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Post-war Youth, Peace and Security agenda in Azerbaijan: challenges and opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

Mainstreaming youth views on preventing and resolving conflict and building lasting peace is a worldwide experience adopted by many countries in recent years. In this sense, UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) is the first international policy framework that recognized the positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.¹ UNSCR 2250 provided a ground for youth-inclusive peace practices and outlined fundamental approaches within its five pillars: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. As the YPS agenda stands for the meaningful and equal participation of youth in building and maintaining peace and conflict resolution, to further develop the roadmap of the agenda, two more thematic resolutions (2419 & 2535) were adopted by UNSC in 2018 and 2020, respectively.

While all three resolutions promote the role of youth involvement at all stages of peacebuilding and post-conflict programming, Resolution 2250 is a landmark in terms of the formulation of the consolidated youth, peace, and security agenda. It was prepared with the help of youth actors and stakeholders by assessing the needs of youth from different conflict-affected regions and addresses the global community. However, a need for conceptualization and localization of this document arises, whereby a more detailed framework could be provided. As the five pillars of Resolution 2250 are represented at different levels in every country, UN member countries took action to prepare national action plans and thematic agendas accordingly. In the case of Azerbaijan, a possible nationwide implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda pre-requires understanding the local context through the lens of youth, as well as defining the framework for calling on relevant institutions to action.

¹ United Nations Security Council (2015). Təhlükəsizlik Şurasının 2250 Sayılı Qətnaməsi. 9 dekabr 2015. S/RES/2250. Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/814032?ln=en>

This policy paper arises from this need and is designed to address the YPS-related issues in Azerbaijan. The paper analyses the country-level context, while providing a youth- and gender-sensitive approach to how young people perceive participation in decision-making processes and peace practices; how youth is affected by conflict and violence; how it contributes to conflict prevention; the level of cooperation between youth-led initiatives and government institutions as well as local organizations. Additionally, normative and policy frameworks are carefully assessed throughout the study, where shared visions, goals, and principles are reflected. Policy frameworks are important when implementing national and subnational-level programs, especially to engage relevant stakeholders in policymaking. To reflect on the tendencies shaping the normative and policy frameworks in Azerbaijan, alongside the perspective of youth, ideas and recommendations of decision-makers and policymakers are taken into account. Furthermore, this paper explores the relevance of YPS agenda objectives while integrating them into different policy domains at domestic and foreign levels in Azerbaijan. Alongside integration into existing policy domains of the YPS agenda, future perspectives for developing relevant roadmaps and strategies are closely examined during the preparation of this brief.

This study relies on qualitative data extracted from different data collection methods: individual interviews, focus groups, and round table discussions. During the first stage, individual interviews were conducted with civil society members, government representatives, policy experts, IDPs and representatives of international stakeholders. The second stage involved focus group discussions with young activist groups. The third stage was dedicated to roundtable discussions with representatives of relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions. Throughout all three stages of the data collection process, respondents were accessed through a purposive sampling method. On the other hand, statistical data was collected through secondary data and

compiled from government documents and data sources of international organizations.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

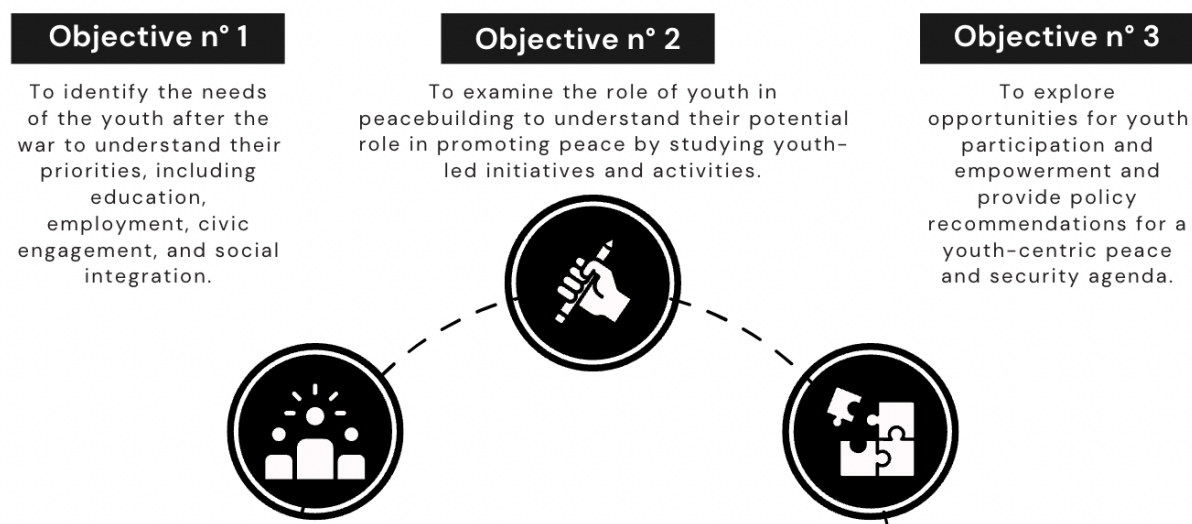


Image 1. Goals and objectives of the research

The first part of this paper provides a detailed framework of national youth policies and representation of young people on different levels in Azerbaijan, whilst presenting the evolutionary phases of the state policies throughout the decades. In the second chapter, the main factors hindering youth from participating in conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts have been explored and the challenges faced by young people were introduced. The third part of the paper stresses the possible ways to strengthen the YPS agenda at national level. The last chapter summarizes the findings of the paper and provides recommendations for governmental institutions, international organizations and civil society.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL CONTEXT: YOUTH POLICY AND YOUTH REPRESENTATION IN AZERBAIJAN

According to the latest available data, around 30% of the population of Azerbaijan falls within the age range of 15 to 29², reflecting weighty presence of youth within the country's demographic landscape. This significant youth population not only adds vibrancy and dynamism to Azerbaijan's social landscape but also holds immense potential to shape the nation's future in various domains. The sizable number of young Azerbaijanis creates a fertile ground for innovation, creativity, and progress across sectors such as education, technology, entrepreneurship, arts, and culture.

Recognising the importance of harnessing this youth potential, the Azerbaijani government has made concerted efforts to have a comprehensive and multifaceted youth policy since gaining independence. The Ministry of Youth & Sports has been rebranded and restructured several times ever since and emerged as the primary governing body responsible for formulating and implementing youth policies in 1994. In addition to the Ministry, other key institutions such as the Department of Youth Policy and Sports Affairs within the Presidential Administration, which plays a crucial role in providing guidance and coordination at the highest level of government, and the Youth and Sports Committee of the Azerbaijani Parliament, *Milli Məclis*, which assumes significant responsibilities in formulating relevant legislation and contributes significantly to shaping the youth policy landscape in Azerbaijan.

² Azerbaijan Statistical Committee (2022), Gender and Age Groups. Available at <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/demography/>

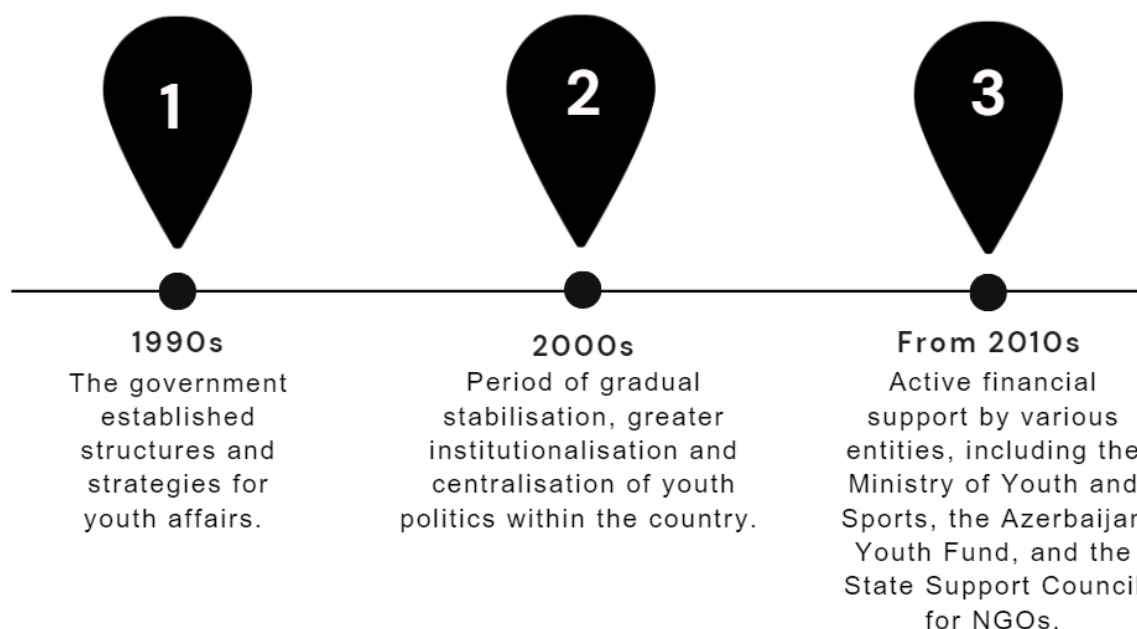


Image 2. The evolution of youth policy in Azerbaijan

Structurally, Azerbaijan's youth policy has undergone significant evolution, progressing through three stages (Image 1). The initial phase, which unfolded during the 1990s, was marked by the formation of the columns of the national youth policy: despite the formidable post-war political and economic difficulties, the government addressed youth affairs and took significant steps to establish relevant structures and strategies. The institutionalization of the national youth policy continued with the tradition of the nationwide youth fora: initiated by then President Heydar Aliyev, the first Azerbaijani Youth Forum took place on February 2, 1996. This date would later officially be designated as Youth Day. The Second Youth Forum, organized in Baku in 1999, was attended by President H. Aliyev. In 1995, the National Council of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA) was formed, initially uniting a limited number of youth organizations operating within the country. Over time, the NAYORA experienced substantial growth and became the largest youth organization in the South Caucasus region, further solidifying its significance within Azerbaijan's youth policy landscape.

The second phase, which took place during the 2000s, marked a period of gradual stabilization and increased revenues from oil and gas sales in Azerbaijan. This newfound stability and financial prosperity contributed to greater institutionalization and centralization of youth politics within the country. As a result, the number of youth organizations in Azerbaijan experienced a notable increase, and youth programs implemented at the state level continued to grow dynamically. It was also during this period that the young population of Azerbaijan started “discovering the world” en masse as they became increasingly familiar with and actively participated in a wide array of international youth and student programs: notably, the introduction and widespread adoption of programs such as AYAFE, AIESEC, and Erasmus+ opened up remarkable opportunities for Azerbaijani youth to engage globally.

The period starting from the 2010s marks the state’s bigger role in youth affairs and the formation of a highly centralized youth sector. Substantial revenues generated from oil and gas sales have provided the Azerbaijani government with the resources to implement various tools and initiatives within the framework of its state-centric youth policy. To ensure the continuity of these local youth organizations, active financial support has been provided by various entities, including the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Azerbaijan Youth Fund (established in 2011), and the State Support Council for NGOs (established in 2007). Notably, the Youth Fund has been instrumental in supporting local youth organizations and their initiatives. With over 20 million manats allocated from the state budget for project implementation purposes, the Youth Fund has financed more than 3,000 projects since its inception in 2011³.

A notable example of the state’s sponsorship in this sector was the ambitious Programme for the Education of Azerbaijani Youth Abroad, which was financed

³ Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2017), Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on additional measures to support the activities of the Youth Fund under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Available at: <https://president.az/az/articles/view/23387>

by the state and launched in 2007.⁴ This program, spanning eight years and continuing until 2015, aimed to provide Azerbaijani citizens with opportunities to pursue higher education in esteemed educational institutions around the world, with a primary focus on the United States and European countries. Over the course of its implementation, the Education Abroad program facilitated the enrolment of more than 3,300 Azerbaijani students in prestigious educational institutions globally⁵. Created for the oil and gas revenues of the country, the State Oil Fund has financed this program with a budget exceeding USD 200 million⁶. The initiative was revived in the form of two new programs: The National Program for Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023 (adopted in 2018)⁷ and the National Program for 2022-2026 for young people to study in prestigious higher education institutions of foreign countries⁸ (both financed by the same Oil Fund). The latter envisages supporting up to 2,000 Azerbaijani citizens in their pursuit of undergraduate and graduate levels of education overseas⁹.

Moreover, Azerbaijan's oil giant SOCAR instituted a separate scholarship for local students who aspired to get educated abroad and employed by the same company upon their return.

Another pivotal aspect of Azerbaijan's state-centered youth policy is the introduction of volunteer programs, which have turned into a trend in recent years and engaged thousands of youngsters. While volunteer activities were initially championed by international organizations during the first phase, the third phase witnessed a significant transformation, with the state assuming a central role in

⁴ State program on education of Azerbaijani youth abroad. Available at: <https://e-qanun.az/framework/13001>

⁵ SOFAZ (2020), 2007-2015 State Programme on the Education of Azerbaijani Youth Abroad. Available at: <https://www.oilfund.az/storage/images/8qfbljavqu.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ministry of Education & Science: State Program: <https://dp.edu.az/az/content/3>

⁸ Ministry of Education & Science: State Program: <https://dp.edu.az/az/content/78>

⁹ Ibid.

this domain. The adoption of the Law on Volunteering by the *Milli Məclis* in 2009 served as a crucial milestone, establishing the legal framework for volunteerism in the country. Following the enactment of the law, volunteer programs have been subsequently integrated into the ASAN Service since 2013. The ASAN Service, renowned for its efficient and citizen-centric approach to public services, became a key platform for organizing and coordinating volunteer initiatives. This integration facilitated streamlined processes, ensuring a more systematic and structured engagement of volunteers within the framework of state-centered youth policy.

The surge in the number of international cultural and sporting events hosted by Azerbaijan since 2008 has played a significant role in fostering volunteerism. Notably, during prominent events such as the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012 and the First European Games in 2015, both held in Baku, special emphasis was placed on actively involving volunteers. In subsequent years, the importance of volunteerism continued to grow. Since 2016, thousands of volunteers have actively participated in annual Formula 1 races, the Baku Islamic Solidarity Games in 2017, and numerous other sports competitions hosted by Azerbaijan. A significant testament to the state's endorsement of volunteerism was the declaration of the Year of Volunteers in Azerbaijan in 2020. Today, it has become deeply ingrained within the culture of Azerbaijan's state and public institutions. Most state organizations, as well as public entities, have established their volunteering programs, providing some opportunities for young individuals to engage in social initiatives.

During this phase, the state initiatives extended beyond the local level and gained recognition on the international stage. Azerbaijan sought to actively represent itself and raise awareness about its interests, particularly in light of the conflict with Armenia. One significant example of Azerbaijan's proactive approach was the establishment of the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF) within the Islamic Cooperation Organization, which stands as the second-largest international organization after the UN. Subsequently, the ICYF played a crucial

role in advocating for the Justice for Khojaly International Campaign. This campaign aimed to raise awareness and seek justice for the Khojaly massacre, the biggest crime against humanity that occurred during the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

However, the state-centric youth policy in Azerbaijan encountered challenges following the substantial decline in oil revenues in 2015. This decline had a notable impact on the allocation of budgets for youth projects, leading to a significant reduction in the number of initiatives with larger financial support. One specific area that experienced significant changes was the afore-mentioned program on education abroad. In the wake of the decrease in oil revenues, it faced significant financial constraints and had to be restructured. Renewed four years later, the revamped program was released in a more limited and restricted form, compared to its predecessor. In response to the changing financial landscape, the state sought to optimize its investments in the youth sector by focusing on targeted and strategic programs that could deliver meaningful impact with the available resources. This approach required a careful reassessment of priorities and a shift towards initiatives that could provide maximum value and long-term benefits. While the scale of certain initiatives may have been affected, the state remained determined to allocate financial resources to retain its dominant role in the national youth sector. This adaptability and resilience showcased the government's desire to continue its youth-focused endeavours despite economic challenges. It was in 2015 when the Government adopted the Development Strategy of Azerbaijani Youth to chart a legislative framework for the actions to be done by 2025. Two years later, Azerbaijani President signed the National Program "Azerbaijani Youth in 2017-2021."¹⁰

Furthermore, the recent years have witnessed a notable emphasis within the youth policy of Azerbaijan on investing more resources from the state budget in

¹⁰ Decree of President of Azerbaijan on approval of the State Program "Azerbaijani youth in 2017-2021". Available at: <https://e-qanun.az/framework/36474>

the cultivation of future-oriented young technocrats. One prominent initiative that highlights this commitment is the establishment of the *Yüksəliş* (Rise) competition in 2019. This competition serves as a platform to identify and recognize exceptional young individuals who display remarkable potential in public management. Through a rigorous selection process comprising comprehensive tests and interviews, the competition aims to identify the most promising talents among the youth. The participants who demonstrate outstanding capabilities in the *Yüksəliş* competition are not only awarded financial rewards to support their personal development but also benefit from mentorship opportunities provided by high-level state officials.

In general, when analyzing the youth policy conducted in Azerbaijan over the past three decades, a notable transformation becomes apparent. Initially, the youth sector was characterized by a more decentralized and competitive landscape, but over time, it has evolved into a highly centralized field under the auspices of the state. This shift has had far-reaching implications for the involvement of international actors in the youth sector and has led to the creation of local alternatives to many international practices.

The government has utilised its administrative resources to establish a more centre-reliant framework, aiming to reduce dependency on external organizations and initiatives. This strategic shift has resulted in the development of many local programs and initiatives. While the creation of local alternatives to international practices has allowed Azerbaijan to assert greater control over its youth sector, it has also had unintended consequences. One significant impact has been the potential strain on international cooperation in the youth sector. By prioritising local initiatives, Azerbaijan may have missed out on valuable opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and skill development offered through international partnerships. For example, despite suffering from the protracted conflict with its neighbouring country, Azerbaijani youth strategy – the most recent one being the 2015–2025 strategy – does not have a single clause about the role of youth in conflict transformation, peace and security

affairs. While the 2017-2021 Program on Youth has an agenda to promote national-religious tolerance, peace ableness and, humanism (which is assigned to Ministry of Youth & Sports, Ministry of Education & Science, State Committee for Work with Religious Institutions, State Security Service), as a pre-2020 document it puts strong(er) emphasis on raising patriotism among the youth. The marginalised international presence in the youth sector and limited engagement with international organizations and programs could hinder the country's access to the latest global trends, innovative practices, and diverse perspectives that are crucial for the holistic development of the youth sector.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE- AND SECURITY-RELATED INITIATIVES: CURRENT LANDSCAPE AND CHALLENGES

The protracted conflict with neighbouring Armenia has necessitated youth's engagement in peace and conflict transformations, as well as youth's expectations regarding peace and security in Azerbaijan. Like many parts of the world, the limited or non-existent participation of young people in political decision-making processes, particularly in sensitive areas such as peace and security, stems from structural issues not exclusive to Azerbaijan. Moreover, the situation worsens as meaningful participation of young individuals cannot be ensured in the majority of conflict transformation initiatives. This obstacle can be considered one of the primary challenges hindering the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda in the country.

It is important to highlight several initiatives that promote the meaningful involvement of young people in conflict transformation processes. Specifically, in the early 2000s, there was an increase in conflict transformation efforts through public diplomacy, with a stronger focus on engaging youth from Azerbaijan and Armenia and ensuring their active participation. The primary objective of facilitating interactions between Azerbaijani and Armenian youth in

third-party countries has been to facilitate meetings and dismantle mutual hatred and animosity. An exemplary instance in this regard was the active engagement of Azerbaijani youth in the Tekali Process, initiated by prominent peacebuilders from both countries.

The gradual stalemate in the interwar negotiation process has had a significant impact on the realm of conflict transformation, leading to a rise in apathy and the gradual decrease and/or monotonization of numerous initiatives. Moreover, this has been accompanied by continuous hostilities on the frontlines, resulting in further estrangement between the two societies. The Second Karabakh War in 2020 exacerbated these divisions, effectively bringing an end to most transformative endeavours. Nevertheless, despite the war and its consequences, several initiatives managed to successfully overcome its effects and continued to foster mutual relations.

In this context, engaging young people in the peacebuilding process in line with the implementation of the YPS agenda in Azerbaijan and neighbouring countries is critical for accomplishing both intra- and inter-societal dialogue and consequently sustainable peace in the South Caucasus. To achieve this, the key YPS objectives such as participation, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration of youth need to be integrated into National Action Plans (NAPs) and other strategic initiatives such as Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) NAPs.

To engage more young people in the YPS agenda, the Azerbaijani government could offer a new, post-war approach and establish avenues for meaningful youth participation in YPS initiatives by acknowledging and empowering young individuals' agency across all levels and stages of policy implementation. Giving space to young people to prove their ability and capacity to independently reflect on their experiences related to conflict is important to encourage their (pro)active participation in peace and security frameworks. Thus, facilitating meaningful participation necessitates the provision of opportunities for

engagement, the freedom to express their views, a receptive audience, and the ability to exert influence in shaping decisions.

First of all, *(geo)political conditions* have presented a wide range of challenges in the country, hindering efforts to promote peacebuilding and engage young people in these endeavours as Azerbaijan has experienced a long period of conflict with Armenia. The Second Karabakh War in 2020 unleashed a new wave of anxieties in the Azerbaijani society about the prospects of peaceful coexistence that not only strengthened the traditional image of the *Other* in a public perception but also makes it exceptionally challenging to foster connections between young individuals from different communities and cultivate a culture of peace. The opportunities for the Azerbaijani youth are limited by the fact that, unlike the older generation, not many of them have had any direct contact with their Armenian peers and/or counterparts, which makes it difficult to build strong communication.¹¹

On the other hand, Azerbaijani youth find itself in the very middle of the *fragile nation-building process* which is prone to reverberations from ever-existing tensions with Armenia. Since the YPS agenda in Azerbaijan is strongly connected to the resolution of the conflict with Armenia and subsequent reconciliation, youth participation in the peacebuilding process is too dependent on external circumstances, especially on the Armenian societal agenda which remains deeply mired in century-old narratives of victimhood and censorship that may severely limit opportunities for youth-level dialogue. This is further complicated by the fact that the youth dialogue and reconciliation activists have always *lacked concrete views* as to how they view the concept of peace in the context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which is indispensable for establishing peace on the ground instead of just exercising rhetoric.¹² Finally, the geopolitical circumstances, sometimes with unpredictable developments, and intensifying

¹¹ Author's interview with former IDP 1, February 2023

¹² Author's interview with former IDP 2, February 2023

security competition in the neighbourhood divert attention from peace, diminishing shared political dedication to genuine peacebuilding efforts, ultimately amplifying the securitization of the opposing side, particularly among the younger generation.

Another challenge lies in the *absence of a clear focal point* within the United Nations, resulting in a lack of clarity regarding expectations among both the government and the young people in regard with YPS goals.¹³ With no single agency taking the lead, it becomes difficult to coordinate efforts and effectively address the specific needs and concerns related to youth, peace, and security. Furthermore, there is *limited awareness and understanding* of the YPS agenda among various stakeholders, including government officials and the youth due to lack of its promotion by the UN agencies. It stands in stark contrast with the successful realization of the UN-supported Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to address the major development challenges faced by people in Azerbaijan. Thus far, the Azerbaijani government has prioritized 17 SDGs, 88 targets, and 119 indicators covering socio-economic aspects of sustainable development and submitted several voluntary national review reports, showing commitment to deeper cooperation on related fields. Local NGOs have also actively participated in the implementation of SDGs in Azerbaijan. This experience can certainly serve as a guide to the achievement of YPS-related goals in a short period of time. In this context, some of the respondents put the emphasis on the need for a good information campaign as a starting point to elevate YPS agenda to the level of national discussion.¹⁴

Among the difficulties for young people in terms of engaging in YPS-related activities, mostly peacebuilding efforts, could be certain *socioeconomic challenges*, including youth employment problems as explained by young

¹³ Roundtable with the representatives of various government agencies and government-affiliated organisations, June 2023

¹⁴ Roundtable with the representatives of various government agencies and government-affiliated organisations, June 2023

activists¹⁵. The lack of dedicated funding for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives in Azerbaijan makes it even more difficult for young people to organize and sustain their efforts for conflict transformation, some respondents state.¹⁶

Furthermore, the youth participation in YPS initiatives in Azerbaijan is compounded by several structural challenges that serve as substantial barriers to the meaningful participation of young people. One of these barriers is a *lack of institutional support for* youth-led peacebuilding initiatives. Many public and civil society organizations do not prioritize the participation of young people in peacebuilding efforts, which can make it difficult for young people to access resources and opportunities. For instance, several interview respondents have indicated the absence or insufficiency of strong representation of the Azerbaijani youth in the Track 1 and Track 2 diplomacy, mentioning that their participation lacks substance. Some of them particularly champion for more youth representation at important levels and decision-making capacity. In addition, there are complaints about lack of access to public grants and funding opportunities: this may limit opportunities for YPS initiatives.¹⁷ In this regard, the lack of experience in organizational budget-making among the young people, putting it in the context of the general problem of the lack of the youth-originated agenda in the relevant public sector bodies, is another challenge.¹⁸

At the same time, the implementation of the various projects is often disturbed by *organizational issues*: e.g., some NGOs may face problems with their registration, and the relevant mechanisms are claimed to function on a subpar level. The failure to resolve these mundane issues is explained by the responsible functionaries through the lack of financial stimuli: it is said that there is too little funding in the sector, so they do not feel motivated to take a proactive stance. Currently, NGOs conducting social projects suffer from the lack of standardized

¹⁵ Focus group, May 2023

¹⁶ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 1, January 2023; author's interview with Civil Society Representative 6, January 2023

¹⁷ Focus group, May 2023

¹⁸ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 4, January 2023

implementation of financial transactions: while some banks serve them in an operative and transparent manner, others may put excessive demands, checking each single penny spent and thus putting the execution of the projects' budget under danger. Moreover, as an anonymous respondent points out, there is a very uneven quality distribution between NGOs in Azerbaijan: while some of them have proven themselves as stable functioning institutions, many others mostly work from project to project and hence fail to establish their articulate agenda and specific social value.

One more structural challenge is *limited opportunities* for youth to participate in decision-making processes related to peacebuilding and conflict resolution.¹⁹ For instance, young people have limited representation in the Azerbaijani Parliament, as there are only a small number of young MPs. Consequently, their influence on decision-making processes may not always be affective. Thus, there should be more advocating for youth empowerment and their involvement in public life.²⁰

In turn, there is a very limited number of opportunities currently available, which mainly revolve around initiatives implemented by the international organizations like Eurasia Partnership Foundation Azerbaijan, IMAGINE Center for Conflict Transformation, EU4Dialogue, Open Corridors and others. In addition, there are some other short-term interventions, which alone are insufficient and symbolic in promoting meaningful participation among young people. These short-term one-time projects may not have tangible results and proper *evaluation mechanisms*.²¹

¹⁹ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 4, January 2023

²⁰ Focus group, May 2023

²¹ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 1, January 2023

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Youth participation in peacebuilding efforts in Azerbaijan is compounded by several structural challenges that serve as substantial barriers to the meaningful participation of young people.

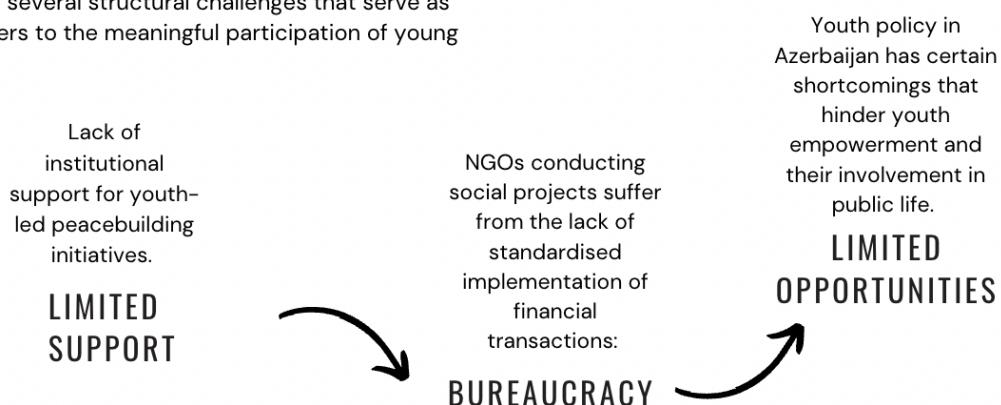


Image 3. Structural barriers for the youth participation in peacebuilding in Azerbaijan

Another challenge is the *lack of peace education* programs within the national curriculum. The failure to integrate peace values and conflict resolution skills into education leaves young people unequipped with the necessary tools to promote peace within society. Moreover, the *limited availability of training opportunities and educational materials in the local language* further hinders the development of essential skills and knowledge required for effective participation in peacebuilding initiatives.²² When peace and conflict studies material is not accessible in the local language, it becomes challenging for young people to educate themselves, engage in dialogue, and contribute to conflict transformation efforts. Thus, without accessible material, young people feel excluded and disempowered in processes aimed at addressing conflicts. Consequently, these challenges contribute to a decrease in the number of young people actively engaged in peacebuilding.²³ However, it is crucial to underscore that effective peacebuilding relies on the active participation and engagement of local communities.

²² Focus group, May 2023

²³ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 5, February 2023

Gender inequality continues to persist as a pressing issue in Azerbaijan, presenting formidable obstacles for young women seeking to engage in peacebuilding endeavours. *Discrimination and restricted opportunities for women* remain prevalent in decision-making processes pertaining to peace and security. Although numerous women hold management positions in NGOs, the representation of women in Track 1 and Track 1.5 diplomacy, as well as within the security field, remains limited.²⁴ This trend can be attributed to the deeply entrenched patriarchal and conservative nature of society, which reinforces gender and generational²⁵ biases, perpetuating the notion of conflict as primarily belonging to the domain of men. Furthermore, civil society falls short in its efforts to effectively advocate for and advance gender equality.²⁶ In addition, the word “feminism” is often perceived with a significant reservation by multiple NGOs as well. Yet another problem revealed is the lack of female experts on politics, public policy and related spheres. On the other hand, it is easier for women, to a certain extent, to participate in peacebuilding and similar initiatives since it does not entail accusations of “disloyalty” and “lack of patriotism” men in this field often have to face.²⁷ At the same time, the share of young women in peacebuilding, volunteering and other activities of this kind is actually higher than that of men since they face less pressure for earning money and may not undertake commitments such as military service.²⁸

It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijan signed the Istanbul Convention in 2018 but has not ratified it yet. Ratifying and implementing this Convention is crucial for combating gender-based violence and promoting gender equality. This commitment would help to create an enabling environment that addresses the structural barriers and discriminatory practices that hinder women's participation in peacebuilding processes. By strengthening legal frameworks, providing

²⁴ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 1, January 2023

²⁵ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 3, January 2023

²⁶ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 2, January 2023

²⁷ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 5, February 2023

²⁸ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 1, January 2023

support services for survivors, and promoting gender-sensitive education and awareness, the convention could empower young women and foster their active involvement in peacebuilding initiatives.

Another dimension that affects the participation of young people in decision-making, is *psychological*: some respondents claimed that independent thinking is not prioritised, hence many young people experience problems with expressing their identity and formulating an individual approach. It is important to point out the negative role of traditional upbringing models here since many families do not allow their children to express themselves.²⁹

The *lack of spaces for training and initiatives* is pointed out to as another significant challenge. Young people often struggle to find dedicated venues where they can gather, learn, collaborate, and engage in activities related to peacebuilding. The absence of such spaces, especially in the provinces, limits their opportunities to conduct their initiatives, connect with like-minded individuals, share experiences, and access resources that are vital for their growth as peacebuilders. This infrastructure gap restricts their ability to develop necessary skills, build networks, and contribute effectively to peacebuilding efforts in the country. One respondent who preferred to remain anonymous, described a number of technical issues that pose serious obstacles to the implementation of the youth-related projects in provinces. One of them is the absence of policy implementation standards at the municipal level in Azerbaijan: while executive powers in some provinces are supportive of these initiatives or at least do not interfere with them, in others they may create obstacles- either willingly or due to the lack of information.

The *insufficient cooperation between local and international organizations*, including UN agencies, in Azerbaijan also poses a significant challenge that hampers the effectiveness of their efforts to address the limited participation of

²⁹ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 4, January 2023

youth in peacebuilding and promote it within the country.³⁰ This lack of cooperation can be attributed to various factors, including disparities in organizational structures and priorities, as well as political sensitivities. International organizations often provide support based on their own agendas, without fully considering the specific needs and perspectives of local organizations.³¹ After the Second Karabakh War, international organizations with vested interests in fostering peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to predominantly adhere to their conventional method of involving youth in peace talks, which sometimes disregards youth factions holding different perspectives on peace. Some respondents from governmental institutions expressed strong dissatisfaction with the international organizations' bias towards Armenian and Georgian youth when selecting participants for various international projects, as they feel that youngsters from Azerbaijan are allotted a relatively smaller number of spots.³²

The lack of collaboration between local and international organizations limits the potential for synergy and coordinated action in advancing peacebuilding initiatives. By working in isolation, they miss out on the opportunity to leverage each other's strengths, expertise, and resources. This fragmented approach may result in duplicated efforts, inefficiencies, and gaps in addressing the root causes of the challenges faced by young people in peacebuilding.

It is important to put a strong emphasis on communication between local and international institutions for addressing the *internal inefficiencies within these institutions* concerning youth-related activities. On the one hand, while various initiatives in Azerbaijan aim to advance the youth agenda, there appears to be a lack of a definitive objective within international organizations, particularly the UN, which makes it difficult for government-affiliated institutions to actively engage with it. Common understanding is that there is a need for the

³⁰ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 1, January 2023

³¹ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 3, January 2023

³² Roundtable with representatives of government-affiliated organisations, June 2023

establishment of a single coordinating mechanism with a clear strategic roadmap about youth-related projects that could channel the institutional vision to the wider audience in the country.³³ Similarly, the lack of coordination between various government institutions responsible for youth affairs, coupled with disconnection from the genuine concerns of young individuals in the country, hinders the development of a comprehensive program aimed at improving the conditions of youth.³⁴ Yet some of the respondents see the problem in the lack of communication between the active youth and the society at large which, as they claim, is not properly informed about the youth initiatives and hence few people get an opportunity to have their voice heard. Specifically, poor access to the relevant information is noticed among the people in provinces. This problem also hurts the legitimacy of the existing programmes since they do not resonate enough with the general population. In the worst case, this alienation shades the reputation of the young peace activists who come to become perceived as at least suspicious or even treacherous in the eyes of the people unaware of their initiatives.

In this context, worth mentioning is the *disengagement of some international organizations*, including donor foundations, from Azerbaijan. This disconnection may negatively affect the cooperation opportunities, such as transfer of best practices and funding, between Azerbaijani and foreign stakeholders. Some of those organizations who might have regional presence and cover Azerbaijan usually work with a marginalized groups of experts and activists, whose outreach to local masses are usually quite limited.

Furthermore, the organizations who cover Azerbaijan but do not have offices in the country may usually use different schemes with their local partners for allocating funding. These schemes create non-transparent mechanisms and diminish the credibility of accomplished projects in the eyes of many.

³³ Roundtable with representatives of government-affiliated organisations, June 2023

³⁴ Roundtable with representatives of government-affiliated organisations, June 2023

The next problem, reported to damage the youth representation in the peace initiatives could be related to the *lack of proper data* that could have helped to diagnose existing deficiencies in the relevant policies and prepare policy advice for fixing them. Limited availability of comprehensive and up-to-date data on youth demographics, socio-economic indicators, and their engagement in peacebuilding efforts hinders effective planning and implementation of initiatives to involve young people in peacebuilding processes. Accordingly, Azerbaijan lacks a comprehensive youth database, particularly in the provinces, which makes it difficult to gather accurate and timely information on its young population. In turn, the absence of reliable data prevents policymakers and organizations from fully understanding the needs, aspirations, and challenges faced by young people in relation to peacebuilding. Some respondents are concerned with the control over access to available data by the government, which may limit opportunities for improving the situation with youth activism.³⁵

After the Second Karabakh War, some war veterans, most of who are at young age, may face the *feeling of marginalization* from employment opportunities and peacebuilding processes due to a lackluster implementation of the existing programs for reintegrating them into the society through long-term skills-building and job training programs. During the 3 post-war years, several steps have been taken to address the needs of the war veterans as the government has launched medical care and treatment programs for injured veterans, including specialised treatments, surgeries, and rehabilitation programs. Recognizing the psychological impact of the war, the government has established counselling and psychological support services for veterans to help them cope with the traumas they experienced during the conflict. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population and its Social Services Agency established call centres for psychological support and invited doctors from abroad (e.g. Türkiye) to provide treatment for the veterans. Efforts have also been made to create employment opportunities for them, including initiatives that prioritise their

³⁵ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 5, February 2023

recruitment in the public and private sectors. The Azerbaijani society has also been quite generous in helping young war veterans in their recovery from war traumas.

At the same time, one should point out to the *rising cost of life and inflation rates* (despite monthly financial support), *bureaucratic challenges and institutional hurdles* which may worsen deterioration of physical and psychological conditions of some veterans which, if not carefully dealt with in the nearest future, may entail an increase in the number of suicides attempts and other related social problems. The lack of military psychologists to deal with war-time traumas is also a serious problem when it comes to the rehabilitation of veterans. Local municipalities and administrative centers established contact points to deal with the problems of the youth affected by the war and families of the war victims, but they lack institutional capacity and most of the time professionalism to do it. Young veterans also need spaces for socialization which the government can easily provide to help them overcome their psychological problems and reintegrate into the society.

The government agencies can address the afore-mentioned issues and boost education opportunities designed to promote the culture of peace and YPS values and investment on human skills through comprehensive reintegration and rehabilitation plans that consider the needs of the youth affected by the war.

The crux of the problem lies to a certain extent in the *lack of communication between the government and civil society groups* who think that the other side is not fully committed to the youth rehabilitation and reintegration process. Thus, coordination of efforts in this regard would not only increase efficiency but also open up new avenues for the engagement of youth in communal and political life. Most importantly, the successful reintegration of war-affected youth would prevent the traumas being channeled to the next generations, hence decreasing pressure on the future peacebuilders.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTING THE YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN AZERBAIJAN

In Azerbaijan, engaging the youth in the YPS agenda can be achieved in *both formal (institutionalized) and informal (non-institutionalized) ways*. As a multifaceted social and political group, the youth naturally foster connections and relationships that span across formal and informal arenas. Young individuals may actively contribute to YPS agendas by amplifying critical perspectives to address conflict- and security-related matters, extending beyond their visible representation in peace talks or related negotiations. Many young Azerbaijanis, including IDPs, studied abroad on government and external scholarships and now create a pool of knowledgeable youth with the potential to offer creative solutions for peace and stability in the region. Young parliamentarians and public servants in leadership positions can act as bridge builders and role models for their peers, leading the way to adopt a future-oriented approach to peaceful co-existence. Furthermore, enabling greater access to decision-making processes and involving young people in delegations responsible for negotiating peace agreements would generate significant interest among youth in the peacebuilding process.

When it comes to non-institutional ways of youth engagement, the government in line with the call of the UNSCR 2250 may launch partnership frameworks with local communities and non-governmental organizations to achieve common goals and counter the negative influences hampering the prospects of peace. Working groups or advisory commissions involving young people with technical expertise in issues as diverse as security sector reform, conflict prevention and early warning systems or theoretical approaches to future peace scenarios can effectively contribute to the peacebuilding process. In order to build on young people's expertise through consultative spaces, the government can recruit young professionals and trainers to design capacity-building activities and integrate the achieved results into the overall program implementation process. While these projects can garner significant interest from young people, it must be

made sure that they attract engagement from different segments of the youth, thus not leaving behind the representatives from suburban or rural areas.

Successful implementation of the YPS framework in Azerbaijan can provide a platform for advocacy and *awareness-raising* on the importance of youth participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Azerbaijani youth and civil society organizations can work with UN agencies and other partners to raise awareness about the YPS framework and its potential to support peacebuilding efforts in the country. It can be used to develop policies that prioritize youth participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This can include establishing mechanisms for youth consultation and engagement in *policy development*, as well as providing funding and resources to support youth-led initiatives. In this regard, it can be useful to leverage *partnerships* with neighbouring countries to promote greater collaboration and exchange of ideas around the YPS agenda.

Education can and should play a critical role in promoting the YPS agenda in the country. UN agencies in collaboration with local organizations can invest in *educational programs* that promote peace and social justice and provide young people with the skills and knowledge they need to engage in peacebuilding efforts. It is crucial for making peace education accessible to a larger number of young people in the country and activate their potential to become peace advocates.³⁶ There is the need to provide more state support to grassroots peacebuilding, dissemination of peace values among the young people, particularly including young females. More specifically, some respondents interviewed for this project emphasised that these values should be promoted at high-school level, adding that this is currently almost impossible, while the interest in meeting and talking with the other side should be normalised and lose certain stigma it has today.³⁷ One respondent suggested that youth-oriented

³⁶ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 5, February 2023

³⁷ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 1, January 2023

peace projects should be made more goal-oriented, avoiding overly general and vague terms and formulations.³⁸ There is also the need to expand peace education activities, including conflict studies, dialogue and transformation training sessions. The government should consider sending more young people to the best universities of the world so that they gain necessary knowledge and worldview to become social leaders.³⁹ Furthermore, the Ministry of Science & Education and the Ministry of Youth & Sport should coordinate their activities along with the respective officials in the Presidential Administration and government agencies in order to pursue a unified and consistent policy aimed at stimulating youth participation.⁴⁰ Along with educational programs, given the high rate of *social media* usage in the country, utilising these platforms can be a powerful tool to reach a large number of young people for engaging them and promoting the YPS agenda.

In addition to these initiatives, specific measures should be taken to address the challenges faced by youth in peacebuilding. *Creating more projects for young people in conflict-affected zones* and providing financial support for their implementation is crucial. By empowering young individuals living in these areas, they can actively contribute to peacebuilding efforts and become agents of positive change. Efforts should also be made to reduce bureaucratic barriers that hinder the implementation of youth-led peacebuilding projects, since minimising administrative obstacles will enable young peacebuilders to carry out their initiatives more effectively.⁴¹ In this regard, there is a need to adopt legislation on corporate social responsibility which would introduce tax exemptions and other benefits for the organizations financing youth projects.

Addressing infrastructure problems, such as the lack of spaces for training and initiatives, is another crucial aspect.⁴² These dedicated spaces (especially in

³⁸ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 6, January 2023

³⁹ Author's interview with Representative from Academia, February 2023

⁴⁰ Author's interview with Civil Society Representative 5, February 2023

⁴¹ Focus group, May 2023

⁴² Focus group, May 2023

provinces) can serve as vibrant hubs for young peacebuilders, equipping them with necessary resources, support, and opportunities for training, workshops, and collaboration. It should be noted that many Gənclər Evi (Youth House) and Gənclər Mərkəzi (Youth Center) have been inaugurated by the Ministry of Youth & Sports over the years in multiple provinces. However, the respondents demand inclusive platforms that foster a sense of community, facilitate knowledge sharing, and encourage the exchange of ideas among young individuals passionate about peacebuilding. Such spaces can provide a conducive environment for youth empowerment and enable them to actively contribute to the promotion of peace within their communities.

To address the challenge of limited data on youth, fostering collaboration with local and international organizations would be beneficial. Using the experience of experienced institutions (e.g. CRRC, Pew) can ensure the *availability of reliable and comprehensive data* specifically focused on youth in the country. Through collaborating it becomes possible to obtain accurate insights into youth demographics, socioeconomic indicators, and their involvement in peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, simplifying bureaucratic procedures and reducing barriers to data collection, especially in provinces, is very important. Streamlining paperwork and improving coordination between government agencies would facilitate the gathering of accurate and timely information. This would enable policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to develop evidence-based strategies for youth engagement in peacebuilding. Furthermore, investing in the necessary infrastructure, technology, and databases is essential for effectively collecting, storing, and analysing youth-related data. Allocating more resources to develop a comprehensive youth database and ensuring the availability of up-to-date technology will enhance data collection and management processes.

As the previous chapter explained, the *disengagement from or limited engagement of some international organizations*, including donor foundations in Azerbaijan can be fixed. As the country enters a new stage, post-2020, much

emphasis is put on the issues of the rehabilitation of Karabakh (which contains both repopulation and infrastructure revival), demining activities, and pro-peace initiatives, both governmental agencies and civil society organizations may benefit from international experience. In this context, the support of foreign structures in the form of best practices and funding would be crucial to address the relevant topics. It might necessitate the active negotiation of Baku with some of prestigious organizations who might establish and/or re-establish their presence in Azerbaijan.

By inviting some organizations to directly operate in Azerbaijan, the government in Baku can make sure that their projects reflect the local needs and are not only based on the agendas of these organizations. Moreover, it should be in the best interest of the Azerbaijani authorities to establish transparency in the flow of grants and other types of funding by relaxing the conditions for foreign NGOs, which in many cases may use loopholes and/or various methods to bypass the registration in Azerbaijan.

Moreover, building *internal and cross-border networks* among young peacebuilders can enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing. Through networking platforms, young people can connect with one another, exchange ideas and experiences, and develop joint initiatives that contribute to peacebuilding efforts.⁴³ Additionally, building relationships between institutions in Armenia and Azerbaijan is essential to facilitate youth participation in reconciliation efforts. Establishing connections and fostering cross-border collaboration and dialogue can create platforms for young people to engage in meaningful discussions.

To further bolster youth engagement, providing specialized opportunities in areas such as history, peace education, and gender studies is crucial. By offering *targeted educational and training programs*, young individuals can develop

⁴³ Focus group, May 2023

expertise in specific fields related to peacebuilding.⁴⁴ This specialization contributes to the growth of researchers and activists who can bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to peacebuilding efforts. In this regard, it is crucial to promote and support initiatives that focus on translating existing peace and conflict studies material into local languages.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Youth, Peace and Security agenda, as embodied by UN Security Council Resolution 2250, holds great promise for Azerbaijan in fostering youth participation in peacebuilding processes. However, effective implementation of this agenda requires its contextualization within the country's unique socio-political landscape and understanding of the experiences and perspectives of young people. A youth- and gender-sensitive approach is essential in addressing the challenges faced by youth in decision-making processes, their vulnerability to conflict and violence, and their potential contributions to conflict prevention.

This study one more time proved that engaging the youth is crucial for sustainable peace and regional integration in the South Caucasus. The youth in Azerbaijan has suffered from the consequences of the long-standing conflict and have been excluded from the peace process. However, after the Second Karabakh War in 2020, there is an opportunity for peace, and involving the youth can facilitate this process. To achieve this, key objectives of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda, such as participation, partnerships, prevention, protection and disengagement, and re-integrations, need to be integrated into a would-be national youth policy and/or a national action plan.

The research demonstrates several challenges which should be tackled, including: the lack of dedicated funding for youth-led initiatives, which further

⁴⁴ Focus group, May 2023

⁴⁵ Focus group, May 2023

hinders their efforts; some structural challenges, such as lack of institutional support for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives; limited access to resources and meaningful representation in decision-making processes; the absence of peace education programs in the national curriculum; gender inequality and restricted opportunities for young women; limited spaces for training and initiatives; limited opportunities for direct contact between Azerbaijani and Armenian youth hinder communication and understanding; socioeconomic challenges, problems with youth employment⁴⁶, which limit their engagement in peacebuilding as they focus on meeting their basic needs; insufficient cooperation between local and international NGOs; the lack of comprehensive data on youth demographics and engagement in peacebuilding, which hinders effective planning and implementation of initiatives; marginalization of war veterans and a lack of comprehensive reintegration plans to meet their needs; political instability and remaining tensions, that hampers peacebuilding efforts and intercommunal dialogue.

The findings of the research are primarily based on personal interviews with civil society representatives actively engaged in peacebuilding, young peace activists, policy makers, and representatives of government-affiliated organizations, as well as the relevant experience of other countries.

From these findings, a number of recommendations have been developed regarding the preparation and implementation of an adequate, up-to-date YPS strategy. These recommendations are addressed to the different institutions. Below is the set of general recommendations addressed at the key stakeholders in the country, namely governmental agencies, international organizations and civil society. Some, more specific, from these recommendations then follow as a separate sub-chapter and are presented in a more elaborated manner.

⁴⁶ Focus group, May 2023

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

To the governmental bodies:

Updating youth strategies seems necessary because most of them predate 2020. However, the Second Karabakh War has not only changed geopolitical realities in the region but also introduced new, post-war conditions and spearheaded new dynamics within the country. Innovative youth strategies, including legislative frameworks ought to address these shifts, such as:

- updating the legislative youth framework in a way to address the YPS pillars, to enable youth participation in public and political affairs and in decision-making. Official youth-related documents such as the Azerbaijani Youth Development Strategy for 2015–2025 offer many opportunities for partnership with local communities and non-governmental organizations on youth affairs but there is still a way to go to make improvements in participation and prevention pillars. Taking into account that the document was approved before the Second Karabakh War, the concerns related to the active youth participation in the peacebuilding process should be recognized.

- launching partnership frameworks with local communities and non-governmental organizations, for example, by conducting frequent discussions and roundtable meetings specifically designed for and led by young individuals. These discussions and roundtable meetings should serve as platforms for open dialogue, collaboration and the exchange of ideas between young peacebuilders and key stakeholders such as government officials, civil society representatives and community leaders.

- boosting partnership with relevant international institutions in order to create a YPS Advisory Council. Based on the experience of similar WPS (Women, Peace and Security) Advisory Council and SDG Advisory Council, such a YPS Advisory Council could be an efficient platform to pre-plan, implement and keep track of a successful YPS strategy in the country.

- facilitating and motivating the operation of international organizations, especially those focusing on YPS-related activities directly in Azerbaijan. Providing a fertile ground for their arrival and comeback in the country could bring not only international expertise but also boost international partnerships and further integration of Azerbaijani youth in the global youth trends.
- providing support in developing policies and mechanisms for youth consultation and engagement in policy development. In this regard, working groups or advisory commissions involving young people with technical expertise to effectively contribute to the peacebuilding process should be formed. These discussions should focus on addressing the challenges faced by young people especially from the conflict-affected regions, identifying opportunities for their active participation and developing concrete strategies to involve them in peacebuilding processes.
- referring to the YPS framework in the documents and strategies prepared by various institutions in order to ensure policy consistency. This can include national policies, action plans, peacebuilding frameworks, and organizational strategies. By incorporating YPS into their official documents and by acknowledging its principles, institutions can demonstrate their commitment to recognizing and supporting the unique roles and needs of young people. These documents should outline concrete steps to engage young people, such as creating dedicated funding mechanisms, establishing youth advisory panels, and providing capacity-building opportunities.
- ensuring and fostering better coordination between the central government institutions that manage youth-related issues, as well as between central and local levels of governments. The implementation of the single youth policy based on the unified vision with similar standards in all the regions of Azerbaijan is the condition for implementing YPS in a successful manner. At the same time, it is also important to provide fruitful conditions for coordination, exchange and

networking among civil society organizations concerned with youth, in order for them to pool their resources and create new synergies.

- granting youth and youth-oriented civil society organizations financial, technical and legislative support to help in the implementation of major YPS policy-aligned projects aimed at youth empowerment and development. In turn, a thorough analysis of the activities and capacities of all the NGOs functioning in the youth sphere should be conducted on the part of the responsible state bodies in order to distinguish the functional and responsible organizations from those merely interested in doing formal activities for the sake of getting funding. Based on this research, state support should be exclusively reserved for the NGOs of the first group, in order to prevent the inefficient use of public funds and reward honest actors.

- introducing educational models focused on peace, conflict resolution and civic participation into high school and university curricula. This process may be launched as a pilot project in a number of selected institutions, and then generalized if successful outcomes are obtained. Additionally, providing specialized training for teachers and educators on peace education methodologies and conflict resolution techniques will enable them to effectively deliver the content and engage students in meaningful discussions. Furthermore, the establishment of peace clubs and extracurricular activities in schools and universities can serve as platforms for promoting dialogue, understanding, and peaceful conflict resolution among young people. These clubs can organize workshops, simulations, and interactive sessions to encourage active participation and practical application of peacebuilding concepts.

- establishing working mechanisms that would ensure unimpeded access of young people to the opportunities to learn the work of decision-making and decision-implementing state institutions, set standards for the practice of internships and fellowships for the youth and requirements for the minimum

representation of young people at national and local levels. Engaging foreign-educated youth specialized on peace and conflict studies.

- focusing on the prevention of marginalization of the people who have relocated to Baku recently, as well as to focus more on youth from the provinces of Azerbaijan. Given the process of active urbanization of the Baku area and the migration of people, mostly young, into the capital, this can be achieved by promoting economic development through supporting local businesses and social entrepreneurship.

- promoting YPS values in mainstream and social media. This can be achieved through content creation, social media campaigns, collaboration with influencers, interactive platforms, storytelling, and collaboration with media outlets. Influential figures, bloggers, and social media personalities who resonate with the youth audience can help amplify the message of YPS values by sharing relevant content, participating in online discussions, and encouraging their followers to engage in peacebuilding initiatives. By utilizing these strategies, the message of YPS values, such as inclusivity, non-violence, and gender equality, can reach a broader audience, inspire youth participation, and foster positive social change.

- providing state support and making it clear to the general public that the peacebuilders' activities do not contradict national interests, is exceptionally salient from the point of view of securing their active participation in social life and capacity to spread their message and fulfil effective projects in the respective fields. In this regard, more space should be ensured for the young people, in the traditional mass media communication such as TV, radio and press, particularly with regard to voicing and discussing relevant challenges and risks facing the youth.

- establishing an ongoing intergenerational dialogue that brings young and older generations closer together to prevent ageism. This dialogue can be done

through establishing regular intergenerational forums and events to foster dialogue and an honest and productive exchange of opinions, allowing both sides to understand each other's perspectives and concerns. Taking into account the traditional dominance of the old generation in the Azerbaijani society, it is particularly important to ensure they hear the genuine concerns of the youth.

- addressing traditional roles, gender inequality and promote young women's engagement in peacebuilding, firstly, it is essential to establish supportive policies and frameworks which will encourage female expertise through mentorship, networking, and visibility initiatives. Secondly, specific attention should be paid to the guarantees of equitable and unhindered female participation, in case there are socio-economic issues that hinder such participation. Thirdly, collaboration with international organizations like UN Women in Azerbaijan and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) can facilitate capacity-building and training opportunities for young women in peacebuilding. Finally, a broad discussion about the arguments for and against joining the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Istanbul Convention and other similar international frameworks involving the Parliament, relevant executive bodies, experts and civil society activists, should be organized.

- creating a comprehensive youth database and streamlined data collection processes to gather accurate and up-to-date information on youth demographics and socio-economic indicators. In this regard, it would be useful to foster cooperation with local and international organizations to ensure the availability of reliable and comprehensive data on youth in the country. However, to facilitate the gathering of accurate and timely information, it is crucial to reduce bureaucratic barriers and simplify procedures for data collection, especially in provinces. This should involve simplifying paperwork and improving coordination between central and regional government agencies, allocating more resources and investing in the necessary infrastructure, including

technology and databases, to collect, store, and analyse youth-related data effectively.

- involving private sector organizations in these processes by establishing a robust global social responsibility ecosystem. By implementing projects aimed at creating a comprehensive ecosystem of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it will be possible to foster increased participation of young people in the private sector. This can be achieved by stimulating private companies to develop CSR initiatives focused on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, supporting youth-led organizations working in these areas, and providing mentorship and internship opportunities for young peacebuilders.

To the international organizations:

- **(to the UN specifically):** establishing a dedicated focal point within the UN in Azerbaijan that can effectively coordinate and guide efforts related to the YPS agenda. This focal point should serve as a central hub for collaboration, communication, and implementation, working closely with government entities and youth organizations to ensure a coherent and comprehensive approach. By having a clear focal point, it would be possible to enhance coordination, streamline initiatives, and provide the necessary support and resources to empower youth in their peacebuilding and security efforts. It is also important to promote clarity, visibility and focal points in the country, similar to the successful promotion of the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs).

- investing in educational programs that promote peace, social justice, and conflict transformation, making peace education accessible to a larger number of young people, including conflict studies, dialogue, and transformation training sessions. In addition, providing resources and expertise to design and implement capacity-building activities for young people in Azerbaijan can be helpful, as well as supporting the development of technical expertise in areas such as security sector reform, conflict prevention, and early warning systems.

- investing in the development and translation of training materials on peace and conflict theories into local languages, ensuring accessibility and cultural relevance by working with local experts, academics, and practitioners to adapt existing materials or create new ones that align with the specific context of Azerbaijan.

- establishing a dedicated resource center that houses a comprehensive collection of materials, including books, articles, research papers, and multimedia resources on peace and conflict studies in Azerbaijani. In addition to these materials, online platforms or repositories where young people can access a wide range of open-access materials on peace and conflict theories in the local language can be crucial. In both cases, it is important to collaborate with local universities, research institutions, and international organizations to compile and share these resources.

- increasing the availability of centers for training and initiatives, especially in provinces, to facilitate youth participation in peacebuilding efforts. These centers can provide resources, such as meeting rooms, training materials, and technological equipment, to support youth-led initiatives and foster collaboration among young people. It is also important to support existing community centers, cultural facilities, and educational institutions in provinces that can be utilized as spaces for youth training and initiatives by providing funding and resources to upgrade and equip these facilities to meet the specific needs of youth engagement in peacebuilding activities.

- designing programs which take into account local peculiarities without imposing existing frameworks from other contexts. Recognizing and understanding the unique cultural, social, and political dynamics of the local context is crucial for ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of these programs. This can be done by actively engaging with youth, local civil society organizations and government bodies. It will help to develop interventions that address the specific challenges faced by local youth.

To the civil society organizations:

- working with the governmental and international organizations to advocate for greater youth participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Raise awareness about the importance of youth involvement and push for the implementation of policies and mechanisms that prioritize youth engagement. It can be done through organizing and supporting peace education initiatives at the grassroots level.
- engaging young people through youth-led peace initiatives, including workshops, seminars, and dialogue sessions, encouraging youth to participate in peace clubs or organizations where they can develop leadership skills and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. By involving youth actively, civil society can ensure that the next generation is committed to peaceful coexistence and social harmony and raise a new generation of peacebuilders with a focus on a more realist and balanced stance, without the burden of mistakes and illusions of the past.
- formulating a working definition of youth that acknowledges their diversity and refrains from treating them as a homogenous group. It is crucial to acknowledge the diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences that young people bring to peacebuilding initiatives, including factors such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and geographic location. When developing programs and activities aimed at engaging youth in peacebuilding, it is important to specify the demographic group being targeted, ensuring that the initiatives are inclusive, responsive, and designed to address the specific needs, perspectives, and aspirations.
- taking into account certain prejudices existing against peace activists, both within the bureaucracy and among the general population. This is why all peacebuilding initiatives should take into account the depth of existing war-related traumas and choose their goals and language carefully. It is also

recommended to avoid assigning these projects to certain people whose exaggeratedly pacifist positions and unwillingness to take into account local context made them look alien and not only reduce their outreach to society but also antagonize their initiatives.

- harnessing the power of media and communication to promote peace values and disseminate positive messages, collaborating with journalists, bloggers, and influencers to highlight stories of reconciliation, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence, and using social media platforms, online campaigns, and traditional media outlets to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and promote peaceful narratives.

- evaluating and monitoring the impact of initiatives to assess their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments, gathering feedback from participants, conduct surveys, and measure indicators of attitude and behaviour change. This data can inform future programming and help refine strategies for greater impact.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation on Peace Education (formal)

To the Ministry of Education & Science:

- institutionalizing and integrating peace education into Azerbaijan's educational system. The Ministry of Education & Science can introduce an educational model focused on peace and conflict resolution into school curricula. This model can be based on international peace education experience, such as the Education for Peace model from Bosnia and Herzegovina. To be precise, the peace education program should apply a holistic approach, encompassing various dimensions of peace, including personal, social, and structural aspects, by recognizing that peacebuilding involves addressing not only the immediate symptoms of conflict

but also the underlying causes and structures that perpetuate violence. As a starting point, a pilot project can be launched in a select number of institutions to assess the effectiveness of the proposed changes. If successful outcomes are obtained, the initiative can then be expanded to all educational institutions across the country. The program itself should include dedicated lessons and activities focused on conflict resolution, tolerance, human rights, diversity, and intercultural understanding and should aim to challenge stereotypes, promote empathy, and encourage critical thinking among students. It can include experiential learning methods, such as storytelling, role-playing, simulations, and cooperative games, which will foster empathy, perspective-taking, and understanding of different viewpoints. In addition, the program can include intercultural exchanges, student-led initiatives, peace-building projects, and community service programs. While introducing this curriculum, there is a need for specialized training to be provided to teachers to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and pedagogical approaches needed to deliver peace education effectively. Teachers should learn about conflict analysis, dialogue facilitation, nonviolent communication, and transformative pedagogy. Given the post-war context, the model should also address the healing of trauma by providing support mechanisms for students and teachers who have experienced the impact of conflict, aiming to create spaces for forgiveness and collective healing. Finally, the effectiveness and impact of the model should be continually evaluated and monitored by studying the outcomes and benefits of peace education implementation, providing insights for further improvements and adjustments.

- integrating the peace narratives into the local curriculum. Regardless of whether systematic peace education can be implemented or not, textbooks mostly on social sciences (e.g. history) for schools and colleges can employ more peaceful narratives by maintaining the patriotic framework in general.

- fostering the development of experts equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and perspectives to tackle the complex challenges in terms of conflict

resolution and peacebuilding, the Ministry of Education & Science can introduce a Master of Arts (MA) program in Peace Studies in one or several of the local universities. The MA program should emphasize practical skill development to equip students with the necessary tools for addressing real-world conflicts. Training in negotiation, mediation, dialogue facilitation, and peacebuilding strategies would enable graduates to make meaningful contributions in various sectors, including government, international organizations, NGOs, and academia.⁴⁷ The design and practical implementation of such a program can benefit from international collaboration with educational institutions who have similar programs and/or academicians specialized in this matter.

Recommendation on Peace Education (non-formal)

To the Ministry of Education & Science:

- encouraging the establishment of peace clubs and extracurricular activities in schools and universities, which can serve as platforms for promoting dialogue, understanding, and peaceful conflict resolution among young people. These clubs can organize workshops, simulations, and interactive sessions to encourage active participation and practical application of peacebuilding concepts.
- investing in the development and translation of existing peace and conflict studies material into Azerbaijani language, ensuring accessibility and cultural relevance by working with local experts, academics, and practitioners.
- establishing a dedicated resource center (offline and online) that houses a comprehensive collection of open-access materials, including books, articles, research papers, and multimedia resources on peace and conflict studies in

⁴⁷ The MA program can potentially be based on the model created by Anar Valiyev, through his extensive research conducted in various countries, including Finland.

Azerbaijani. To collaborate with local universities, research institutions, and international organizations to compile and share these resources.

To the United Nations in Azerbaijan:

- investing in educational programs that promote peace, social justice, and conflict transformation, making peace education accessible to a larger number of young people (especially from conflict-affected regions), including conflict studies, dialogue, and transformation training sessions. Some of these educational programs can be adopted to the “Conflict School”⁴⁸ methodology, which emphasizes critical thinking training, comprehensive dimensions of conflict transformation, and an intersectional approach. It has a 30% quota for conflict-affected populations in all conflict resolution initiatives, ensuring representation from marginalized groups, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and veterans' families.
- providing resources and expertise to design and implement capacity-building activities for young people, as well as support the development of technical expertise in areas such as security sector reform, conflict prevention, and early warning systems among young promising people.
- collaborating with international evaluation specialists to comprehensively assess the impact of conflict resolution training conducted in Azerbaijan on young individuals. It can be done by inviting proficient foreign specialists experienced in gauging transformative outcomes within conflict resolution initiatives. This process can also involve investing resources in building the capacities of local experts, empowering them to effectively gauge and quantify transformative changes and establishing a robust evaluation framework centered around key progress indicators and sustained long-term effects.

⁴⁸ Program organized by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation Azerbaijan

- Investing in public relations efforts to promote stories of reconciliation, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence is a strategic and impactful way to advance peace values and disseminate positive messages. Collaborating with journalists, bloggers, and influencers can help amplify these narratives across various platforms, including social media, online campaigns, and traditional media outlets, thereby fostering a culture of peace and understanding.
- supporting events (e.g. summer schools) which would promote YPS agenda in Azerbaijan. By organizing such activities, the UN can also put an emphasis on the multinational composition by inviting participants from other, neighbouring countries.

Recommendation on Gender Equality

To the State Committee for the Family, Women and Children's Affairs:

- collaborating with specific organizations (e.g. the Women, Peace and Security Advisory Council, Gender Hub) through a framework document (e.g. Memorandum of Understanding) to outline the objectives, responsibilities, and areas of collaboration, developing joint awareness and advocacy campaigns to raise public awareness about women's rights, gender-based violence, and the importance of promoting a peaceful and inclusive society. These campaigns can engage various educational and community organizations and should recognise the intersectionality of identities within youth and address the unique experiences of young women with disabilities, from minority groups, and with diverse cultural backgrounds.
- investing in gender-disaggregated data collection and research to better understand the unique challenges and barriers faced by young women in Azerbaijan in regard with YPS values. This data should inform evidence-based policymaking and the development of targeted interventions to address gender

inequalities in the security field. In addition, funding studies to assess the impact of gender-sensitive youth programs on peace and security outcomes to ensure that strategies are effective and evidence-based.

To the United Nations in Azerbaijan:

- investing in education and training programs that would equip women with the necessary knowledge and skills for peacebuilding. These programs should focus on enhancing women's leadership, negotiation, conflict resolution, and mediation skills. Partnering with educational institutions and experts in the field, as well as international stakeholders (e.g. OSCE) which implement various programs in this field can help provide comprehensive training.
- developing and implementing clear, comprehensive guidelines and mechanisms for the systematic integration of gender considerations into government and security sector policies. These guidelines and mechanisms should not only be applied at the national level but also disseminated and incorporated into the practices of local organizations and institutions, ensuring a consistent and inclusive approach to gender mainstreaming. Monitoring the enforcement of these guidelines and mechanisms is also important.
- organizing networking events and platforms to connect women peacebuilders with relevant stakeholders, including donors and international entities. In addition, creating mentorship programs that pair experienced women peacebuilders with newbies.
- allocating specific funds and resources to support women-led peacebuilding initiatives. This can include grants, scholarships, and seed funding for projects implemented by women and women's organizations. Access to financial resources is vital for women to engage in peacebuilding activities effectively.
- establishing safe spaces and supporting services specifically for young women affected by conflict or violence. These spaces should provide counselling, legal

aid, vocational training, and livelihood support, addressing the specific barriers young women face and empowering them to actively participate in peacebuilding.

- promoting entrepreneurship among women affected by conflict, by providing financial support, training, and access to markets. Encourage the creation of women-led businesses and cooperatives, as economic empowerment is a crucial component of gender equality and peacebuilding. Consider leveraging the experiences and successful models of women resource centers by UN, with a specific focus on tailoring these resources to the unique needs of conflict-affected women.

Recommendation on Corporate social responsibility

To the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and private sector:

- involving private sector organizations in these processes by establishing a robust global social responsibility ecosystem. By implementing projects aimed at creating a comprehensive ecosystem of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), it will be possible to foster increased participation of young people in the private sector. This can be achieved by stimulating private companies to develop CSR initiatives focused on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, supporting youth-led organizations working in these areas, and providing mentorship and internship opportunities for young peacebuilders. Stronger links between business, education, and social protection institutions should be forged so that big companies can provide more focused training to young people, especially those of socioeconomically unfavourable backgrounds, enabling them to become a qualified workforce and properly integrate into society. A number of YPS reports on developing countries (e.g. Nigeria⁴⁹) emphasize that fighting

⁴⁹ “The missing peace: independent progress study on youth, peace and security”. Available at: <https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy>

youth unemployment and marginalization is one of the most efficient ways to prevent young people from sliding into extremism and violence.

To the Yaşat Fund and DOST Agency:

- currently, existing corporate measures mostly provide passive help (e.g. Azercell's⁵⁰ concessionary tariff for war veterans). Moreover, though currently there are existing programmes aimed at employing war veterans, more efforts can be taken to address their specific issues, since those veterans with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological issues may experience difficulties adapting to the corporate environment and hence employers are often unwilling to hire or retain them, which by making them economically more vulnerable exacerbates the challenges they face. This is why psychological support service for the war veterans should also cover their workspace adaptation and facilitate understanding between them and companies.

To the Ministry of Economy:

- launching youth-oriented initiatives in order to stimulate the private sector, the state should be ready to provide financial support and expertise. For example, those companies that run programmes for training and employing veteran youth and those from disadvantaged backgrounds should receive subsidies and other rewards in case they successfully employ the programme beneficiaries. Business activities aimed at youth training and/or promoting YPS values to some extent can also be exempt from and/or receive concessions regarding taxes.

⁵⁰ Azercell is an Azerbaijani telecommunications company based in Baku. It is the largest mobile network operator in Azerbaijan.

Recommendation on Youth participation in the official peace process

To the Ministry of Youth & Sport:

- organizing training programs for government officials and relevant stakeholders, emphasizing the efficiency and benefits of inclusive youth participation throughout the policy-making process. Equip them with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively engage with and harness the potential of young individuals in peace-related initiatives.
- establishing regular youth consultation panels where government officials can directly interact with young representatives. These panels should be part of the decision-making process and provide a platform for young people to express their views, ideas, and concerns related to peace and policy-making. In addition, host public hearings and forums that specifically invite youth voices on topics related to peace, security, and conflict resolution. This allows young people to contribute their perspectives and expertise directly to the legislative process.
- supporting research initiatives that underscore the understanding of hindering factors for youth participation and existing trends on their participation, inter alia, impact of youth representation in internal and external settings.
- introducing incentives and recognition systems to encourage government officials and stakeholders to actively involve young people in peace initiatives. Recognizing and rewarding those who support, and mentor youth can promote greater involvement.
- developing specialized trainings for young diplomats, providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to represent their countries in international fora effectively.

To the Milli Məclis:

- integrating youth delegates into relevant parliamentary committees, such as the Youth and Sports Committee. Ensure that these youth delegates have a voice and a vote in committee decisions, especially those related to peace and security. In addition, establish clear legislative frameworks that promote and mandate inclusive youth representation at all stages of the peacebuilding process and broader societal decision-making. Ensure that these frameworks include mechanisms for reporting and accountability.
- introducing new mechanisms and frameworks in legislation for promoting inclusive youth representation at all stages of the peacebuilding process and societal decision-making. In this regard, encourage and support youth involvement in shaping draft laws and amendments by soliciting their input and feedback on proposed legislation. Create platforms for youth to submit policy recommendations and actively consider their views in the decision-making process.

Recommendation on Data on Youth

To the State Statistical Committee and other relevant governmental bodies:

- creating a valid database consisting of contextual indicators of young people in Azerbaijan, such as youth participation in society, employment and entrepreneurship, education, and training of youth as well as social inclusion. Regularly update the database to ensure it remains current and relevant to the changing needs and circumstances of young people in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- allocating resources to invest in the necessary infrastructure, including technology and databases, to effectively collect, store, and analyze youth-

related data. This will enhance data collection and management processes and ensure the availability of up-to-date information.

- introducing intersectional data collection methods to comprehensively capture the diverse aspects of youth demographics, socio-economic indicators, and their involvement in peacebuilding efforts. Include dimensions such as gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, educational background, and social status to provide a nuanced understanding of youth needs in conflict and post-conflict scenarios.

- collaborating with international organizations and experts to align data collection methods with international standards, promoting data comparability and allowing for global insights into youth-related issues. It can also help to develop analytical tools and models to effectively assess and interpret the data gathered, providing valuable insights for policymaking and program development aimed at youth empowerment and peacebuilding. In this regard, cooperating with established international organizations (e.g. Caucasus Research Resource Center - CRRC). By engaging with international organizations, Azerbaijan can strengthen its data collection processes and gain access to a broader and more interconnected perspective, ultimately advancing the development of evidence-based policies and initiatives that address the unique needs of youth people.

- ensuring that collected data is made accessible to the public, policymakers, and researchers to promote informed decision-making and foster a culture of accountability. However, in doing so, it is equally crucial to maintain stringent data privacy and security measures to safeguard sensitive information. Promoting transparency in data sharing and utilization further bolsters the credibility of collected data and reinforces public trust in the process. By striking a balance between data accessibility and security, a stronger foundation for data-driven decision-making and effective youth-related interventions can be established.

- Identifying and eliminating formal and non-formal barriers that impede efficient data collection. In this regard, simplifying bureaucratic procedures and reduce barriers to data collection, especially in provinces, by optimizing paperwork and enhancing coordination between central and regional government agencies.

To the Ministry of Youth & Sport

- mapping youth-led initiatives and youth focused actions related to peacebuilding activities in order to provide youth workers with adequate support to carry out violence prevention actions. It is also detrimental to map stakeholders to develop guidelines for legislation related to conflict transformation.

- creating a pool of young researchers who are properly trained and educated to carry out quantitative and qualitative research. Youth participation in data collection is essential to reach tangible results, therefore this action will amplify the data assessment process and provide a basis for availability of up-to-date and legitimate data to assess the needs of youth when necessary. Facilitating collaboration between these researchers and established academic institutions to promote rigorous research methodologies and knowledge sharing.

Recommendation on intergenerational dialogue

To the governmental bodies:

- establishing a continuous intergenerational dialogue that brings young and older generations closer to prevent ageism. This dialogue can be achieved by establishing regular intergenerational forums and events to foster dialogue and an honest and productive exchange of opinions, allowing both sides to understand each other's perspectives and concerns. Taking into account the traditional dominance of the old generation in Azerbaijani society, it is essential to ensure they hear the genuine concerns of the youth.

- providing a space where all age categories feel encouraged to discuss their approach to intergenerational collaboration on different aspects of civic life, including but not limited to the future co-existence with Armenia as a peaceful neighbouring country. It will also require recognizing the expertise of young peacebuilders and including them in the design and implementation stages of the peacebuilding process. Young people should not be expected to just aimlessly follow orders from the other, mostly non-youth stakeholders but be supported to offer their own solutions. The idea of inclusivity should be built not only on the fact that these people are young but also because they have relevant experience and knowledge.
- ensuring that equal and mutually beneficial intergenerational partnerships recognize the youth a space to push back against culture-driven exclusion such as accusing the youth of ingratitude for its critical approach to certain aspects of the discussed issue. As it may affect funding prospects, it can estrange youth-led groups from the dialogue process.
- including age as a factor to consider when determining who should be included in programming, events, and funding. Also, it is essential to ensure that the participation of the youth organizations in the intergenerational dialogue does not suffer from nepotism and elitism where those who have access to power thanks to privileged backgrounds are invited to the events while those, especially the youth from rural parts of the country are excluded.
- enhancing the funding application process to promote collaborative submissions, fostering cooperation between youth-led organizations, or organizations representing diverse youth sections, instead of pitting them against each other in competition.

To the international organizations:

- In collaboration with the Azerbaijani government, developing and implementing concrete plans targeting intergenerational dialogue and meaningful inclusion of the youth in the peacebuilding initiatives.
- providing accessible and long-term financial support to local youth organizations participating in the intergenerational dialogue.
- providing funding for relationship-building activities among the leaders of different generations.

To the civil society organizations:

- organizing workshops, forums, and dialogue sessions for meaningful discussion across different generations of peacebuilders. It is vital to promote discussion between generations on the meaning and consequences of certain aspects of social life that older people understand but younger generations may not.
- establishing organizational linkages to ensure continuous communication between different generations of peacebuilders beyond the duration of the intergenerational dialogue programs.
- maximizing effectiveness in supporting peacebuilding groups and dialogues, prioritize the thorough analysis of stakeholders during activity planning. This approach will help identify all relevant groups and understand local power dynamics and influential factors.

Recommendation on encouraging of international organizations in Azerbaijan

To the Presidential Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

- inviting some prestigious international structures, such as NGOs and foundations, to establish and re-establish their physical presence in Azerbaijan. As the country deals with the post-2020 issues which contain the mega-projects in Karabakh such as the Great Return (repopulation of the region with former IDPs, who might need psychological and capacity building support), demining, including mining awareness, it can be interested in importing funding and expertise on these relevant topics. This would allow the government to discuss the Azerbaijan-related agenda of the foreign structures and polish it to meet the local needs and expectations.

To the Ministry of Justice:

- relaxing the conditions of operation of international organizations in Azerbaijan. By offering lenient terms for them, the Ministry can make sure that Azerbaijan-related projects become more transparent in terms of funding and implementation, which in some cases nowadays may use loopholes and/or various methods to bypass the registration in Azerbaijan.

To international organizations

- operating directly in Azerbaijan would be beneficial in many aspects. Some of those organizations which may have regional presence and cover Azerbaijan usually work with a marginalized groups of experts and activists, whose outreach to local masses are usually quite limited. In order to break this monopoly and have bigger impact on society by learning the local needs, the South Caucasus-oriented initiatives should be interested in working in the country in collaboration with the central authorities and civil society organizations.

ANNEX 1

Personal interviews with representatives of:

- “Common Sense” Youth Organization
- Center for Studies of the South Caucasus
- Eurasia Partnership Foundation Azerbaijan
- “Femact” Azerbaijan's Women Fund
- “IMAGINE” Center for Conflict Transformation
- Ministry of Education & Science of Azerbaijan
- Berghof Foundation in Azerbaijan
- Women, Peace, and Security Advisory Council Azerbaijan
- Independent experts, researchers, trainers
- Peace activists
- Former IDPs

Focus Group with students and young activists:

- Young people actively engaged in various local and regional peacebuilding initiatives. Some of them have implemented conflict transformation projects with the support of international organizations.

Round table with representatives of government-affiliated organizations:

- Azerbaijani Students and Alumni Platform (ASAP)
- “Irelı” Public Union
- Ministry of Youth & Sports of the Republic of Azerbaijan
- Ministry of Science & Education
- National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA)
- “One Volunteer” Students Cooperation Public Union
- Union of Volunteer Organizations of Azerbaijan
- Youth Foundation of the Republic of Azerbaijan



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