



## Practical Steps to Making Progress on Youth, Peace and Security: Connecting Track 3 and Track 1 Negotiations for Sustainable Peace

### SUMMARY NOTE

In [the Pact for the Future](#), Member States requested the UN Secretary-General 'to carry out the second independent progress study on youth's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution by the end of the eightieth session' (Action 20(c)). It is a follow-up from [the first progress study](#) published in 2018 highlighting the recommendations from young people to the peace and security community to work with young people in new ways.

This expert-level consultation built on the 2024 report by Justice Call and Harvard Law School's Dispute Systems Design (DSD) Clinic titled "Mapping Grassroots Peace Negotiations Led by Civil Society and Youth in Conflict Affected Areas." This study highlights that youth in many contexts across the MENA region continue to be perceived as inexperienced and untrained, which causes other parties to be less likely to include them in peace processes. The consultation provided space for over 90 international experts within civil society, the UN and Member States to share their experiences engaging youth in mediation and peace processes, outlining good practices and lessons learned. The findings of this discussion provide a valuable contribution to the second progress study on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS).

### The key takeaways from the discussion include the following:

- *Full, equal and meaningful youth Involvement in Track 1 remains a critical priority for the sustainability of peace:*

Young people are heavily impacted by conflict and violence, as violence emerges where young people often report feeling of disempowerment. The importance of youth being involved in Track 1 peace negotiations is built on several rationales. First, formal recognition of youth in peace processes leads to their empowerment as critical stakeholders. It leads to young people recognizing their power as well as their responsibility to contribute to peace. Second, youth are critical to proper implementation of peace agreements that they can relate to. The value that youth bring to the negotiations was also highlighted. It was reported that Track 1 stakeholders have difficulty identifying the clear value youth might bring to the negotiation table, leading to young people questioning the value of their own input. The participants highlighted that young people have unmatched capacity to bring new ideas that could break gridlock between parties. Youth also have expertise on certain issues being negotiated such as environmental topics. Youth also have strong connections to other youth within

communities and can advocate for preconditions that would lead their peers to disarm and/or be persuaded to not take up arms.

- *There is a strong need to address barriers for full, equal and meaningful youth participation in Track 1.*

While the commitments to youth participation exist, they are rarely implemented. Young people highlighted the following barriers that prevent youth full, equal and meaningful participation in Track 1. First, there are persistent structural barriers. This includes access to technology, ability to get passports and visas on time, language abilities and technical jargon, and the lack of access to education. Second, there are significant capacity barriers, including the lack of understanding of the Track 1 process, absence of negotiation skills, and limited topical knowledge of the issues being negotiated (ie SSR, DDR, transitional justice, governance structures, etc). Third, social barriers include social structures that associate power with particular gender, age and family status. Fourth, financial barriers include lack of financial support to youth organisations to develop skills missing, make their work visible, expand their access, and to travel to advocate to Track 1. Fifth, the political will is missing to meaningfully engage young people in peace processes. It is demonstrated through legal structures and censorship that prevent or deter youth from participating in visible peacebuilding work. Sixth, youth have serious security concerns both during negotiations and when returning to their communities. Seventh, where peace processes include young people, they are likely to serve the interests of donors or to fulfill other guidelines, becoming a “box-ticking” exercise. This is the type of participation, where young people have no real input into the negotiations, continue to lack access to relevant stakeholders, and engage on superficial questions. Finally, the high-stakes nature of Track 1 negotiations, including speed and the aim of creating the process, results in an unwillingness to invite more individuals than absolutely necessary to the table. These barriers are critical to consider as they are both well-known and persistent, while lacking meaningful action.

**The following recommendations for national governments and development partners emerged from the discussion to support youth’s full, equal and meaningful inclusion in Track 1:**

- *Engage with local youth-led organizations.* Regular, intentional and strategic engagement based on authentic partnership with youth networks and organizations helps global and national stakeholders to understand the value added of youth experience in peacebuilding and create visibility of youth work.
- *Provide opportunities for youth to access trainings on Track 1 negotiations.* This could include online or in-person trainings focused on Track 1 processes, their structures, required negotiation skills, thematic topics included in Track 1 negotiations, proposal document drafting, as well as other training that could assist youth in developing the Track 1 lexicon, required skills, and a strategy for engaging strategically with Track 1 actors. By having undergone such trainings youth might be able to better contribute to formal peace processes and increase their estimated value during Track 1 negotiations.
- *Provide individual advising and preparation of youth representatives before participation in Track 1 negotiations.* In addition to general training on Track 1 negotiations, it would be helpful to provide advising and preparation sessions for

youth representatives who are about to engage in a Track 1 negotiation to brief the youth on the current state of negotiations, the parties present, the expectations parties may have, particular topics on the table. This would help the youth create their strategy for persuasion and any needed evidence base to engage in negotiations.

- *Support the development of youth networks.* Networks are useful platforms to avoid competition, share resources and access points, facilitate learning and capacity building across diverse areas of expertise. Networks are also representative of their constituencies, and therefore, can help facilitate inclusive peace processes. As such, creating networks can make it easier for Track 1 actors to find youth representatives to engage in Track 1 peace negotiations.
- *Support intergenerational training, programs, and community discussions.* Instead of holding youth-specific events, organizing intergenerational events could provide youth with connections and mentors to enhance their skills in peacebuilding and provide them with entry points to the formal peacebuilding world. Moreover, having older generations engage in discussions alongside youth allows the older generations to understand the potential, ideas, and value of youth perspectives in practice.
- *Identify clearly what youth expertise is required.* To have value in Track 1 negotiations it is not enough to simply have “youth” present, but it matters which youth are present so that the youth are able to contribute effectively to the negotiations. Track 1 actors must be able to identify what skills, experiences, substantive knowledge, connections, among other expectations, are expected from youth. These expectations can help youth networks and coalition identify the right youth actors to engage. For example, if negotiations are focused on DDR, youth who have worked on disarmament and other related topics could bring a key perspective to the negotiations. Or, if parties are considering environmental damage and natural resource sharing, youth who engage in climate activism would bring expertise to the negotiations.
- *Increase direct financial resources for youth-led organizations.* Increased funding directly provided to youth-led organizations may enhance their ability to conduct effective peacebuilding activities at the grassroots level based on their own needs and priorities, using tools that they deem to be relevant in a specific context. This includes having financial support to determine ways to connect their work to the Track 1 level, increase their impact, and increase their visibility.
- *Leverage youth’s skills in outreach and social media.* Global and national actors can enhance and leverage youth’s skills in social media to socialize peace agreements and assist peace-minded youth making their voices heard. Social media can also be a strong medium for channeling messaging into Track 1 processes,, and Track 1 actors could work with youth to use social media to connect with the public.