Youth Excel: Our Knowledge, Leading Change

Protection Policy Desk Review

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Section 1: Introduction

Objectives

This Desk Review serves an important function in the creation of a Protection Policy for Youth Excel, providing a foundation upon which to build the necessary protection and safeguarding protocols and policies for Youth Excel programs and activities. The aim of this Desk Review is to identify and review existing key global, regional, and national standards, resources, approaches, and actors on youth protection, while bridging protection strategies and standards made for children and adults for the youth demographic. Further, it will serve as a master reference list so that all documents are organized and easily accessible to all team members with corresponding summaries and takeaways of each key reference. It is meant to serve as an *internal* reference that may be updated throughout the development of the policy and procedures.

Methodology

We reviewed resources and guidelines associated with a number of key schools of thought and practice around the protection of young people. We considered several factors in identifying relevant resources:
- The *key functions* that primary Youth Excel participants will fill: (implementation) research, programming, and advocacy
- The *types of protection* to focus on: physical, psychosocial, gendered, and digital
- The *priority challenges and sectors* that Youth Excel implementation research and activities will likely address: education, employment, civic engagement, health and mental health, agriculture and food security, environment and water, and social inclusion
- The diverse contexts where Youth Excel activities will take place, with a particular focus on *conflict and crisis settings and closed and closing civic spaces* where young people face elevated risks.

The desk review is also guided by the following questions:
1. What are the most relevant resources or guidelines for Youth Excel programs and activities?
2. Which unique risks does the resource identify facing youth in research, leadership, and advocacy as well as specifically high-risk contexts such as conflict and crisis, closing civic spaces, or other contexts relevant to Youth Excel?
3. Which mitigation strategies does the resource or guideline provide for protection of youth?
4. What do these resources or guidelines offer in terms of participatory and youth-empowered approaches to protection?
5. What resources and guidelines are applicable to the regional and country priorities of Youth Excel activities? What key recommendations do they offer for these contexts?

Background

Young changemakers face numerous, compounding, and gendered threats to their safety and security, including harassment and attacks, which can be physical, psychological, sociocultural, political, legal, or financial in nature and take place both online and offline.[1] Youth who speak out face harassment and attacks on their freedom of movement, assembly, association, and expression.[2] As the spread of internet access facilitates greater access to information, dialogue and political spaces, the need for digital in addition to physical protection is acute as youth increase their online organizing and activism. The source of threats is often unknown and may come from multiple actors at once, particularly for youth in association with Western organizations and those that have more visibility locally, nationally, and internationally.

While there are a number of efforts to address the protection of adult (and more recently, child) human rights defenders and children in conflict, young people often find themselves caught between the two because of their transitional age range (15 - 29) which overlaps legal definitions of childhood and adulthood. The ambiguity of where youth fit within these protection standards indicates that existing protection mechanisms and guidance may not be accessible or fully address the concerns of young people. This poses a challenge to practitioners and INGOs working with young people.

This desk review and the creation of the Youth Excel Protection Policy builds on the work of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security Working Group on Protection[3] to ensure proper policies and guidelines are put in place for any programming and research involving or engaging young people. This Desk Review will build on Search for Common Ground's (Search) decades-long experience working with youth in some of the world's most complex conflict contexts, as well as Search's ongoing work with the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security on building a global protection framework for youth.

Section 2: Standards and Principles in Youth Protection

Schools of Thought / Approaches

We have identified the main principles and standards we can consider to bridge the gap between standards for children and adults. This intends to be a brief overview of the various standards that may be relevant for us to consider around protection for the Youth Excel Protection Policy.

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[1] Graeme Simpson. *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.unfpa.org/resources/missing- peace-independent-progress-study-youth-and-peace-and-security.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] The Protection Working Group (PWG) was established in December 2019 as a response to reports of threats, harassment, reprisals and other forms of violence that young people are exposed to when promoting human rights and peace in their communities. The PWG is part of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, which is the leading platform for shaping global policy and practice, as well as coordinating collective efforts on youth, peace and security. Co-chaired by Search for Common Ground and United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the PWG facilitates collaboration between more than 50 representatives from youth-led and youth-focused civil society organizations, UN agencies, funds and programmes, academia and intergovernmental bodies.

Safeguarding / Duty of Care / Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) / Child Protection

Child protection, safeguarding, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse are all closely related and interconnected. Child Protection (CP) is defined by UNICEF as "prevention and response to violence, exploitation and abuse of children in all contexts."[4] Safeguarding generally refers to an institution's responsibility to prevent, report and respond to any harm that may arise from an organization's operations, programming, or personnel.[5] Similarly, Duty of Care is the common law concept that refers to an organization or institution's legal and moral responsibility to protect children or vulnerable people from physical harm.[6] Further, preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH) of children has been a priority for the international community, with many guidelines, protocols, and laws protecting children from SEA and SH.[7]

The first international standards for safeguarding were launched in 2002 by the Keeping Children Safe (KCS) Coalition, which maintains standards and guidance that were built in order for organizations to meet the responsibilities set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.[8] Safeguarding was initially introduced for children as a victim-centered approach based on human rights and experiences, but expanded to recognize the vulnerabilities of youth as vulnerable adults and recognizes the power imbalance between aid or development workers and children.[9] Safeguarding offers a broader scope of the protection of children across many types of risks including physical, psychosocial, and digital.[10]

Key recommendations and considerations:
- Safeguarding considers **Policy**, **People**, **Procedures**, and **Accountability** necessary to ensure safe participation of young people.[11]

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[4] UNICEF Data, (2015), *Child Protection Overview.* Retrieved from: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/overview/#:~:text=UNICEF%20uses%20the%20term%20'child,of%20children%20in%20all%20contexts.

[5] Blakemore, S. and Freedman, R. (2019) *Safeguarding in conflict and crisis.* Forced Migration Review (61). pp. 52-55. ISSN 1460-9819 Available at http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84705/

[6] Tameside Safeguarding Children Board. *Guidance for Safe Working Practice for Adults Who Work With Children and Young People.* Retrieved from: https://www.tameside.gov.uk/ChildProtection/Guidance-for-adults-who-work-with-children-and-you#:~:text=Duty%20of%20Care%3A%20The%20duty,individual%20or%20organisation%20is%20responsible.

[7] UNICEF, (2019), *Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitattion and Abuse and Sexual Harassment.* Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/UNICEF-Strategy-Prevent-Respond-Sexual-Exploitation-Abuse-Sexual-Harassment-January-2019.pdf

[8] Keeping Children Safe, *The Safeguarding Standards.* Retrieved from: https://www.keepingchildrensafe.global/accountability/

[9] Blakemore, S. and Freedman, R. (2019), *Safeguarding in conflict and crisis.* Forced Migration Review (61). pp. 52-55. ISSN 1460-9819 Retrieved from: http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84705/

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Keeping Children Safe, *The International Child Safeguarding Standards.* Retrieved from: https://www.keepingchildrensafe.global/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/KCS-CS-Standards-ENG-200218.pdf

- Safeguarding standards recommend identifying the types of contact between an organization and children / youth and the risks this contact presents, then developing policies and procedures to respond to concerns appropriately, designating a focal point to receive and manage any concerns, ensuring staff training on reporting and identifying concerns, and focusing on safeguarding in recruitment, among other measures.[12]
- Safeguarding must **enable local action to respond to concerns where they arise and be available to youth and staff alike regardless of the rise of risks**, taking into account national laws, institutional policies, and context-specific laws and policies.[13] These may overlap or contradict one another in contexts affected by conflict and crisis and, particularly if rule of law has broken down, opportunities to commit harm with impunity are elevated. It's important to have information and be prepared to coordinate with **local services, authorities, and organizations** to provide support and report concerns appropriately.[14]
- Develop clear guidelines for mitigating and measuring protection issues, and to **prevent, identify, report, and respond** to harm or abuse.
- Understand and prepare for risks to young people from organizations, including staff, programs, operations and partners and focus on prevention, response, and resolution.[15]
- Roadmaps for preventing SEA and SH include the core values of: **Care**, **Respect**, **Integrity**, **Trust**, and **Accountability**.[16] SEA and SH also are committed to survivor-centered response, safe and trusted reporting mechanisms, partner engagement in prevention, swift investigations, and organizational cultures of zero tolerance.[17]
- Disempowerment and threats youth face based on their age is often magnified by their gender (e.g. women, girls, and gender non-conforming persons), socioeconomic status, ethnicity, refugee status, and more. Safeguarding must account for the increased protection needs of such vulnerable populations of youth.
- Develop protection mechanisms in line with legal mandates and responsibilities to protection, as well as moral and ethical dedication with commitment from authorities at all levels within an organization.[18]

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
- Keeping Children Safe's [Developing Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures](#)
- UNICEF's [Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitaton and Abuse and Sexual Harassment](#)
- UNICEF's [Risk Assessment Tool](#)

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12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

15 UNICEF, *Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement: Risk Assessment Tool. Retrieved from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VwwEw6cnm8K_VFOT48ePxa0riBOY2Q1m/view*

16 UNICEF, (2019), Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitaton and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/UNICEF-Strategy-Prevent-Respond-Sexual-Exploitation-Abuse-Sexual-Harassment-January-2019.pdf

17 *Ibid.*

18 Youth Action, (2005), *Duty of Care in NSW Youth & Welfare Services.* Retrieved from: https://www.youthaction.org.au/duty_of_care

Do No Harm / Conflict Sensitivity

Conflict Sensitivity is a broad framework that helps organizational capacity to understand the contexts within which it operates, understand the interaction between its operations and the context, and to in turn ensure its activities are based upon this understanding in order to reduce negative impacts while consciously working to create positive impacts on dynamics within the context.[19] Do No Harm (DNH) is an analytical tool and practical approach from Conflict Sensitivity was developed by CDA Collaborative Learning Project after the Rwandan genocide that recognizes that aid is not neutral in its impact and helps practitioners understand how an intervention plays a role in conflict dynamics.[20] DNH refers to violent conflict, as well as structural, psychological, economic, gender-based, institutional violence and analyzes all layers of a program's implementation - from the impacts on beneficiaries to operations - and how they contribute to conflict or peace in a given context.[21]

Key recommendations and considerations:
- Use conflict analysis to understand context and relationship dynamics between and among groups, including sources of tension (**dividers**) and capacities for peace and cohesion (**connectors**).[22]
- Conduct conflict analysis to understand how interventions - including **programs, operations, policies** - interact with given context.[23]
- Ensure young people from the local/given contexts are engaged in conflict analysis and all stages of protection from the beginning to end.
- Regularly update and conduct thorough conflict analyses in given contexts to ensure DNH and conflict sensitivity practices stay relevant to rapidly changing contexts.[24]
- Act upon understanding to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of interventions.[25]
- Focusing on Do No *'More'* Harm can fully recognize the role outside interventions inevitably play in shifting conflict dynamics by acknowledging not all perspectives will be

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[19] Interpeace, (2010). *What is peacebuilding? Do no Harm, Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding.* Retrieved from: https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010_IP_What_Is_Peacebuilding_Do_No_Harm_Conflict_Sensitivity_And_Peacebuilding.pdf

[20] CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. *Do No Harm Workshop Trainer's Manual*. Cambridge, MA: CDA, 2016.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] CDA Collaborative, *Do No Harm: A Brief Introduction from CDA*. Retrieved from: https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Do-No-Harm-A-Brief-Introduction-from-CDA.pdf

[23] Interpeace, (2010). *What is peacebuilding? Do no Harm, Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding.* Retrieved from: https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010_IP_What_Is_Peacebuilding_Do_No_Harm_Conflict_Sensitivity_And_Peacebuilding.pdf

[24] CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. *Do No Harm Workshop Trainer's Manual*. Cambridge, MA: CDA, 2016.

[25] Interpeace, (2010). *What is peacebuilding? Do no Harm, Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding.* Retrieved from: https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/2010_IP_What_Is_Peacebuilding_Do_No_Harm_Conflict_Sensitivity_And_Peacebuilding.pdf

included in research or risk assessments, and that outside perceptions can do more harm than good.[26]

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
● CDA Collaborative, Do No Harm: A Brief Introduction from CDA
● CDA Collaborative, Do No Harm Workshop
● USAID, Checklist for Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs

Research Ethics

There is a recognized set of ethical considerations around young people's participation in research, which have been articulated by **Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC),** a joint project between UNICEF's Office of Research, Innocenti, the Childwatch International Research Network, the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University, Australia, and the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago, New Zealand.[27] ERIC connects researchers and other research stakeholders to promote the dignity and wellbeing of children in research.[28] One of the first ethical considerations is around how to minimize potential harms and maximize potential benefits to young participants in research.[29] Potential risks and harms to children and youth in research include physical harm, retribution, punishment for participation (particularly relevant for women and girls), distress, anxiety, loss of self esteem, vicarious trauma, and more.[30] While many research ethics guidelines primarily focus on children under 18 years of age, many principles and guidelines can be applied to youth as well.

Key recommendations and considerations:
● Best practices of ethical research lie on the foundational questions of the necessity of undertaking research, the need for young people to be involved in said research, and in what capacity they need to be engaged in.[31]
● **Conduct risk assessments, with a particular attention to gender dynamics, and planning before initiating research and reflect with young people on potential harm and benefits** to young people with a focus to minimize risks and maximize potential benefits.[32] Ensure young people are aware of the risks facing them through participation, their rights, and resources available to them.
● Minimize distress for youth participating in research by providing adequate support and guidance to young people to exercise their rights which recognizes their local contexts, capacities and experiences - which vary widely by age and personal circumstances, and

[26] USAID and IREX. (2021). Global Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis. Retrieved from: https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/Youth%20Excel%20Global%20GESI_3_4.pdf
27 Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC). *History and Process.* Retrieved from: https://childethics.com/home/background/
[28] ERIC, *Ethical Guidance: Harms and Benefits*. Retrieved from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/109rbaQ7ZBJV6suaHzkwl1MH29EGzhJeL/view
29 *Ibid.*
30 *Ibid.*
31 *Ibid.*
32 *Ibid.*

providing opportunities for debriefing, constant consent, and accessing psychosocial support or referral to appropriate services throughout the research process.[33]

- Pay particular attention to organizational capacities (e.g. sufficient trained personnel, adequate funding and timeline, positive youth development approach) to effectively balance protection and participation throughout the research process - from design through data collection, analysis and dissemination.[34]
- ERIC's guidelines recommend additional considerations for **consent**, **competency**, **confidentiality**, **anonymity**, and **inclusivity**, including peer research methodologies to help minimize power imbalances, and not tokenizing youth throughout the research process.[35]
- Ethical guidance includes having safeguarding measures and support in place for youth, developed with local consultation that involves parents, caregivers, and communities for buy-in.

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
- ERIC, Ethical Guidance: Harms and Benefits
- Caroline Bradbury-Jones & Julie Taylor, Engaging with children as co-researchers: challenges, counter-challenges and solutions
- Technical Working Group on Data Collection on Violence Against Children, Ethical Principles, Dilemmas, and Risks in Collecting Data on Violence Against Children

Holistic Security

Holistic Security was initially created to support human rights defenders and synergizes three main aspects of security - **digital**, **physical**, and **psychosocial wellbeing** - together to ensure protection and mitigation efforts are streamlined.[36] This framework serves as a self guided learning resource that can help activists protect themselves in all spaces they navigate in - including both physical and digital spaces - and builds upon several recognized resources and concepts for human rights defenders. By recognizing this broad scope of threats facing human rights activists, the Holistic Security framework touches upon all critical elements of protection, particularly in rapidly changing contexts and in coordination with traditional security management practices.[37]

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[33] CP MERG (2012), *Ethical principles, dilemmas and risks in collecting data on violence against children: A review of available literature*. Statistics and Monitoring Section/Division of Policy and Strategy, UNICEF, New York. Retrieved from:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1B_1Me8wrRH0EB90UpePN2DVjBuJeCmUk/view?usp=sharing
[34] ERIC, *Ethical Guidance: Harms and Benefits*. Retrieved from:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/109rbaQ7ZBJV6suaHzkwl1MH29EGzhJeL/view
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] Tactical Technology Collective, *Holistic Security Manual.* Retrieved from: https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/
[37] *Ibid.*

Key recommendations and considerations:
- The artificial separation of different types of security and safety can have negative impacts for activists and **integrated holistic approaches** should be prioritized.[38]
- The aim for security efforts should be to **maintain** and **expand space** (physical, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental) and **protect activists** for human rights work.[39]
- Key to holistic security is understanding the diversity of actors, both individuals and teams, in projects or research that can pose a variety of different challenges and threats that may be more subjective in nature and constructed by perceptions.[40]
- **Risk assessments** can help understand the resources, mitigation mechanisms, and capacities needed to prevent and protect from threats and risks.[41]
- Develop a safe methodology of recording and analyzing security incidents through a **victim centered approach**.[42]
- **Analyze** and **understand vulnerabilities** (behaviors or weaknesses that may expose people or organizations to threats) and **capacities** (among individuals, teams, and organizations to overcome security concerns and threats) to more effectively address threats and concerns.[43]
- Identify various tactics and tools that encourage others to accept the work, deter attacks against human rights defenders, and protect defenders.
- **Incorporate the unexpected** into security plans and responses based on **systematic analysis.**

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
- Tactical Tech, Holistic Security Manual
- Amnesty International, Security Toolkit for Young Defenders
- Frontline Defenders, Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk

Gender Sensitivity

Gender plays a large role in how young people face risks and protection challenges. Girls and young women in particular face an intersection of the inequalities of their age and gender that can heighten their vulnerability. Gender Based Violence (GBV), which is an umbrella term for violence or harm on someone on the basis of gender,[44] can take a variety of forms, including sexual violence, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation, or intimate partner violence, as

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[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] Amnesty International, (2018), Security Toolkit for Young Defenders. Retrieved from: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act10/1223/2018/en/

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] UNHCR. (2020). UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Ris, Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence. Retrieved from https://www.unhcr.org/5fa018914/unhcr-policy-prevention-risk-mitigation-response-gender-based-violence

well as non phsyical forms of violence such as financial threats, sociocultural, and psychosocial.[45] GBV can impact boys and young men as well and gender sensitive protection mechanisms must also look at gender beyond the binary of male and female and take into account the unique protection challenges facing young LGBTQIA+ people. The Gender-Responsive, Age Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) framework offers a holistic approach to the intersections of age, gender, and protection mechanisms.[46]

Key recommendations and considerations:
- Ensure all protection mechanisms are gender responsive.
- Conduct specific **risk assessments with women and gender minorities**, including a specific focus on social norms in local contexts.
- Facilitate secure transportation with security experts and secure communications using encrypted devices and platforms as needed.[47]
- Consult and engage families of women, that women themselves identify and whom do not pose a risk, to facilitate programs and security measures.[48]
- Appoint **trusted and discreet personnel** who are gender sensitive to serve as point of contact for the case of a security threat, risk, or incident.[49]
- Gendered risks and threats facing youth can be presented beyond the male-female binary, making members of **LGBTQIA+ communities particularly vulnerable**.
- Acknowledge gendered risks and vulnerabilities throughout the life course.[50]
- Informal and formal networks can serve as a form of protection for vulnerable women and gender minorities.
- Highlight the risks and threats women peacebuilders face, giving **priority to their analysis as they are experts on their own situation**.
- Build **women's individual and organizational capacities** for conducting their own risk assessments, prevention, mitigation, and developing both individual and organizational security plans and protocols to promote resilience.
- Utilize a **'gender integration continuum'** (GIC) to analyze and integrate gender in protection.[51] The GIC can be used while creating a protection policy to help assess the levels that gender is integrated (or not) integrated throughout protection. Levels of measurement can range from gender discriminatory to gender transformative.
- Gender norms and learned behaviors around violence are connected to gendered inequalities that pass down generations. Exposure to violence in society, at home, or qualities of 'manhood' like strength and aggression play a role in gender based violence

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[45] UNICEF, Gender-based Violence in Emergencies. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies

[46] UNICEF (2020). Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection: A Conceptual Framework. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/WP-10_Gender-Responsive-Age-Sensitive-Social-Protection.pdf

[47] ICAN, Operational Guidance to Establish and Enhance the Protection of Women Peacebuilders

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] UNICEF (2020). Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection: A Conceptual Framework. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/WP-10_Gender-Responsive-Age-Sensitive-Social-Protection.pdf

[51] *Ibid.*

and inequalities. Gendered protection must be two fold, focused on the **protection of survivors and victims** and the **promotion of peaceful masculinities.**[52]

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
● UNICEF, Gender-Responsive, Age Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP)
● ICAN, Operational Guidance to Establish and Enhance the Protection of Women Peacebuilders
● UNHCR, UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence

Youth Participation in Peace and Security

Young people face some of the most serious risks to their safety and security in conflict, including their exclusion from peace and security efforts, a main focus of a growing movement focused on recognizing and supporting the positive role that young people play in preventing and responding to violence and crises. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 introduces **five key pillars** for action on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS): **participation**, **protection**, **prevention**, **partnerships,** and **disengagement and reintegration**. The protection pillar of Security Council resolution 2250 (2015), reinforced in resolution 2535 (2020)[53], is a central tenet of the youth, peace and security agenda, calling for the global community to "ensure the protection of young civilians' lives and human rights."[54]

The movement to increase protection mechanisms for young peacebuilders is led by the Protection Working Group in the Global Coalition on YPS (GCYPS). Founded in 2019, the objective of the group is to strengthen, adjust, and build on the existing tools and mechanisms for protection of human rights defenders to address the specific needs of young people in the context of civic space, as part of the global efforts to promote a safe, enabling, and gender-responsive environment.

Key recommendations and considerations:
● Threats facing young people are **multifaceted and complex**, not playing or showing up in isolation. The YPS framework offers a multifaceted framework to look at these threats in all aspects of young people's participation in peace and security efforts and pins protection as a key pillar of the framework.
● The international community is expressing **growing concern, elevating awareness,** and **increasing commitment and resources** to build effective mechanisms on youth protection.
● Protection threats facing young people can prevent their meaningful engagement in peace and security efforts.
● To date, there is **no systematic data collection on the threats young people face.**

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52 Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice. (2018). Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Violence: The Promise of Psychosocial Interventions to Address Children's Exposure to Violence.

53 United Nations Security Council, Security Council resolution 2535 (2020) [on youth, peace and security], 14 July 2020, S/RES/2535 (2020), available at: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2535.
54 United Nations Security Council, Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) [on youth, peace and security], 18 March 2016, S/RES/2250 (2015), available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/56ebfd654.html.

- Young people continuously **point to protection issues as a major hindrance** to their work as actors for peace and call for more political, institutional, and adult support for their protection. The protection challenges they report come from government and security forces, as well as non-state armed groups.[55]
- COVID-19 has offered new challenges to civic spaces for youth, particularly in digital spaces where many young people have shifted their work.
- **Young people operate in dangerous and rapidly evolving conflict contexts,** making protection a rapidly changing and even more so important factor in ensuring the meaningful participation.

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
- Forthcoming OSGEY Report
- The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security
- Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP)

Types of Protection

Digital

From harassment and bullying, to technology surveillance, and even to exclusion from participation in digital spaces, the risks facing youth online are vast and come from all stakeholders in conflict; including and not limited to governments, armed groups, program implementers, communities, their own peers, and more.[56] The increasing visibility, use, and mobility of youth in digital spaces comes with an increase of risk in these spaces. Thus, the digital protection of youth requires special attention from program implementers and researchers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic where much program activity has shifted online as well.

Key recommendations and considerations:
- Utilize self-empowered tools to help young people how to assess their own risks online and easy-to-access digital protection mechanisms.[57]
- Develop a flexible and regularly updatable digital protection policy to keep up with a rapidly changing digital environment.[58]
- Ensure technological use in programs is **affordable, inclusive,** and **accessible** to young people to ensure freedom of expression and equitable information access.[59]
- Invest in policies and programs to support and prevent gendered risks digitally.[60]

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55 UNOY Peacebuilders and SFCG (2017), *Mapping a Sector: Bridging the Evidence Gap on Youth-Driven Peacebuilding.* Retrieved from: https://unoy.org/downloads/mapping-a-sector-bridging-the-evidence-gap-on-youth-driven-peacebuilding/

56 SecDev Group, (2017), *Digitally-enabled Peace and Security: Reflections for the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda.* Retrieved from: https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-04/2.%20TP_Social%20Media_SecDev.pdf

57 Frontline Defenders and Tactical Technology Collective, *Security in a Box: Digital Security Tools and Tactics.* Retrieved from: https://securityinabox.org/en/

58 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Privacy International, (2018), *The humanitarian metadata problem: "Doing no harm" in the digital era.* Retrieved from: https://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/85089/the_humanitarian_metadata_problem_-_icrc_and_privacy_international.pdf

59 UNICEF, (2018), *Policy guide on children and digital connectivity.* Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/3141/file/PolicyLab-Guide-DigitalConnectivity-Nov.6.18-lowres.pdf

60 *Ibid.*

- Minimize situations of digital threats by building in safety features into technological products or services from the onset.[61]
- Take local, national, and global safeguarding measures into consideration when assessing and mitigating digital risks.
- Adopt **proactive, preventative,** and **protective** measures to respect privacy, identity, and protection of young people's data and digital activity.[62]
- Assess digital risks and map the life of all digital activity by taking into account all communications, activism, and presence in digital and telecommunication technologies.[63]

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
- UNICEF, Policy guide on children and digital connectivity
- ICRC, "Doing No Harm" in the Digital Era
- Frontline Defenders and Tactical Tech, Digital Security in a Box

Physical

Arguably the most visible and recognized form of protection challenges facing youth participating in research, programming and advocacy, physical harm can be present in a multitude of ways - from state violence to homicide to sexual abuse and exploitation to domestic violence and to violence from armed groups. Many international frameworks and treaties recognize the vulnerability of children and their rights to physical protection, particularly in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). As a leader in preventing and ending violence against children, UNICEF offers a number of great resources, including **INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children** which was created in partnership with the World Health Organization and other international partners.[64]

Key recommendations and considerations:
- Different types of physical harm can be presented to young people and unique situations (poverty, disability, etc.) can require different and special protection and mitigation measures.[65]
- The type of physical harm can vary based on gender, age group, and other vulnerable identities.
- While physical harm can be more visible than digital or psychosocial harm, it is still difficult to identify.
- Social tolerance of both victimization of girls and women and perpetration by boys and men makes vulnerability to physical violence higher.

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61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Privacy International, (2018), *The humanitarian metadata problem: "Doing no harm" in the digital era.* Retrieved from:https://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/85089/the_humanitarian_metadata_problem_-_icrc_and_privacy_international.pdf

64 UNICEF & WHO, INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children

65 *Ibid.*

- Victimization and violence against boys and men is often forgotten and overlooked, yet a critical part in preventing violence against youth.
- Challenge and change gender norms around male entitlement over girls and women's bodies to reduce GBV, shape prevention mechanisms, and address specific care and support needs.[66]
- Understand the multifaceted nature of violence against children through taking into account the **individual, close relationship, community,** and **societal levels** to develop protection mechanisms to simultaneously confront violence on all levels.[67] The **social ecological model** can help map risks and opportunities for prevention in all these dimensions.[68]

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
- UNICEF & WHO, INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children
- FHI 360, Child Protection Basics
- UNICEF, Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children and Adolescents

Psychosocial

Young people around the world are facing a mental health crisis, with mental health conditions forming the leading cause of disability in young people around the world.[69] Psychosocial well-being refers to the relationship between psychological aspects of experience and wider social experiences.[70] Risks facing youth are high and can be multifaceted and include major, long-term impacts on their mental well-being and can damage social cohesion in communities and families.[71] From mental health disorders to trauma, crises and conflict can amplify feelings of isolation, uncertainty, fear, anger, loss and sadness.[72] These problems can be exacerbated during programs and research, particularly in contexts of crisis and emergency. Through prioritizing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), organizations and practitioners can mitigate impact and prevent increased risk. MHPSS is a holistic term encompassing a wide spectrum of intervention and treatment from local or outside support that promotes psychosocial well-being.

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[66] UNICEF, Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children and Adolescents
[67] UNICEF & WHO, (2016), INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children. Retrieved from: https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/9789241565356-eng.pdf
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] Booysen, C., Pavarini, G., Gatera, G., Jimenez, I., Muhia, J., Omar, D., Qureshi, O., Ryan, G., Eaton, J., & Singh, I. (2019). *Young people will transform global mental health: A call to prioritise global action on mental health for young people. Young Leaders for the Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health.* Retrieved from https://globalmentalhealthcommission.org/policy-briefs/
[70] INEE. (2018). G*uidance Note on Psychosocial Support: Facilitating Psychosocial Wellbeing and Social and Emotional Learning* (Publication). Retrieved from: https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE_Guidance_Note_on_Psychosocial_Support_ENG_v2.pdf
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.*

Key recommendations and considerations:
- Use a **layered approach to meet the MHPSS needs** of youth partners and participants: basic psychosocial support can be integrated across activities to strengthen overall social wellbeing and promote healthy coping mechanisms, while ensuring that referral pathways (and necessary budgets) are in place for focused support or specialized treatment supervised by mental health professionals.[73]
- Ensure young activists, partners, participants have access to **simple, accessible tools and methods for identifying and responding to stress, burnout, anxiety and depression**.[74]
- Adopt **DNH protocols for MHPSS programs** to reduce the potential for MHPSS programs to cause further harm. Examples include effective coordination, participatory approaches, cultural aptitude, community and individual support, and ensuring only qualified professionals provide support.[75] It is also critical to consider how to overcome stigma around MHPSS, which exists in nearly all cultural contexts and is a key potential area of harm.[76]
- Improve **mental health literacy** and **awareness,** especially for men and boys, of positive coping mechanisms, understanding of the brain's response to trauma, and accessible tools and personnel for support.[77]
- Consider holistic approaches to MHPSS including individual/group-based, family-based, school based, and community-based interventions.[78]
- **Partner with youth-led groups** to strengthen leadership and awareness of psychosocial well-being and governance of MHPSS programs.
- Working with survivors of trauma, particularly women and gender minorities, requires mitigation techniques for practitioners to prioritize self-care and well-being to avoid re-opening of wounds for survivors and vicarious trauma for themselves.
- Take **activism culture** (superhero persona, overwork, exposure), **oppression and privilege** (formal and informal; systemic, institutional, societal), and **intergenerational power dynamics** (tokenism, adultism, ageism) into consideration to reduce risks of distress in programs.[79]
- **Meaningful participation** (e.g. participation in planning, decisionmaking) - which builds on the agency, assets and strengths of individuals, families, and communities -

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[73] Amnesty International, (2020), Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act10/3231/2020/en/

[74] UNICEF, (2018), *Operational guidelines on community based mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings: Three-tiered support for children and families (field test version).* Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/reports/community-based-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-guidelines-2019

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice. (2018). Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Violence: The Promise of Psychosocial Interventions to Address Children's Exposure to Violence.

[77] UNICEF, (2018), *Operational guidelines on community based mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings: Three-tiered support for children and families (field test version).* Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/reports/community-based-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-guidelines-2019

[78] Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice. (2018). Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Violence: The Promise of Psychosocial Interventions to Address Children's Exposure to Violence.

[79] Amnesty International, (2020), Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act10/3231/2020/en/

enhances young people's wellbeing, development and protection.[80]
- **Domestic alliance and coalition-building among civil society groups and maintaining organizational autonomy from international actors** helps open civic spaces (and protect rights and psychosocial wellbeing by extension) in restrictive environments.[81]

Tools for protection policy development or toolkit:
- INEE, Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning for Children and Youth in Emergency Settings
- UNICEF, Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian
- IASC, Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings
- Amnesty International, Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists
- UNICEF, "Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Children in Humanitarian Settings: An Updated Review of Evidence and Practice"
- Promundo, Breaking the Silence of Intergenerational Trauma: The Promise of Psychosocial Interventions to Address Children's Exposure to Violence

Section 3: Existing Mitigation Strategies, Trainings, and Manuals

For INGOs, Adult Allies, & Donors
- *Keeping Children Safe*, Safeguarding in Conflict and Crisis
- *Keeping Children Safe*, Developing Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- *UNICEF*, Risk Assessment Tool
- *Tom Burke, Clair Cooke, Isabelle King*, Safeguarding young people during the COVID-19 pandemic
- *USAID,* Checklist for Conflict Sensitivity in Education Programs
- *ERIC*, Ethical Guidance: Harms and Benefits
- *Caroline Bradbury-Jones & Julie Taylor,* Engaging with children as co-researchers: challenges, counter-challenges and solutions
- *UNICEF,* Policy guide on children and digital connectivity
- *eSafetyCommissioner of the Australian Government*, Toolkit for Schools
- *ICRC,* "Doing No Harm" in the Digital Era
- *UNICEF,* Digital Civic Engagement by Young People (esp. pg. 16-18)
- *Frontline Defenders and Tactical Tech,* Digital Security in a Box
- *UNICEF,* Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children and Adolescents
- *FHI 360,* Child Protection Basics
- *WHO,* Inspire: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children
- *OHCHR,* Manual on Human Rights Monitoring: Trauma and Self Care
- *Ann T. Chu and Anne P. Deprince,* Perceptions of Trauma Research with Sample of At-Risk Youth
- *ICAN,* Operational Guidance to Establish and Enhance the Protection of Women Peacebuilders
- *UNICEF,* Gender-Responsive, Age Sensitive Social Protection
- *Terre Des Hommes & International Institute for Child Rights and Development,* You

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80 Lloyd and Emerson. (2016). (Re)examining the Relationship Between Children's Subjective Wellbeing and Their Perceptions of Participation Rights. Retrieved from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cye3gn2piTb1sKwMGdMe-ISkLWIyaM8B/view?usp=sharing

81 USAID and University of Colorado Boulder. (2017). Maintaining Civic Space in Backsliding Regimes. Retrieved from: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00N1RG.pdf

Create: Psychosocial, Youth-Driven, Arts Based Program Report
- *Child Rights Connect*, The Rights of Child Human Rights Defenders: Implementation Guide

For Youth & Youth-Led Organizations
- *Tom Burke, Clair Cooke, Isabelle King,* Safeguarding young people during the COVID-19 pandemic
- *Amnesty International,* Security Toolkit for Young Defenders
- *Amnesty International,* HRD Under Threat (sec. 6.3, pg. 37 for Youth HRD)
- *Frontline Defenders,* Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk
- *UNICEF,* Digital Civic Engagement by Young People (esp. pg. 16-18)
- *Frontline Defenders and Tactical Tech,* Digital Security in a Box
- *OHCHR,* Manual on Human Rights Monitoring: Trauma and Self Care
- *ICAN,* Operational Guidance to Establish and Enhance the Protection of Women Peacebuilders
- *UNICEF,* Gender-Responsive, Age Sensitive Social Protection
- *Amnesty International,* Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists

Section 4: International Frameworks and Guidelines

International Frameworks

- International Convention on the Rights of a Child
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- UN Voluntary Compact on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
- Youth 2030: The UN Youth Strategy
- Legal Protection of Children in Armed Conflict
- *Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security* Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding
- *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*, "Protecting and Empowering Children as HRD" report
- *Children Human Rights Defenders, Roadmap: Protection and Empowerment of Children as Human Rights Defenders.*
- *ISHR,* Toolkit on Diplomatic Support for HRD

Regional and National Guidelines

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)
- Arab NGO Network for Development (AAND)
- Euro-Meditrranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)
- *Iraq*
  - *OHCHR,* Protecting the Rights of Children in Iraq
  - *UNICEF,* Child Protection in Iraq
  - *MICS,* 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey Briefing, (see p. 29, 37, 49)
  - *Medicine and Conflict Survival Journal*, Iraq children's rights: Building a system under fire
- *Lebanon*

- *OHCHR*, [Report on the RIghts of the Child in Lebanon](#)
- *Law Library of Congress*, [Lebanon: Children's Rights: International and National Laws and Practices](#)
- *UNICEF*, [Child Protection in Lebanon](#)
- *CRC*, [Third Periodic Report of Lebanon](#)
- [The Lebanese Institute for Child Rights](#)
- *Jordan*
  - *UNICEF*, [Child Protection in Jordan](#)
  - *OHCHR*, [Report on the Rights of the Child in Jordan](#)
  - *Children of Jordan*, [Child Protection](#)

East Africa
- [African Union Commission on Human and Peoples Rights](#)
- [African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#) (ACERWC)
- [East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project](#) (EHAHRDP)
- *TRANET Africa,* [African Youth HR Defenders report 2019](#)
- *Kenya*
  - *Constitution of Kenya,* [Article 53](#)
  - *UNICEF,* [Child Protection in Kenya](#)
  - [Child Protection Law and Policy: Kenya](#)
  - *National Council for Children's Services*, [Summary of the outcome of mapping and assessing Kenya's child protection system](#)

Latin America
- [Latin America and Caribbean Network for Democracy](#) (REDLAD)
- [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#)
- *Guatemala*
  - *UNICEF,* [Annual Report 2017, Guatemala](#)
  - *Developing our World*, [The Condition of Children's Rights in Guatemala](#)
  - *Humanium,* [Children of Guatemala](#)

Section 5: Recommendations for Youth Excel

This desk review identified and reviewed existing key global, regional, and national standards, resources, approaches, and actors on youth protection. What is evident upon completion of the desk review is there are few resources existing that target or cater to the holistic protection of young people (15-29). For the creation of Youth Excel's Protection Policy, it is imperative to bridge protection strategies and standards made for children and adults for the youth demographic in order to develop a cohesive, accountable, and responsive protection policy so we can ensure that Youth Excel creates a safe, enabling, and gender responsive environment for the inclusion and participation of young people.

Key recommendations based on the desk review include:

1. Ensure policy encompasses **physical**, **psychosocial**, **gendered**, and **digital threats** facing young people at a minimum. Pay attention to the intersectionality of vulnerabilities

of young people, particularly around the vulnerabilities of youth with disabilities, gender, socio-economic status and how that shapes their experiences of protection;

2. Recognizing that many young people are acting at the nexus of different sectors, draw from the schools of practice around **safeguarding**, **conflict sensitivity**, **holistic security,** and others;

3. Adopt a **youth-empowered approach to the policy** by prioritizing youth agency and decision making throughout the risk assessment and protection process. **Avoid paternalistic mechanisms and language** for the policy to enable and provide youth-led organizations and young partners of Youth Excel activities the capacity to use protection prevention and mitigation strategies. Build on the recognition that **meaningful participation enhances youth wellbeing, development and protection**;

4. Acknowledge **perceptions of protection risks are subjective** and may be understood differently by different youth, age groups, generations, localities, and more. The risk assessment must be **inclusive and centered on youth**;

5. Develop **clear guidelines for common risks**, such as: protection during research, preventing secondary / vicarious trauma, conflict sensitive communications, digital safety, transportation to and from activities, gendered risks, and more;

6. Create **easy-to-use and easily updatable risk assessment** and **conflict analysis guides** for local youth partners to conduct their own risk assessments for tailored protection strategies, while recognizing the subjective and personal nature of the concept of security, as well as the need to systematically review such assessments to **account for the unexpected**;

7. Link **international**, **national**, and **local legal frameworks** in the creation of the policy and access to resources;

8. Take **activism culture**, **oppression and privilege**, and **intergenerational power dynamics** into consideration in developing policy;

9. **Budget safeguarding** and protection resources and a contingency budget that can help refer youth to specialized services and support when needed;

10. Designate clear **focal point** personnel at all levels to **champion, communicate, and implement** the safeguarding and protection policy;

11. Include training for **staff, partners, youth partners, youth participants,** and **key community stakeholders** on protection policy and procedures, including ensuring youth participants and partners know their rights and resources available;

12. Adopt **survivor-centered, secure,** and **transparent reporting mechanisms**; and

13. Ensure **accountability** and access to **justice** when protection is violated.