



A young North Korean defector and South Korean leader present on a collective vision for peace.

Youth Democracy, Human Rights & Governance Cross-Sectoral Initiative

Under the USAID Global Elections and Political Transitions (GEPT) award, the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) is facilitating an initiative to explore the intersections of DRG and other youth development sectors, bringing together practitioners, donors and young leaders from across the world. This initiative is a forum and learning community for youth development practitioners to explore cross-sectoral challenges and opportunities that foster meaningful political participation and leadership by young people.

Exploring the Intersection of DRG and Youth, Peace and Security Programs Co-hosted with CEPPS Associate Partner Search for Common Ground

Young people constitute the majority of the population in conflict-affected countries and are often excluded from peacebuilding efforts and underrepresented in formal political structures. In December 2015, the UN Secretary Council officially recognized the positive role of youth in peace and security (YPS) in Security Resolution 2250, which urge states to both consider young people's political exclusion and increase the representation of youth in all levels of decision-making. This requires analyzing YPS efforts through a democracy, human rights, and democracy (DRG) lens with the understanding that establishing and maintaining peace is inherently political. If young people's peacebuilding efforts are disconnected from broader democracy and governance efforts, it will be challenging to integrate their perspectives into public policies and laws or, more importantly, to sustain their impact. For example, in multiple countries, there is promising evidence that the establishment of new linkages between youth and parliament, the use of young parliamentarians as mediators, and the promotion of dialogue in divided societies through young parliamentarians have resulted in positive outcomes that may advance peace and stability over time.¹


Key Challenges

- The absence of pathways or effective mechanisms for youth to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes in conflict-affected environments.
- The “violence of exclusion” as a form of structural and psychological marginalization for young people that is indivisible from their political, social, cultural and economic disempowerment and results in policies and programs that don't reflect young people's rights and realities.
- Government and state repression often undermine legitimate opportunities for young people to engage in politics, peaceful protests and movements.
- Political inequalities, manipulation, and exclusion are key areas of concern for young people and they tend to reject political inclusion if it is in corrupt, undemocratic, oppressive systems.
- False perceptions of young people, their assets, and capabilities manifest into mistrust of young people and their contributions by the state, political elites and older people.
- Young people often internalize harmful stereotypes and as a result are more likely to stereotype their peers and exclude themselves from opportunities to participate.

“It's important for young people to be much more than just fuel for movements, more than just raw energy: young people are actual partners and key carriers of peacebuilding processes.”

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2017). Youth Participation in Parliaments and Peace and Security. https://www.ipu.org/sites/default/files/documents/tp_youth_participation_in_parliaments_and_peace_and_security_ipu.pdf

“It’s important to recognize political divisions among young women and men and to use conflict sensitive approaches in outreach, selection, recruitment, and engagement while building in opportunities for dialogue across political divides. This includes recognizing how political quotas may reinforce elitism or lend themselves to co-opting by political parties.”

A young woman with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and a dark vest, is speaking and gesturing with her hands. She is standing in front of a whiteboard with some writing on it. Another woman is partially visible behind her, wearing a grey jacket. The scene appears to be a workshop or training session.

A young woman participates in an advocacy skills workshop to bolster young community mobilizers.

Key Recommendations for YPS Practitioners

- Consider recruiting and training young political actors for peace and security programs, such as elected representatives and civic and political activists, on the local or national level.
- Integrate political leadership training and an introduction to policymaking and advocacy as part of peace and security programs to ensure peacebuilders have the skills to engage in decision-making processes and policy reform.
- Support young people’s political participation in the form of quotas and a lower age of eligibility during peace and security decision-making processes.
- Directly address the policies of governments that have contributed to sustained conflict, unrepresentative governance structures, corruption, and the marginalization of young people.
- Strengthen links between political actors, such as elected officials, young parliamentarians, or youth-centered civil society organizations, and youth peacebuilding organizations.

Key Recommendations for DRG Practitioners

- Recognize that young people, including young women, have long been at the forefront of grassroots efforts for peace and justice and build on their existing efforts and demonstrated capacity to lead.
- Partner with young women and men and connect them with policymakers working in the peace and security sector to advocate for policy changes that incorporate young people’s experiences.
- Identify political entry points for young people’s participation during peace negotiations as research indicates that participation in peace processes contributes to inclusive and representative governance structures that likely increase the sustainability of the agreements.
- Integrate intergenerational collaborations and networking in programs which promote positive relationships and help bridge the communication gap between young people and older generations to move from conflict to peace and secure democratic gains.
- Incorporate key peacebuilding skills in capacity building trainings, e.g. empathy, positive self-concept, self-control, respect for diversity, nonviolent communication, non-adversarial advocacy, etc.
- Use media to build meaningful and relevant content featuring young peacebuilders and activists to counter negative narratives and promote young people as positive contributors to democracies.

Key Resources

- [Raising their Voices: CEPPS Resource on Pro-Youth Laws and Policies](#)
- [We Are Here](#)—Policy paper on an integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes
- [Youth4Peace Toolkit](#) provides training guidance on peacebuilding & conflict transformation in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [French](#), & [Arabic](#).
- [Youth Participation in Parliaments and Peace and Security](#)—thematic paper highlighting linkages between youth participation in parliament and peace and security in the world.
- YouthPower: [What works in youth and peacebuilding?](#)

Examples of Cross-Sectoral Programs



Amplifying Youth Voices through Regional Networks and Exchanges

Nevena Todoric, a NED Hurford Youth Fellow and Coordinator at the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, discussed the importance of expanding the perception of political participation beyond political parties and voting to investing in young people through allyship, intercultural and cross-regional exchanges, and the development of more responsive policies. Within the Western Balkans, young people advocated for the establishment of [RYCO](#), the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, which supports initiatives aimed at reconciliation and remembrance, diversity and cultural exchange, regional mobility, participation and closer connections with Europe.



Promoting Positive Youth Narratives

In 2018, **Hussein M Sarayrah**, a journalist, activist and member of Jordan's YPS Coalition, participated in a CEPPS program in Jordan focused on civic engagement, media and peacebuilding skills which produced TV segments highlighting youth initiatives around the country and encouraged young viewers to start their own youth engagement initiatives. Hussein emphasized that journalism provided young people with an opportunity to find solutions for local problems and that media is the best tool to close the communication gap between the government and connect young people across the world.



Including Young People in Electoral and Peacebuilding Processes

Aissa Traore, Co-founder of the Youth Association for Active Citizenship & Democracy (AJCAD) in Mali and member of SFCG's [Global Leadership Council](#), discussed lessons learned from conducting election-focused programming in a conflict-affected context and the need for more inclusive political processes. During the election period, AJCD engaged youth and other stakeholders to raise awareness on young people's priorities, facilitated youth consultations and youth debates, and developed a youth manifesto. Throughout this work, Aissa emphasized the need to build young people's confidence and implement campaigns targeting youth inclusion in peace processes, particularly in insecure regions of the country.

Continue to Engage with the Youth DRG Cross-Sectoral Initiative

- Network with youth development thought leaders, practitioners, and donors across sectors;
- Discover effective approaches and updates related to youth political participation and leadership within a Positive Youth Development framework; and
- Identify lessons learned and promising practices related to youth political participation and cross-sectoral programs.

For more information, please contact CEPPS partners:

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