



Resolution 2378 (2021)¹

Strengthening the role of young people in the prevention and resolution of conflicts

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe has several active and protracted conflicts on its territory, which deprive generations of young people of opportunities for a better future. At the same time, young people remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the countries affected by armed conflict. No lasting peace agreement can be reached without the positive involvement of youth, yet their potential and contribution to effective conflict regulation and peacebuilding has received little attention and support.
2. Often simplistically stereotyped as villains or victims, young people's true potential as agents of peace is largely unused. Data are scarce on how many young people are directly engaged in peacemaking, peacekeeping or peacebuilding activities. Peace talks rarely focus on how to channel youth into productive processes.
3. Many youth initiatives operate at the grass-roots level. However, young people face multiple barriers when trying to reach out and have an impact on policies: lack of recognition and meaningful inclusion, limited funding and the shrinking civic space all hinder the work and outreach of youth organisations, networks and initiatives.
4. Peace and security mean much more to young people than just the absence of violence or the end of violent conflict: they require positive visions of free and democratic societies that support development and dignity and address social, political and structural inequalities. Involving youth merely in peace processes is thus not enough. They should be actively engaged in all political processes and decision making that affect them and society at large, in particular when it comes to global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which has hit them particularly hard; climate change; human rights or achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) set for 2030.
5. In this context, the Parliamentary Assembly deplores that the share of young people in legislatures has decreased over the years. Only 3.9% of national parliamentarians in Europe are under 30 years old. This is partly linked to negative attitudes towards the capabilities of young people but also to various structural, individual and organisational barriers to getting into the system. Consequently, young people are seeking alternatives to participation, such as taking to the streets or engaging through social media. To promote the participation of young people, political leaders should make use of existing instruments, such as the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and create structures with possibilities for young people to have a real impact. Encouraging participation of younger generations in local and regional decision making through youth councils and parliaments is an important step towards their inclusion in mainstream politics.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee*, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 28 May 2021 (see [Doc. 15294](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Ms Inka Hopsu; and [Doc. 15296](#), opinion of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Ms Christiana Erotokritou).



6. At the same time, the Assembly wishes to make sure that youth-led organisations, networks and initiatives and young peacebuilders are given the space and opportunity to be more active, claim greater ownership and leadership roles and conduct more visible advocacy for greater involvement in political processes. To this end, the establishment of local, regional and global youth mediation networks to increase youth participation and inclusion in peace processes should be supported.

7. The Assembly commends the active role played by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in promoting the inclusion and participation of youth in peace processes. Its successive [Resolutions 2250 \(2015\)](#), [2419 \(2018\)](#) and [2535 \(2020\)](#) have set out international commitments on youth, peace and security and offer a blueprint for meaningful youth inclusion, while recognising that multilayered and integrated engagement should be the main strategic approach.

8. However, the Assembly deeply regrets that nearly six years after the adoption of the first UNSC landmark resolution concerning youth, peace and security, little progress has been made, and young peacebuilders find that their space for action is diminishing rather than growing. Finland is currently the only European country to have introduced an action plan for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2250 (2015).

9. The Assembly therefore echoes the recent call of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to urgently create conditions that would enable young people to unleash their full potential and to set up institutions to address their needs and expectations. The new era of youth participation requires mechanisms to ensure their continuous and meaningful involvement in making decisions, shaping policies, adopting strategies and implementing actions.

10. It is essential to ensure that young people are not only consulted, but also that they act as co-creators of the blueprints for youth, peace and security. Their inclusion in the decision-making processes within conflict prevention and resolution should be approached in a multidimensional way and integrated and interconnected with other inclusion agendas. It requires creating spaces for their involvement in political processes and true recognition of their vision of peace, but it is equally essential to ensure their access to rights and dignified livelihoods and to facilitate intercommunity dialogue and exchange.

11. The ultimate responsibility for preventing and resolving conflicts lies with adults. However, considering the impact of conflicts on the whole of society, the Assembly would also encourage taking into account the views and experiences of older children and adolescents in peacebuilding and conflict-prevention processes. Such practices should involve due respect for relevant safeguarding principles and a focus on the best interest of the child.

12. The Assembly is aware that it will take time to fully achieve the in-depth changes required, but stresses that they must progress speedily. It notes that the [UNSC Resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) on women, peace and security has taken over two decades to become part of national agendas. The Assembly is particularly concerned about the exclusion of young women from peace processes and insists that their inclusion in all stages of conflict regulation should be the focus of immediate attention.

13. Quality education and capacity building, notably with regard to citizenship, conflict transformation and human rights, are essential for developing peaceful societies. Young people must be provided with useful and concrete educational tools, in both formal and non-formal contexts, to fight violence, discrimination, hatred and extremism. In this context, the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture and its Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, among others, provide good guides to intercultural dialogue and learning reconciliatory skills from an early age.

14. Young people are eager to keep learning, to advocate for peace and to bring change to their conflict-ridden society, notably in the current Covid-19 crisis. The active involvement of youth will also be crucial for the achievement of the SDGs. Transparency, accountability, inclusivity and co-operation are the cornerstones of successful national action plans. Yet one size does not fit all; action plans and policy programmes must be adapted to the circumstances and priorities of each country.

15. In the light of the above, the Assembly calls upon the governments of the Council of Europe member States as well as countries with observer and partner for democracy status to:

15.1. accelerate implementation of UNSC [Resolutions 2250 \(2015\)](#), [2419 \(2018\)](#) and [2535 \(2020\)](#) concerning youth, peace and security, by devising national road maps and comprehensive dedicated policies and programmes at local, national or regional levels, with sufficient resources, through a participatory process, in particular with an emphasis on the constructive involvement of youth as decision makers, the creation of safe spaces for

15.2. regard young people and youth organisations as indispensable partners in any peace or political processes; include them as part of the response to tackling conflict situations as well as all major global challenges;

15.3. allocate adequate resources to youth-led and youth-focused organisations and networks at local and national levels so as to ensure the sustainability of youth-inspired dialogue-building activities;

15.4. support the establishment of national coalitions for youth, peace and security, bringing together youth-led and other civil society organisations, relevant government entities and other partners in order to develop national action plans, not for young people but with them;

15.5. introduce, if they have not yet done so, democratic citizenship and peace education into the formal school curriculum from an early age. Such a curriculum should include, but not be limited to, relationships and team working, empathy, critical thinking, media literacy, conflict transformation, reconciliation, human rights education, peaceful political participation and intercultural dialogue, so that young people may be better equipped to understand the root causes of violence, support peace and ensure respect for diversity in multicultural societies;

15.6. promote a variety of perspectives in history teaching as a means of addressing prejudice and developing mutual understanding;

15.7. foster continuous intercommunity dialogue and co-operation among young people from different communities, and between youth and other groups in society, with a view to overcoming the prevailing lack of trust in youth;

15.8. consider ways of including more human rights education and peace mediation, conflict resolution and reconciliation skills into the curricula of military and police training programmes;

15.9. ensure compliance with obligations under international law, including to protect youth from violence in armed conflicts and conflict-affected areas and to ensure the rights of young people within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of their parents' or legal guardians' race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

16. The Assembly praises the work undertaken by the various United Nations agencies in promoting the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. It hopes that they will further strengthen their efforts to bring about a true paradigm shift in the design and implementation of youth-inclusive peace negotiations from the outset and to ensure that the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2250 (2015) is closely linked to other democratic development and inclusion agendas. In particular, the Assembly invites the relevant agencies of the United Nations to:

16.1. reinforce efforts to collect independent empirical data in order to properly estimate the number of young people affected by the various conflicts in the world and to identify serious partners among youth organisations and young peacebuilders in conflict-affected communities;

16.2. further reflect on how to create safe spaces for young people who are involved in peacebuilding, democracy or human rights, in all circumstances, and in particular in the context of active or "frozen" conflicts, or in non-democratic regimes, as well as in conflict-affected areas and occupied territories, including to mitigate the adverse effects that indoctrination and recruitment campaigns have on young people.

17. The Assembly underlines that national parliaments have a significant role to play in improving legislation and supervision, commissioning national road maps to implement the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, allocating financial resources and supporting inclusive and meaningful youth participation in conflict prevention and resolution and in the fight against violent extremism. It calls upon the parliaments of the Council of Europe member States to create and/or reinforce linkages with youth, in particular by removing the barriers to youth participation in political processes, lowering the voting and eligibility age, developing awareness campaigns, designing new recruitment strategies, considering specific aims or youth quotas for political parties to enhance the selection and promotion of young candidates and learning from the experience gained in advancing women's political participation. It also calls on them to value young parliamentarians as mediators and promoters of dialogue in divided societies.

18. The Assembly resolves to continue its reflection on promoting meaningful and structured ways of involving youth participants in its activities, most importantly by increasing dialogue and co-operation between the Assembly and the different youth forums that already exist within the Council of Europe.

19. The Assembly encourages national delegations to consider ways of ensuring that the Assembly's voice is better heard by youth in their respective countries and also that these young voices are better heard within the Assembly.