



Expert Group Meeting

“Youth, Peace and Security: Social Issues and Social Policies”

Rome, 30-31 October 2017

Concept Note

The Division for Social Policy and Development in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing an Expert Group Meeting under the theme **“Youth, Peace and Security: Social Issues and Social Policies”**, to take place in Rome on 30-31 October 2017. The meeting will bring together experts from academia, representatives of Member States, United Nations entities, youth organisations and intergovernmental bodies to examine current challenges regarding youth, peace and security issues, and discuss ways to promote and enhance young people’s positive engagement in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

These topics will be considered under the framework of Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, as well as in the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Youth. The meeting will address issues of youth marginalisation and socio-economic exclusion that contribute to their vulnerability to engage in violence, conflict and social unrest, particularly their susceptibility to radicalisation and violent extremism. It will also discuss young people’s social and political engagement in their communities; their role in promoting social well-being, in consolidating the social fabric, as well as in conflict prevention and sustaining peace. This discussion will also include an examination of critical social and economic issues that hinder youth development and inclusive political participation at all levels. The meeting will provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, experiences and substantive knowledge on these issues, and offer recommendations aimed at strengthening the implementation of the UN youth, peace and security agenda, and more broadly, the implementation of the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development.

Objectives

The primary objective of the Expert Group Meeting is to provide innovative thinking on the role of young people in the prevention of violence and conflict, and as drivers in processes aimed at building and sustaining peace at local, national and global levels. The results of this meeting will also contribute to the United Nations Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security mandated by the Security Council and attached to its Resolution 2250. More specifically this meeting will aim to:

- (i) Highlight the social dimensions of the youth, peace and security agenda in articulation with the political, economic, cultural and the environmental dimensions;
- (ii) Examine the driving factors and the root causes of youth engagement in organized violence, conflict, and violent extremism;

- (iii) Examine young women and young men's apathy and disaffection in light of their political, social, cultural, religious and other aspirations; their sense of marginalisation and exclusion;
- (iv) Address the capacity of young people to substantively shape and contribute to peace and security issues
- (v) Examine ways in which government and youth civil society organizations may create spaces for youth to be heard, and more effective mechanisms for their participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts;

Overview

Young people constitute the majority of the world's population today. In 2015, a global figure of 1.2 billion aged 15-24 accounted for one out of every six people worldwide. By 2030, the target date for the Sustainable Development Goals, the number of youth is projected to have grown by 7 per cent, to nearly 1.3 billion. This is indeed the largest youth cohort the world has ever seen.

However, the majority of young people living in developing countries struggle to attain basic needs in terms of education and training, gainful employment and sustainable livelihoods, health care services, as well as civil liberties and political participation. Without access to these basic needs, young people have no means to grow, establish families, support their offspring and fully contribute to society. These social, economic and political needs are fundamental for improving young people's lives, eradicating poverty and hunger and promoting well-being and more inclusive peaceful societies. The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) clearly highlights the importance of these social issues as fundamental pillars for sound and effective youth social development. These social development issues have been repeatedly recognized and acknowledged by governments, as well as by young people and youth-led organizations, as important challenges facing the younger generations today. Therefore, peace, security and sustainable development can only be achieved by tackling the social, economic and political issues affecting young people in a holistic and integrated manner.

Young people are often perceived as the main perpetrators of political violence, social unrest and violent extremism. The events surrounding the North African uprisings and the series of popular protests across the continent are often explained by the socio-economic and political marginalization of youth. Likewise, the surge in radicalisation and violent extremism in the past 15 years also tends to be associated with the political and socio-economic disaffection of young men, and increasingly young women, who join extremist groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and ISIL. Likewise, youth involvement in organized violence, through gangs and protection racket groups has been associated to high unemployment rates, lack of opportunities, dysfunctional family structures and social exclusion. While young people are particularly susceptible to violence and crime, they are also disproportionately burdened by social and economic insecurities, and are often victims of violence, political unrest and terrorism themselves.

It is also important to acknowledge young people's positive roles as they participate in efforts to prevent conflicts, combat violence and extremism and building sustainable peace. For example, many young women and man have been opposing unlawful constitutional changes in their countries, exercising their participatory citizenship through popular protests. Many have been at the forefront of important policy and decision-making processes at local and national levels. Others have been making contributions through their everyday life participation in community groups, cultural, artistic and sports associations and the like. In reality, the role of young people in peace and security is more complex than some stereotypes may suggest, and requires a much deeper understanding.

The Security Council Resolution 2250 on *Youth, Peace and Security* is therefore a timely international framework that recognizes youth not just as perpetrators and victims of conflict, violence and extremism but also as fundamental drivers and critical partners in global efforts to prevent conflict and promote lasting peace. The resolution is indeed ground-breaking by enhancing the positive contributions young women and men in peace and security. Furthermore, the resolution aims to broaden the opportunities for youth to participate in formal conflict prevention and peace processes by calling for the inclusion of young women and men in peace negotiations and peacebuilding efforts. It urges and encourages Member States to consider innovative ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in efforts to promote peace and security in their communities and identify effective mechanisms for conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

More broadly, resolution 2250 connects directly to an earlier Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2000), which emphasizes the pivotal role of young women in conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Therefore, these resolutions recognize young women and young men's role as key drivers in conflict prevention and sustaining peace, as well as in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, aimed at the advancement of "peaceful, just and inclusive societies" as particularly expressed in SDG 16.

Key Issues

The Expert Group Meeting will include four working sessions that will examine how to prevent young people's engagement in violence, conflict and violent extremism from a social development perspective. Emphasis should be placed on how to address social inequalities, grievances and social economic aspirations; how to promote social inclusion and well-being. Similarly, discussions about enhancing young people's participation in peacebuilding needs to take into account their need to be heard, to be acknowledged and included in decision-making processes.

Working Session 1 will focus on the prevention of young people's recruitment into organized violence such as gangs and protection racket groups. The discussion will focus on the impact of gang violence and protection racket groups in the lives of young people and their communities; the types of relationships that young people in gangs and protection racket groups establish among themselves, and the rivalries they create between the various groups; the role of young women in gang activity; and the transnational connections established between gangs and protection racket groups. This session will discuss lessons learned and more effective strategies for preventing youth involvement in gang violence and protection racket groups.

Working Session 2 will address the prevention of young people's radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremist groups as well as their involvement in terrorist activities. This session will have to distinct panels: Panel one will look at radicalisation processes by analysing different forms and strategies of radicalisation; and issues regarding youth aspirations, disaffection and marginalisation that might facilitate radicalisation. The use of Internet social networks for recruitment purposes should also be considered. Panel two will focus on the young people's roles within violent extremist groups; what these groups offer to attract youth; what kinds of relationships are established within the groups; and the religious or other beliefs that may enhance young people's allegiance to the group. The session will also discuss mechanisms that can help prevent young people's involvement in radical terrorist activities at community, national and global levels.

Working Session 3 will examine ways to promote and enhance of youth citizenship participation and contributions to conflict prevention. It will also discuss their engagement and active participation in

decision-making, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. This session will also include two panels: panel one will be on youth involvement in citizenship participation on a daily basis through youth associations at community level; and examine the impact of such engagement. Panel two will focus on youth social movements, and national political protests that mobilise large numbers of young people into the streets. Both panels will examine the impact of youth participation and highlight success stories that can be replicated.

Working Session 4 will focus on bringing the three thematic areas together and summing up the discussions. It will focus on specific recommendations in terms of social policies and actions to be undertaken under each theme that will contribute to the UN Progress Study on Youth Peace and Security. The discussions in this Expert Group Meeting will also feed into the DSPD country projects and training workshops on youth, peace and security, and enhance the Division's overall work in this area.

Expected Outcomes

- 15 short expert papers on the three thematic areas of the meeting
- List of key recommendations for each thematic area
- Substantive and conceptual input and contribution for the Un Progress Study on Youth Peace and Security; to DSPD's projects and broader work in this area.

Participants

The EGM will bring together 15 experts on the specific thematic areas that will be addressed at the meeting. These experts will be identified from civil society organisations, youth led structures, academia, United Nations, Member States, and the private sector to ensure a fully rounded discussion. Gender parity and geographical balance, as well as age balance will also be pursued.

Experts will be asked to present a technical paper on their topic of expertise two weeks prior to the EGM so as to ensure that all participants are fully informed on the subject areas discussed. The technical papers will also be used in the background preparation for the UN Progress Study on Youth Peace and Security.