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OSCE Chairpersonship Youth Forum

– from Helsinki to next 50 years

Helsinki, 29–30 July 2025

Participants' recommendations to OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Elina Valtonen, and OSCE Secretary General, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu

On 29–30 July 2025, the Finnish Chairpersonship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) convened the OSCE Chairpersonship Youth Forum in Helsinki.

The Forum brought together young participants across the OSCE region to discuss the OSCE's engagement on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), reflect on what meaningful youth participation looks like in practice and develop recommendations to inform the drafting of the OSCE-wide Youth, Peace and Security roadmap, that Finland will launch during its OSCE Chairpersonship in 2025.

This paper reflects the outcomes of that process. It offers recommendations for the Finnish Chairpersonship on how to support the OSCE and its participating States to build on existing efforts and further integrate the YPS agenda across all dimensions of the OSCE's work.

The discussion focused on two areas in particular: How to define meaningful youth engagement in peace and security and what options there are for OSCE's future action in YPS.

Principles for Meaningful Youth Engagement

Meaningful youth engagement at the OSCE requires the systemic integration and mainstreaming of youth into all relevant structures and policies. This means ensuring that young people are involved in policy discussions across all sectors, beyond traditional "youth matters", recognizing that all policies affect youth. It also means a commitment to not engaging in tokenistic "tick box" exercises. Achieving this requires the OSCE to foster meaningful partnerships, meaningful processes and meaningful support.

1) Meaningful partnerships, including:

- *Respect and Equal Partnerships:* Youth need to be recognized as equal partners, stakeholders and experts in building and maintaining peace and security.
- *Intergenerational Collaboration:* Meaningful youth participation requires intergenerational dialogue and collaboration, a commitment to intergenerational fairness and justice, and meeting youth where they are.
- *Sustained Engagement:* Youth engagement must build on long-term relationships and sustainable platforms or mechanisms, including support for youth-led structures and organisations, avoiding one-off or ad-hoc interventions.
- *Mutual Benefit:* Youth engagement processes must recognize young people's expertise and time, and provide tangible benefits for young people, youth organisations and youth more broadly — not just for institutions or decision-makers. Engagement is not meaningful if it only serves the goals of others.

2) Meaningful processes, including:

- *Co-creation and Co-management:* Youth should be engaged as co-designers and co-managers of processes which impact them.
- *Peer Learning and Movement Building:* Processes should support peer learning and youth-led movement building to foster collaboration, exchange, and collective agency.
- *Accountability and Follow-up:* Robust mechanisms for accountability, follow-up and feedback need to be in place to ensure that youth insights are taken up and commitments are honored.
- *Ethical and Safe Practices:* Participation needs to be safe, inclusive and youth-sensitive in order to be meaningful, rooted in a "do no harm" approach. This requires trauma sensitivity and taking into account digital, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing.

3) Meaningful support, including:

- *Inclusivity and Diversity:* The non-homogeneity of youth must be recognized, with appropriate mechanisms to support inclusive participation of diverse youth groups, prevent discrimination and ensure space for new voices.
- *Access to Information:* Meaningful youth participation is founded on the clear and transparent provision of information and processes. Information must be clear and accessible, adaptable and generationally appropriate, avoiding jargon, to ensure that the content is readily understood by all citizens, including young people.

- *Capacity Building and Empowerment:* For youth to be able to engage in a meaningful way, they need to be supported to engage with the topics at hand from an early age, through both formal education and informal community spaces, so they perceive themselves as valued agents of change.
- *Financial Support and Compensation:* Engagement opportunities must be adequately funded to overcome financial barriers to participation. This can include fair compensation for work, reimbursement of expenses, and paid opportunities.

Recommendations for OSCE action on Youth, Peace and Security

1) Cultivating Political Buy-in

- *Political Commitments:* Secure political commitments from individual participating States, future Chairpersons, tailor persuasive messaging to resonate with different stakeholders, and show governments that young people are allies.
- *Awareness Raising and Visibility:* Use relevant platforms and opportunities to raise awareness on YPS, leverage soft power and visibility opportunities, increase social media presence, and showcase success stories and youth-led initiatives. In addition to executive summaries, simplified summaries of crucial documents should be introduced to make OSCE work in general and the YPS agenda more accessible.
- *Link to Broader Agendas:* Frame the YPS agenda by highlighting alignment with national and international priorities, including SDGs, WPS, and human rights.
- *Research and Evidence-Based Policy:* Make a compelling investment case by demonstrating economic returns and social impact, conduct social and economic return investment analyses, and support research that supports the need for youth participation.
- *Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration:* Build strategic alliances with key stakeholders including governments, academic sector, civil society, and international partners, involve civil society and youth-led organizations as equal partners, and foster international partnerships between national organizations and NGOs.

2) Institutionalizing Youth Participation

- *OSCE Youth Strategy:* Adopting an OSCE-Wide comprehensive Youth Strategy
- *Advisory Mechanisms:* Establish dedicated units for YPS affairs at the OSCE Secretariat and executive structures and youth advisory boards to the Secretary

General and field missions with internal and external youth members to advise OSCE staff on YPS. Develop a clear OSCE definition of 'youth' to guide these mechanisms and positions.

- *National Action Plans (NAPs) and Policy Integration:* Advocate for the development and drafting of NAPs, internationalize existing NAPs through regional exchange and adaptation of lessons learned, integrate youth perspectives into NAPs for mainstreaming, and utilize NAPs as a common framework for YPS work.
- *Data Collection, Monitoring, and Reporting:* Establish mechanisms for mandatory reporting of youth programs and OSCE commitments on youth, integrate YPS into common reporting frameworks, systematically collect and analyze age-disaggregated data, and implement YPS-focused monitoring frameworks.
- *Mainstreaming and Systemic Integration:* Work towards mainstreaming the YPS agenda, integrate youth-specific segments into all relevant fora and throughout processes, and clarify youth participation as a distinct thematic area within broader policy frameworks.
- *Youth Focal Points:* Establish regular cooperation for the YPS Focal Point Network, allocate dedicated time and budget for Youth Focal Points, and establish youth focal points in each OSCE Permanent Delegation.
- Unifying existing sets of recommendations developed by the previous chairs into an action on Youth Peace and Security
- Recognising and institutionalising existing mechanisms of youth participation (for example Network of Young Parliamentarians within OSCEPA)

3) Empowering Youth Agency & Expertise

- *Financial Support and Funding Mechanisms:* Establish earmarked budgets for YPS programs and mechanisms of meaningful youth participation as an organisational priority, including support for National Action Plans (NAPs), and create dedicated funding streams and earmark funding for YPS activities within existing funding mechanisms such as the Finnish Chairpersonship's Helsinki +50 Fund.
- *Capacity Building and Training:* Develop and enhance capacity building programs for YPS actors and youth leaders, provide training-of-trainers (ToT) for both youth leaders/civil society and OSCE staff on YPS, and facilitate international capacity building and knowledge exchange. This needs to strike a balance between both physical and digital, AI-powered, platforms.

- *Supporting Continued Engagement:* Establishing new and strengthening existing alumni networks of the OSCE youth-related programs (for example, OSCE Scholarship for Peace and Security, WIN Project, YW4P (Young Women 4 Peace Initiative Central Asia) Dialogue Academy for Youth Women Supporting and strengthening cooperation between alumni networks of the OSCE youth-related programs to increase peer-to-peer learning and cooperation across the entire OSCE region
- *Knowledge Sharing and Best Practices:* Establish a cross-agency YPS learning platform and a digital knowledge-sharing platform/database to exchange experiences, share good examples, and map best practices in YPS across the region. This also covers youth engagement in mapping of relevant YPS actors, the assessment of impact as well as development of operational guidelines on YPS. This also covers youth engagement in mapping of relevant YPS actors, the assessment of impact as well as development of operational guidelines on YPS.
- *Chairpersonship:* Enhancing the transparency of decision-making processes by establishing clear timelines and entry points for civil society participation, with particular attention to enabling youth civil society to contribute meaningfully
- *Youth Delegates and Internships:* Implement an OSCE Youth Delegate program, include youth delegates in OSCE election observation missions, and introduce special YPS internships in missions.

The recommendations presented here represent the collective insights and experiences of the participants. They are intended to support the OSCE Chairpersonship, other participating States and the OSCE executive structures in further developing and implementing the YPS agenda in ways that are practical, inclusive and sustainable.

Participants emphasized that youth engagement is most effective when young people are seen as partners in shaping peace and security, not only beneficiaries of it.

The participants commend the Finnish Chairpersonship for convening the Forum and for its leadership in advancing YPS during 2025 and hope these recommendations will serve as a useful contribution to the OSCE-wide YPS Roadmap and to ongoing efforts to promote inclusive peacebuilding and security across the region.