusion of young people in decision-making processes cannot be considered optional. To achieve sustainable peace and development, it is essential to include the whole population in the process and to leave no part of society behind.

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⁹ United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (2018): *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security*, United Nations publication.

¹⁰ Irena Grizelj and Ali Saleem (2022): *“We are in this Together: Operationalizing a Five-Year Strategic Action Plan for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes”*, Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security.

1.2 Bridging the gap: From a United Nations resolution to the implementation of the YPS Agenda

When the UNSCR 2250 was unanimously adopted in December 2015, marking the starting point of the YPS agenda, it was not the first time the topic had been discussed by international actors, but it was the first time that all countries had committed to principles and priorities regarding youth in the area of peace and security. Recognising the important role of young people in preventing violence and promoting peace, the resolution identifies five priority areas in which member states are encouraged to take or increase action and create mechanisms for meaningful youth participation.¹¹

Table 1: Five priority areas of the UNSCR 2250¹²



Building on the results of the independent progress study on youth peace and security, “The Missing Peace”, which was requested by UNSCR 2250, the second resolution of the YPS agenda, UNSCR 2419 (2018), urges member states and responsible UN bodies to consider how their actions in conflict and post-conflict situations include the voices and needs of young people, and to increase youth participation. Unlike the first two resolutions in the YPS agenda, UNSCR 2535 (2020) provides concrete steps for implementation and asks both member states and regional organisations “to develop and implement policies and programs for youth and to facilitate their constructive engagement, including through dedicated local, national and regional roadmaps on youth, peace and security, with sufficient resources, through a participatory process, in particular with young people and youth organisations and to pursue its implementation, including through the monitoring, evaluation and coordination with young people”.¹³

11 United Nations Security Council (2015): Resolution 2250, available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2250>.

12 Author's illustration, based on United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (2018): *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security*, United Nations publication.

13 United Nations Security Council (2020): Resolution 2535, available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2535>.

Looking at the implementation of the YPS agenda, several countries are at the forefront of supporting young people in their efforts for peace and security. A few months before the UNSRC 2250 was adopted, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan hosted the first Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security in August 2015, during its presidency of the UNSC.¹⁴ The forum was perceived as a turning point in the international recognition of young people's role in peacebuilding, and resulted in the Amman Youth Declaration, which was drafted in a participatory process involving consultation of more than 10,000 young people around the world.¹⁵ In addition, Colombia, Finland and Qatar showed their international commitment to providing young people with a platform by co-hosting the First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes in March 2019 and the High-Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes in January 2022.¹⁶

Regarding the development of roadmaps, Finland was the first country to adopt a NAP in August 2021, followed by the Nigerian NAP in September 2021. Currently, Jordan and the Philippines are in the process of establishing a NAP, and several countries, including Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso and Mexico, have integrated the agenda into national policies without a concrete roadmap. In the EU, Sweden has implemented the agenda into its development cooperation framework, and both Ireland and Italy refer to the YPS agenda in the NAPs for the WPS agenda.¹⁷

At a regional level, the AU published its Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security in August 2020, together with a 10-year implementation plan from 2020 to 2029.¹⁸ One key activity in this implementation plan is the development of NAPs by member states, with the target of having NAPs in 25% of member states by 2024 and in 50% of member states by 2029.¹⁹ Besides the EU, which recently published its first Youth Action Plan in EU's external action the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is promoting and implementing the YPS agenda on the European continent. With the OSCE Special Representative on Youth and Security, and various initiatives and declarations, the organisation is committed to meaningfully including youth voices in the security debate.²⁰ For the implementation of the YPS agenda in the MENA region, the League of Arab States is developing a regional roadmap for the YPS agenda for 2022 to 2025 through a participatory multistakeholder process.²¹

14 Youth4Peace (2015): The Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security, available at <https://www.youth4peace.info/event/global-forum-youth-peace-and-security>.

15 Youth4Peace (2015): Amman Youth Declaration, available at <https://www.youth4peace.info/book-page/amman-youth-declaration-english>.

16 United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (2022): High Level Global Conference on Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes, available at <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/doha2022/>.

17 United Nations Security Council (2022): Youth and peace and security – Report of the Secretary-General, available at https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2022-03/S-2022-220_English.pdf.

18 African Union (2020): Continental Framework for Youth, Peace and Security, available at <https://au.int/en/documents/20200821/continental-framework-youth-peace-and-security>.

19 African Union (2020): 10-Year Implementation Plan for the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace And Security (YPS) 2020-2029, available at <https://au.int/en/documents/20200821/10-year-implementation-plan-y-ps-2020-2029>.

20 Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2020): Youth and Security Education: Compilation of OSCE Commitments Youth, available at <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/455512>.

21 United Nations Security Council (2022): Youth and peace and security – Report of the Secretary-General, available at https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2022-03/S-2022-220_English.pdf.

When it comes to the implementation of the agenda, civil society organisations (CSOs) and youth themselves are taking a leading role in the promotion of the agenda. Not only did youth organisations and global initiatives play a crucial role in pushing for UNSCR 2250 before the YPS agenda was adopted, but afterwards young people stayed committed to promoting their influence in peace processes. Currently, the main platform for action is the Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding, which was established in 2012 and renamed the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security in 2018 after the launch of *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. The Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security brings together CSOs, including youth-led organisations, UN bodies and donors as well as academia. The Global Coalition is co-chaired by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, the United Network of Youth Peacebuilders (UNOY) and Search for Common Ground, ensuring a variety of perspectives and insights into the YPS agenda.²²

²² Youth4Peace (2022): *Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security*, available at https://www.youth4peace.info/About_GCYPs.

2. The EU's commitment to young people

2.1 EU and (global) youth participation

Over the last few years, the EU's commitment to young people and the perception of youth have changed slowly but surely toward a more inclusive approach, seeing the need to mainstream youth support and participation across different policy areas, even though policy documents often still lack the overall perspective of youth inclusion. The current EU Youth Strategy, adopted in 2018 and covering the period from 2019 to 2027, focuses on three main areas of action: engage, empower, connect. The strategy asks member states to translate the EU priorities into NAPs and meaningful engagement with young people. The EU Youth Dialogue takes place under the framework of the EU Youth Strategy, connecting young people and decision-makers to ensure young people's voices are reflected in EU policies.²³ In June 2021, the first EU Youth Coordinator was appointed to strengthen cooperation with youth by the EU Commission. Working as a policy officer in the Youth, Volunteer Solidarity and Traineeship Office within the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), the position of EU Youth Coordinator focuses on young people in specific policy areas without considering youth as a cross-cutting element.

In line with the EU Youth Strategy the corresponding new Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022-2027, published in October 2022, also builds on the three areas of 'engage, empower, connect' with different topics and initiatives. Besides institutional changes to better take account of young voices in policy-making processes, the YAP wants to empower youth and cooperate more with young people worldwide in areas such as democracy, education, economic opportunities, sustainable development and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Three new initiatives, the Youth and Women Democracy Initiative, the Youth Empowerment Fund and the Africa-Europe Youth Academy were launched with an overall budget of 100 million euros. Apart from these new funding opportunities, the implementation of the YAP is based on existing financing instruments, with a need to reallocate funds towards the new action plan.

In the EEAS as well as the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), the importance of youth engagement is well recognised. In terms of engagement with youth at a global level, the EEAS and the DG INTPA are two of the main actors, along with the DG EAC, using various tools and programs to empower young people and include them in decision-making processes. The AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub can be seen as a flagship project for meaningful international youth participation. The AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub was launched by the AU and EU based on the Abidjan Youth Declaration and the AU-EU Youth Agenda developed by the AU-EU Youth Plug-In Initiative and presented at the 5th AU-EU Summit in Abidjan in 2017. The Hub is a multi-stakeholder initiative aiming to tackle common challenges

²³ European Union (2022): EU Youth Strategy, available at https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en.

faced by the AU and EU. In six different clusters, including Peace and Security, various pilot projects have been developed by young people from the AU and EU and carried out with the support of CSOs.²⁴ The AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub empowers young people and gives them an opportunity for meaningful participation in EU programming by shaping projects.

Another important tool for global youth engagement is the Youth Sounding Board (YSB), established by the EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, in mid-2021. The YSB consists of 25 young people from EU and non-EU countries, who advise Jutta Urpilainen and the DG INPA on EU policies for international partnerships.²⁵ In addition, the first national YSBs have been established in EU delegations, for example in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, giving local young people the chance to influence EU cooperation with their countries. Considering the importance of youth engagement and the EU commitment to including young people, for example with the European Year of Youth 2022, the question remains of why only DG INPTA has institutionalised regular youth involvement with a YSB. The fact that there were more than 4,000 applicants for the 25 positions in the YSB shows the strong motivation of young people to shape EU policies.

2.2 YPS Agenda in the EU – still sidelined?

Except for the YAP, none of the existing youth policy documents have explicitly made the link between youth and the policy area of peace and security. This is



24 European Union External Action Service (2018): Become a Pioneer of the AU-EU Cooperation: Call for applications for the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/50385_en.

25 European Commission (2022): Youth Sounding Board, available at https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/youth/youth-sounding-board_en.

also the case for important foreign policy and security frameworks where the YPS agenda is not mentioned. The adoption of the Council Conclusion on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe from April 2018 and the Council Conclusion on Youth in External Action from June 2020 underline the importance of youth involvement for sustainable peace and securing European values. However, the new Strategic Compass published in March 2022, to cite one example, makes no reference to young people or the YPS agenda. The separation of youth-related issues, where the YPS agenda is currently located on one hand and security policies on the other, hinders the full implementation of the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting element that is required to mainstream youth involvement. The newly published YAP is an important step toward formalising and taking into account overall youth engagement in external action, and more specifically in the area of peace and security. But to fully implement the YPS agenda a more holistic approach is needed, one which also dedicates specific funding and human resources to achieve the goals of the agenda.

Even though the YPS agenda has not yet been well incorporated into youth policy frameworks and security documents, some EU actions around the YPS agenda were already visible before the newly published YAP. Federica Mogherini, in her role as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, declared the EU's commitment to UNSCR 2250 for the first time in March 2017 during the inauguration of the "Young Med Voice Plus" youth initiative.²⁶ Reiterating the EU's commitment, the EEAS organised European Regional Consultation on the YPS agenda in September 2017 as a contribution to the independent progress study "The Missing Peace" requested by UNSCR 2250. The EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security: Promoting Youth in Peacebuilding, organised by the EEAS in May 2018, was a milestone in EU engagement on the YPS Agenda. In addition to that, several EU instruments and tools are being used to include youth in the policy area of peace and security. The leading tool is the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, one of the Foreign Policy Instruments, which also funds around 60 programmes supporting young people in peacebuilding and crisis management.²⁷

The separation of youth-related issues, where the YPS agenda is currently located on one hand and security policies on the other, hinders the full implementation of the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting element that is required to mainstream youth involvement.

26 European Union External Action Service (2017): HR/VP Mogherini launches pioneering "Young Med Voices Plus" youth initiative in dialogue with young Mediterranean voices, available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/23339_en.

27 UNOY Peacebuilders (2019): *Mapping the progress of Youth, Peace and Security in the EU*, The Hague.

3. Could Finland serve as a role model for the implementation of the YPS Agenda?²⁸

3.1 Finland's path to a National Action Plan

According to a representative from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, who is in charge of the YPS agenda, young people and youth organisations took a leading role in initiating and promoting the development of a NAP in Finland. By approaching politicians to take the YPS agenda into account in their decision-making, over a period of several years young people successfully raised awareness about the importance of a NAP. In April 2018, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Timo Soini, announced the start of the planning process for the world's first NAP to implement the YPS agenda. When it came to the actual development process, the foreign ministry knew about the importance of youth involvement, but faced the challenge of how to reach out to young people and find proper means of communication. Realising that the ministry was not sufficiently familiar with youth work on the ground, they outsourced the first phase of the drafting process to Allianssi, the Finnish National Youth Council. As the foreign ministry wanted to hear young people's problems, concerns and opinions about peace and security to identify what should be tackled in the NAP, the ministry tasked and funded Allianssi to conduct a survey among young people across the country. Allianssi prepared the survey in cooperation with Finland's 2250 Network, an open network for young people and organisations interested in promoting the YPS agenda. The survey was distributed via various Finnish youth organisations and schools to reach out to young people in all regions of the county and to ensure diversity. A total of 207 responses were received after two survey periods, two weeks at the end of 2018 and four weeks at the beginning of 2019. Despite the efforts made to include youth from across the country, most of the participants came from the Uusimaa region, around the capital, Helsinki. Only six other regions had more than zero to three participants, showing the difficulty of reaching people in less urban regions. Besides the survey, 12 consultation sessions with young people were organised in cooperation with different youth organisations and one upper secondary school. Of the 12 consultation sessions, 6 took place in Helsinki, involving 89 participants out of the 116 participants in total.²⁹ The secretary of the Finnish 2250 Network identified the problem of too few resources to reach out to young people in rural areas and from minority groups as the main reason for the insufficient diversity in the development process. In her opinion, more funding and support from the Finnish Foreign Ministry would have been needed.

Once Allinassi had drawn up a report on the results of the survey and

28 This chapter is based on three qualitative interviews with a representative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland responsible for the YPS agenda, the International Advocacy Specialist at the Finnish Youth Council Allianssi and secretary of the Finnish 2250 Network as well as with a founding member of the 2250 Network.

29 Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi (2019): Experiences and views of peace and security among youth in Finland, available at <https://www.2250finland.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/YPS-report-Finland-EN.pdf>.

consultation sessions, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs could identify the priorities of Finnish youth and continue the work in the ministry. To include young people in the actual drafting of the NAP, the ministry organised several workshops between young people, representatives of the Finnish 2250 Network and government officials from different ministries. In the workshops, the results of the survey and consultation sessions were discussed, leading to initial ideas about concrete aspects for the five priority areas of the UNSCR 2250. The actual text for the NAP was drafted in the workshops. Once the Finnish Foreign Ministry had finalised the first draft of the NAP, it circulated the draft to other ministries and government bodies as well to the 2250 Network and Alliansi, asking for their suggestions. After redrafting and circulating the NAP again in two more revision rounds, the world's first NAP for the implementation of the YPS agenda was adopted in August 2021, three years from the initial announcement that a NAP would be developed. Looking at the final version of the NAP, the secretary of the Finnish 2250 Network observed that young people and the network were heard in the process, and both their ideas and their suggested changes to the draft versions were taken into account. In this regard, the recognition of intersectionality as the basis of the NAP is seen as one of the main achievements of young people.

3.2 Promotion of the YPS Agenda in Finland's external engagement

Finland is aware of the importance of the YPS agenda, which is also stated in the chapter "Globally influential Finland"³⁰ in the government programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin, which reinforces its support for activities related to the YPS agenda in its foreign policy. Finland promotes the YPS agenda in various ways. In the context of EU activities and the Nordic countries, the Finnish government advocates for stronger recognition of the agenda as an integral part of the EU agenda. As a side event at a meeting of Nordic foreign ministers and African leaders, Finland recently organised a meeting with young people to boost knowledge about and awareness of the agenda. Besides European engagement, Finland has also incorporated support of the YPS agenda into its Africa strategy. As the representative of the Finnish Foreign Ministry stated, the UNSCR 2250 is seen as a toolbox to handle the conflicts in Africa, since sustainable conflict resolution can happen only if the whole population is included. As a concrete measure, Finland supported Nigeria in the process of drafting its NAP. Meetings and twinning activities between Finnish and Nigerian officials were organised to share examples of best practice in the development process. The YPS is one of the key topics in their bilateral cooperation.

On the broader international level, Finland is highly engaged in raising awareness and developing concrete tools to implement the YPS agenda. This international engagement started with the first International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, co-hosted in 2019 by Colombia, Finland, Qatar and several UN bodies including the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. The symposium was a starting point for ongoing international seminars to raise awareness about the agenda and create

30 Finnish Government (2019): 3.2 Globally influential Finland, available at <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/marin/government-programme/globally-influential-finland>.

actual tools for implementation. A follow-up conference took place in January 2022. The outcome of the conferences and smaller seminars are now being implemented in a working process together with Search for Common Ground and UNOY. This includes a series of virtual workshops, which will lead to a policy workshop in Helsinki at the end of 2022 to support willing countries with the implementation of NAPs. Alongside the workshops, the Finnish Foreign Ministry is also trying to implement twinning activities with representatives from countries that want to establish a NAP. In terms of the promotion of the YPS agenda, Finland tries to work at a normative and political level as well as implementing concrete actions.

3.3 Lessons learned from the Finnish approach

Looking at the implementation of the YPS agenda in Finland, the interviews conducted showed that young people were actively involved in the development of the NAP and were able to meaningfully participate through actually co-creating the policy outcome. Even though the overall process was quite successful, some challenges remain. The main challenges concern the funding of the NAP. During the development process, there was a lack of resources for youth consultations, which was seen as the main reason for insufficient diversity among young people in the development process of the NAP. Also, concrete funding for the NAP itself is unclear, as the plan does not mention a budget for the measures and activities. Apart from the financial aspect, the constant involvement of other ministries and the coordination of different actions regarding the YPS agenda were difficult. The overall achievements and challenges in the development process of the NAP identified in the interviews conducted are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Achievements and challenges of the implementation of the YPS agenda identified from the interviews with representatives of the Finnish Foreign Ministry, the National Youth Council Allianssi and the Finnish 2250 Network.

	Achievements	Challenges
Initiation Phase	Youth activism led to the development of a NAP.	Political commitment in the ministry required to implement the demands from youth.
Drafting Phase	<p>Written commitments to and implementation of the YPS agenda in different policy documents such as the Government Programme, the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy and the Africa Strategy.</p> <p>Intersectional approach while drafting the NAP to include all young people in the activities and measures of the NAP, regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnicity, culture, religion, disabilities or other aspects.</p> <p>Local contexts must be considered when translating the YPS agenda into the NAP and implementing the demands and ideas of young people including economic, social and climate security.</p> <p>Cooperation with youth through the National Youth Council and 2250 Network to hear and include young people's opinions.</p> <p>Implementing young people's ideas about peace and security through regular meetings and workshops with policymakers and youth.</p>	<p>Funding to ensure diversity in the participation of young people was limited, which led to a low level of inclusion of marginalised groups in the consulting and drafting process.</p> <p>Institutionalisation of positions and responsibilities in ministries for the YPS agenda is needed, because the involvement and promotion of the agenda is not a given.</p> <p>Communication with youth is important but the capacity of ministries remains limited.</p>
Implementation Phase	Implementing the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting element with participation of different ministries and inclusion of different policy areas.	<p>Coordination of the various actions of different ministries and actors around the YPS and identification of what has already been done to implement the agenda.</p> <p>Funding of measures and activities to implement the NAP remains insufficient.</p>
Promotion of YPS agenda in external action	<p>Inclusion of meetings with young people when meeting with government officials from other countries.</p> <p>Opportunity for cooperation with other countries and regional organisations through the exchange of best practice examples, dialogue and workshops.</p>	Political commitment from the respective governments is needed to implement the YPS agenda and develop a NAP in a participatory process with young people.

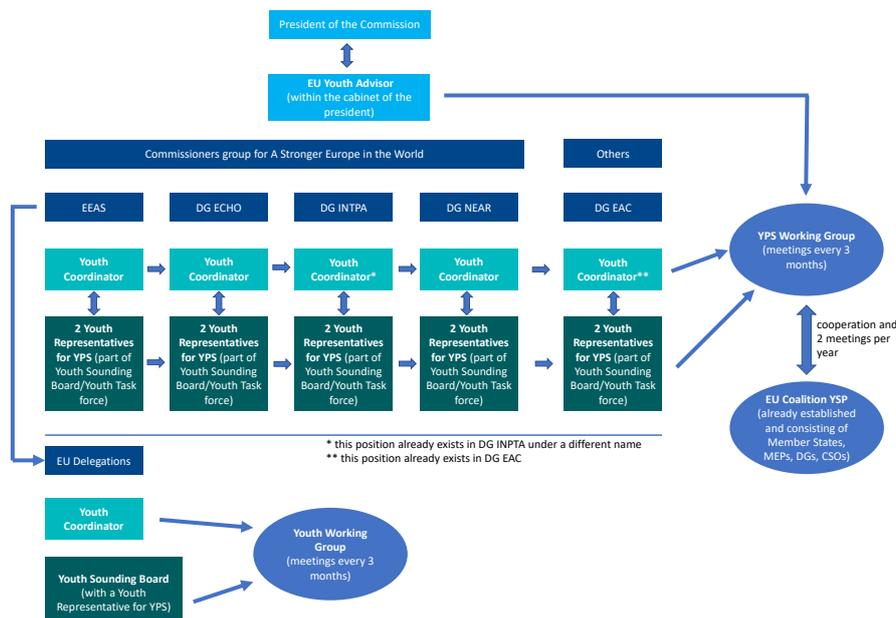
Taking into account the achievements and challenges in the development of the NAP and the promotion of the YPS agenda, much can be learned from the Finnish experience and other actors can build on it. Besides the achievements, the challenges give other actors who would like to implement the YPS agenda an idea of the difficulties that it is important to overcome. Despite problems with ensuring diversity among young participants in developing the NAP, Finland can be seen as a role model for the implementation of the YPS agenda. Thanks to the strong cooperation and constant communication between ministries and young people as well as civil society, not only were the opinions and demands of youth regarding peace and security taken into account, but young people were actually able to co-create and draft new policies.

4. Recommendations for EU policy makers

The following recommendations to help EU institutions better implement the YPS agenda and promote NAPs in their external actions are drawn from the lessons learned from the Finnish NAP development process and EU engagement over the past few years. The EU institutions have already organised conferences on the YPS agenda as well as other forms of dialogue and youth consultation, but as this policy paper shows, the agenda is still sidelined in policy documents and programming. This leads to the conclusion that young people have to be more directly involved in the work of EU institutions. Youth consultation and dialogue should not be seen as extraordinary measures used once in a while, but should occur on a more regular and structured basis. In addition to various forms of dialogue, conferences and consultation, youth participation must be formalised within the daily work of EU institutions and policy-makers to ensure youth participation has a meaningful impact.

As the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) were explicitly tasked by the Council Conclusions from 2018 and 2020 to better implement the Youth, Peace and Security agenda through their activities, the recommendations of this paper are addressed to different levels within the European Commission and the EEAS. The YPS agenda touches mainly on the area of peace and security, but it cannot be viewed in isolation; it should instead be understood as a cross-cutting element focusing on various aspects of youth participation and engagement. Young people often perceive peace and security in relation to their personal experiences, which are not part of the traditional understanding of security. Therefore, the lessons learned from the Finnish process of developing a NAP for the YPS agenda can also be applied on a broader scale in terms of meaningful youth participation in policy-making processes.

Table 3: Institutionalising the implementation and promotion of the YPS agenda in the EU Commission



4.1 President of the EU Commission

Political commitment at the highest level and **coordination of various actions** relating to youth and the YPS agenda are important for mainstreaming youth across different policy areas. With the European Year of Youth 2022, the EU recognised the importance of including young people and their voices. This momentum should be used to continue EU efforts to make decision-making processes more accessible and inclusive for young people. Therefore, the position of an **EU Youth Advisor** should be established within the Cabinet of the President. This person would be responsible for coordinating the actions taken within the EU Commission and the different DGs regarding youth engagement and inclusion as a cross-cutting element in different policy areas. Having an EU Youth Coordinator within DG EAC only is not sufficient to coordinate overarching youth activities and strategies.

- **Tasks of EU Youth Advisor:** Coordination of youth action and participation within the Commission; Reporting to the President of the Commission; Coordination and identification of funding possibilities for youth policies and engagement; Exchange with Youth Coordinators from DGs/EEAS and Youth Representatives; Exchange with the UN Youth Office.

4.2 Directorates-Generals and European External Action Service

Written commitments to and implementation of the YPS agenda is key to mainstreaming this agenda. So far, key policy documents such as the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (2022), the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the New European Consensus on Development (2018) do not consider the YPS agenda. To implement the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting element, it is not enough to commit to the YPS agenda in one Youth Action Plan on external action. More detailed measures, tools and inclusion of the YPS agenda into the EU's overall security strategies are needed. All key policy frameworks for European external actions must consider the YPS agenda as one element contributing to peace and security. In addition, the EU should commit to actively supporting the implementation of NAPs in member states. As a first step, the EU should aim for participatory development of NAPs in 50% of member states by 2027, when the current EU Youth Strategy and YAP will end, following the example set by the AU, which aims for NAPs in 50% of member states by the end of its 10-year implementation plan for the YPS agenda in 2029.

Intersectional approach and the **local contexts** of young people in the EU as well as young people in the respective countries where the EU engages in peace and security matters must be taken into account. Drafting a NAP should always be based on consultation with a diverse body of young people. The YPS agenda must reflect the local realities and demands of young people with concrete measures and indicators to achieve the goals of the YPS agenda. The new YAP, which was drafted after consultation with young people, mentions

the need for a local dimension but does not provide detailed measures on how to achieve that. Additionally, in the context of European external action, more concrete measures are needed to implement the goals of the YPS agenda. As well as a gender balance, we also need a generational balance in peacebuilding missions. Hence, one example of a concrete measure is more training of young peacebuilders and at least 10% participation by young peacebuilders under the age of 30 in EU civilian missions as youth advisors to guarantee meaningful youth participation in EU external action.

The whole Commissioners group for A Stronger Europe in the World (DG INTPA, DG NEAR, DG ECHO, EEAS) as well as the DG EAC should take actions to consider the YPS agenda in their programming.

Implementing the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting element requires the involvement of all DGs involved in different aspects of the YPS agenda. The whole **Commissioners group for A Stronger Europe in the World** (DG INTPA, DG NEAR, DG ECHO, EEAS) as well as the DG EAC should take actions to consider the YPS agenda in their programming. When defining medium and long-term goals, setting guidelines for grant applications, writing calls for projects and selecting specific projects, the implementation and promotion of the YPS agenda and youth participation must be included. At least 30% of projects implemented or ordered by the Commissioners group for A Stronger Europe in the World should address youth participation and co-creation of policies in their goals.

Institutionalisation of positions and responsibilities for youth engagement and youth activities under the Commissioners group for A Stronger Europe in the World with a **Youth Coordinator** in each DG and the EEAS to ensure youth participation and the promotion of the YPS agenda.

- **Tasks of Youth Coordinators:** Coordination of Youth Activities, including in relation to the YPS agenda, in the own DG/EEAS; Listening to ideas and demands from Youth Representatives for YPS; Review of policies and project calls in the DG/EEAS regarding youth participation and YPS implementation.

Cooperation with youth is the key to implementing the YPS agenda. Consequently, the DGs and the EEAS should all establish their own Youth Sounding Board (YSB) like DG INTPA, to give young people a greater voice in decision-making processes. To ensure the legitimacy of the YSB, it is recommended to establish an advisory board consisting of representatives from CSOs and youth organisations. Through this advisory board, youth organisations and CSOs can nominate one candidate from an EU country and one candidate from a non-EU country for the YSB. Based on the DG INTPA example, where the YSB consists of 25 members, the advisory board should vote for a list of 100 candidates for each YSB which would be forwarded to the respective DGs and the EEAS. Each DG and the EEAS should select 25 members for their YSB from the list of the advisory board, ensuring diversity and a variety of perspectives in the YSB.

The YSB should elect two **Youth Representatives for YPS** out of their group, one from an EU country and one from a non-EU country to ensure the EU's external dimension. The Youth Representatives for YPS should have monthly meetings with the Youth Coordinator in the respective DGs and the EEAS to ensure the implementation of YPS actions and adjustment of programmes to incorporate the agenda.

- **Tasks of Youth Sounding Boards:** Advising DGs/EEAS in their decision-making on the perspective of young people; Exchange and consultation with youth organisations to ensure diversity and plurality; Regular work meetings within the YSB to discuss current policy developments and draft suggestions for the respective DGs/EEAS; Election of two Youth Representatives for YPS.
- **Tasks of Youth Representatives for YPS (as part of the YSB):** Cooperation with the other members of the YSB to ensure the cross-cutting element of the YPS agenda; Exchanging ideas with youth organisations to present different opinions and perspectives to EU policymakers; Cooperation with the Youth Coordinator in the respective DG/EEAS to better implement the YPS agenda into EU policies and external action.

Implementing young people's ideas is needed to guarantee meaningful youth participation and co-creation of policies. A cross-institutional **YPS Working Group** should meet every three months to exchange and coordinate the implementation of the YPS agenda as well as to hear young people's demands. The working group should consist of the Youth Coordinator, the Youth Representative for YPS and the EU Youth Advisor to the President of the Commission. A separate EU Coalition YPS has already been established with interested member states, MEPs, CSOs and representatives from key commissions to promote the YPS agenda in the EU and bring together different perspectives. Since the YPS agenda has still not been taken into account in most of the relevant policy documents, the YPS Working Group is required to ensure the agenda is given greater consideration in the commission's decision-making processes. The YPS Working Group and the EU Coalition YPS should have exchange meetings twice a year to align their engagement.

- **Tasks of the YPS Working Group:** Coordination and cooperation with regard to actions taken by the various DGs/EEAS to implement the YPS agenda; Discussion of upcoming EU policies and how to align them with the YPS agenda; Looking at allocation of funding for the YPS agenda and related activities; Exchange with EU Coalition YPS.

Funding for measures and activities related to the YPS agenda needs to be available. More funding in the external action must go into projects promoting the development of NAP and youth engagement. To include young people in decision-making processes and to ensure diversity in youth consultation, a lot of resources, especially financial resources, are needed to reach out to young people as well as to conduct consultation sessions. The thematic **MIP for Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention** from 2021 to 2027 as part of the NDICI-Global Europe identifies the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting issue. Therefore, the YPS agenda as a cross-cutting element should be included in the specific Annual Action Plans for different countries, regions and topics which are adopted by the EU Commission each year. At least 30% of the projects selected under the MIP for Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention should address young people and meaningful youth participation, including the promotion of the YPS agenda.

In the suggested ASEAN-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, within the Peace and Security cluster young people could draft and implement projects to promote the development of NAPs for the YPS agenda by exchanging experiences and examples of best practice to promote the goals of the agenda.

Opportunities for cooperation with other regional organisations like the AU and ASEAN regarding the implementation of the YPS agenda should be used. The AU aims to have NAPs in 25% of member states by 2024. The EU should support the process financially and with twinning activities. The **AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub** could be used by young people to promote and support the process of developing NAPs, for example by preparing surveys to ask young people about peace and security within the Peace and Security cluster of the Youth Cooperation Hub. In terms of cooperation between young people in the EU and ASEAN, the second edition of the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum in 2022 provided young people with an opportunity to shape the future of ASEAN-EU relations. As the YPS agenda should be seen as a cross-cutting element around different policy fields, the Young Leaders Forum could be used to promote the development of NAP through the exchange of young people's perceptions of peace and security in their countries and regions. To continue and further deepen youth engagement between ASEAN and the EU, an institutionalised platform should be implemented. Following the successful example of the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, a **similar hub should be created for cooperation between ASEAN and EU youth**. In the suggested ASEAN-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, within the Peace and Security cluster young people could draft and implement projects to promote the development of NAPs for the YPS agenda by exchanging experiences and examples of best practice to promote the goals of the agenda.

4.3 EU Delegations

Youth activism and **communicating with youth** are important aspects of promoting the YPS agenda and NAPs. Young people need access to policymakers to advocate for their ideas and to communicate them to a broader public. Therefore, the EU delegations should work together with national youth councils and youth organisations and support them in their activities. A starting point could be the regional networks of UNOY (United Network of Peacebuilders), for example UNOY Asia or UNOY East & Southern Africa, and the implementation of regular hybrid exchange meetings and workshops with youth organisations.

Inclusion of meetings with young people when meeting with government officials in their respective countries, to give youth the opportunity to advocate to the EU delegation and their own governments with regard to their ideas about implementing the YPS Agenda. Depending on the political situation in the respective countries and relations with the government, members of the delegation could act as bridge builders between the government and young people looking for joint cooperation and actions.

Written commitments and implementation of youth demands, as well as the promotion of the YPS agenda, should be part of **local programming** and projects. In cooperation with the EEAS and DG INTPA, delegations decide on local priorities in their work and select local programmes. The YPS agenda should be considered in the local priorities and programmes. The EU

Delegations should also advocate for youth participation and the promotion of the YPS agenda to be implemented in the country-specific Annual Action Plans.

Institutionalisation of responsibilities should also be achieved in the EU Delegations, appointing a **Youth Coordinator** in every delegation who will coordinate youth activities across different policy areas and the promotion of the YPS agenda, reporting back to the Deputy Head of Delegation.

- **Tasks of Youth Coordinators:** Overall observation and coordination of youth activities and implemented projects in the delegation; Listening and exchanging experiences with national Youth Sounding Board; Advocating for demands and ideas of YSB in the delegation.

Cooperation with youth should be fostered with the establishment of **national Youth Sounding Boards (YSB)** in more countries, like the ones that have been established at the EU delegations in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, to give local youth a voice in EU cooperation with their countries. Within the YSB, one member should be elected as the **Youth Representative for YPS**. Through the national YSB in EU Delegations, a contact with young people will be established and provide an opportunity to collect ideas from the broader youth population in the country to ensure an intersectional approach.

- **Tasks of national Youth Sounding Boards:** Advising the delegation on the selection of local programming and the development and implementation of local projects; Exchanging experiences with local youth and youth organisations to bring in an intersectional perspective; Developing ideas for better youth engagement.
- **Tasks of Youth Representative for YPS (as part of the YSB):** Meeting with youth organisations and the national youth council to exchange ideas and demands around implementing the agenda; Bringing local youth opinion into the YSB; Advising YSB and Youth Coordinator on how to better implement the agenda in the local context.

Implementing young people's ideas should be assured through a **Youth Working Group** consisting of the Youth Coordinator and the YSB, which meets monthly to include young people in decision-making processes. The YPS agenda should be featured as a topic in the Youth Working Group.

- **Tasks of Youth Working Group:** Monthly meetings between YSB and Youth Coordinator; Exchanging ideas about current developments; Development of new policies and projects to ensure co-creation with youth; Reporting back to Head of Delegation.

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