Executive Summary

Youth, Peacebuilding, and the Role of Education

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The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (IN EE) is an open, global network that promotes access to quality, safe, and relevant education for all persons affected by crisis.

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The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is an open, global network of representatives from non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, donor agencies, governments, and academic institutions that are working together to ensure the right to a safe, good-quality education for all people affected by crises. To learn more, please visit www.ineesite.org.

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Cover image: Death of Innocence mural in Derry, Ireland, by The Bogside Artists, 2000. Photo taken by Mieke T. A. Lopes-Cardozo, July 2016. The mural commemorates fourteen-year-old Annette McGavigan who was shot by a British soldier in 1971, the 100th victim of the Troubles and one of the first children to be killed. The little colored stones at her feet are objects she was collecting for a school project. The broken gun signals a call for and end to violence. Here the innocence of a child’s world contrasts vividly with the chaotic violence with which others have surrounded her.
Acknowledgments

This thematic paper, *Youth, Peacebuilding, and the Role of Education*, was authored by Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo (Assistant Professor of International Development Studies, University of Amsterdam) and Giovanni Scotto (University of Florence, Georg Arnhold Visiting Professor in Education for Sustainable Peace).

This thematic paper contributes to the independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security mandated in 2015 by the United Nations Secretary-General to inform United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250. INEE acknowledges that this paper reflects the expertise and areas of work of its two authors and their ambition to cover a broad range of debates and insights on the subject. Feedback from a variety of reviewers is fundamental to the quality of the work presented here. Nevertheless, all ideas and interpretations are solely those of the two authors.

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Introduction

Adopted unanimously in December 2015, United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) is the first UN resolution on youth, peace, and security. It recognizes the importance of young women and men as agents in the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security (United Nations, 2017).

The full thematic paper on Youth, Peacebuilding, and the Role of Education outlines key debates and insights on the role of education in relation to UNSCR 2250 and the youth, peace, and security (YPS) agenda. UNSCR 2250 requires the UN Secretary-General to “carry out a Progress Study on youth’s positive contribution to the peace processes and conflict resolution” and to present the results to the UN Member States (UN Security Council, 2015, p. 5). The objective of the paper is to provide stimuli for the YPS independent Progress Study and, at the same time, to serve as a discussion piece for policy-makers, practitioners, and scholars.

The international community’s increased attention to the role of education in conflict-affected areas corresponds with the increasingly popular view that young people are important actors in sustainable peacebuilding. UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) on Youth, Peace and Security urges member states to recognize the potential of young people to act as constructive change agents for peace. UNSCR 2250 also includes several direct references to the importance of education and lays out broad mandates for education-system actors to promote youth participation in education. However, like many educational interventions, the resolution primarily and narrowly conceptualizes education as a driver of young people’s economic participation and civil political engagement.
This paper highlights five key messages:

**PEACE – Five Key Messages**

In order to build sustainable peace and better serve young people’s needs through education, there is an immediate need to carry out “P-E-A-C-E”:

1. **PRIORITY**ZE education funding and resources for young women and men in order to achieve the goals formulated in UNSCR 2250 to address the root causes of inequality and violent conflict and enable **reconciliation** across generations and groups in society.

2. **EMBED** in global responses the progressive and preventive potential of education to address inequalities and build sustaining peace by improving support for teachers and providing more meaningful **representation** of young people’s realities and needs.

3. **ADEQUATELY** assess and respond to the potential of education to contribute negatively to conflict and violence, and ensure that educational institutions, students, and teachers are **protected** from direct attacks.

4. **CREATE** partnerships to translate conflict-sensitive, gender-responsive, and youth-informed reforms of formal and non-formal education into system-wide approaches at, above, and below the state level in order to **engage** young people’s peacebuilding potential.

5. **ENACT** the more holistic and relevant educational opportunities young people demand in order to fully develop all sociocultural, political, and economic aspects of youth **empowerment**, and, as a result, enable meaningful youth **participation**, (dis)engagement, and (re)integration.
SECTION I
In first section of the thematic paper on Youth, Peacebuilding, and the Role of Education, the authors argue that the global community pays relatively little attention to the sociocultural aspects of young people's identity and agency. As such, many educational interventions miss the opportunity to integrate youth agency and strategies for peacebuilding with the roles, actions, and hopes of young people living in conflict situations. The starting point for this paper is the question of how education can engage and support youth in long-term peacebuilding processes and conflict transformation. The authors closely examine UNSCR 2250 to assess the resolution's representation of education and identify its possible limitations and gaps.

SECTION II
The authors' analytical approach is presented in the second section of the paper. It begins with a comprehensive definition of youth agency for peacebuilding and calls on readers to sideline the "victim-perpetrator" binary and instead to see agency as a way for various individual and collective actors to develop successful strategies for building peace within the broader cultural, political, and economic contexts of conflict. The authors then discuss "The Four Rs (4Rs) Framework" for peacebuilding, which links ideas from social justice and transitional justice with an understanding of the multiple dimensions and directions of inequality (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, & Smith, 2017). The paper builds on the idea that formal and non-formal learning environments that address the 4Rs—recognition, redistribution, representation, and reconciliation—are best suited to address young people's needs and to promoting sustainable peace.

SECTION III
UNSCR 2250 identifies five pillars for fostering young people's participation in building sustainable peace: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. In the third section of this paper, the authors discuss how each UNSCR 2250 pillar complements one or more of the 4Rs with the recommendations it makes to UN member states. A brief summary is provided here:

- **UNSCR 2250 Pillar I: Participation.** Member states are encouraged to include youth representation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes whenever possible. More work is needed to ensure that such participation is transformative and that young people's representation is not tokenistic.

- **UNSCR 2250 Pillar II: Protection.** Education is not directly included as an element of the protection pillar, which the authors argue is a crucial omission of UNSCR 2250. Attacks on students and schools by groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Al Shabaab in East Africa demonstrate that education systems are vulnerable. Students and schools rely on governments and the international community to make specific commitments that recognize students’ vulnerability and potential to be victimized during conflict, and to redistribute resources that provide physical and psychological security to young people affected by conflict.

- **UNSCR 2250 Pillar III: Prevention.** The notion that employment and constructive political and civic engagement underlie conflict prevention appears in the language of the prevention pillar. UNSCR 2250 frames education as a means for young people to acquire professional or vocational training or learn to become entrepreneurs, which locates young people's agency as economic and political actors. A more comprehensive view of agency would also take seriously young people's sociocultural identities, implying a recognition of those identities through transformative postconflict education, as well as reconciliation of the injustices brought upon members of particular communities during a conflict. UNSCR 2250 urges Member States to support "quality education for peace" that equips youth with the skills and knowledge "to engage in civic structures and political processes" (p. 4). However, quality is not adequately defined. Young people often report the need for comprehensive education reform after a conflict, including a change in subjects taught, methods of instruction, teacher selection and training, and textbooks and teaching materials.
UNSCR 2250 Pillar IV: Partnership. This pillar identifies youth, families, women, and religious, cultural, and education leaders as actors in the process of preventing violent extremism. In so doing, UNSCR 2250 calls on Member States, including education actors, to develop context-relevant approaches that “engage youth meaningfully” and involve relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in “developing strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative that can incite terrorist acts” (pp. 4-5). Pillar IV implies that there is be a need for more inclusive representation of marginalized stakeholders in strategies to promote social inclusion and cohesion.

Pillar V: Disengagement and Reintegration. This pillar interprets the role of education in building the capabilities and skills that young people need to meet labor market demands and ensure their employment, both of which are crucial aspects of reintegration for youth affected by armed conflict. The emphasis on economic agency and employment, while narrow, lends itself to redistributive activities. This pillar recognizes that education aimed at building young peoples’ capabilities and skills should be “designed in a manner which promotes a culture of peace” (p. 5). However, it lacks clarity in terms of how to address the concerns of recognition and reconciliation in education practice, an issue this paper elaborates on.

SECTION IV

In the fourth section of this paper the authors focus on contentious issues related to power in education systems. They examine cases where the following issues have been drivers of conflict: education policy and governance; the school site as the locus of violence or resistance; and the relationship between education, social inequality, and violence. A greater emphasis on the 4Rs framework would better position UNSCR 2250 to counter these forces. The authors argue, for example, that resources should be redistributed among marginalized students. Diverting resources that provide equitable access to school facilities and enable the implementation of measures that promote students’ sense of security at school are the goals of UNSCR 2250 Pillars I and II – protection and participation.

Pillars I, III, and IV, protection, prevention, and partnership, elevate the recognition of marginalized groups during the peace process. In education systems, this can be done through more equitable policies on language of instruction and more inclusive curricula, to offer just two examples. Representation of marginalized groups in education systems is possible by creating governing bodies that are ethnically, linguistically, and gender balanced; informed by youth voices; and carried out through inclusive pedagogical approaches. The authors believe that representation of this sort is at least in part the intention behind Pillars I, III, and IV. Finally, reconciliation points to the ways school systems and content can begin to heal students’ broken trust and redress past and present grievances, thereby creating transformation and alternative pathways to a more sustainable and peaceful future.

SECTION V

Section five provides a set of recommendations for unleashing education’s transformative potential to support reconciliation and peacebuilding, as informed by insights from research. Special attention is given to the voices of young people and youth organizations. Where relevant, the authors identify how the recommendations may be adopted or applied by UN Member States that want to extend their application of the UNSCR 2250 five pillars for action.

Recommendations:

- Governments, bilateral donors, and international organizations should prioritize the integration of education and sustainable peacebuilding approaches, foster collaborative partnerships for policymaking with grassroots-level education system stakeholders, and protect educational spaces through long-term funding and political commitments. They should ensure fair distribution of resources and training, and remuneration for educators.

- Education policymakers, as well as designers of educational programming in formal and non-formal spaces, are advised to use gender- and conflict-sensitive approaches informed by historical and local contexts and young people’s needs. Education
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Program and policy designers should, to the extent possible, uncover, prevent, and address all forms of violence present in formal and non-formal education. They should strive to promote inclusiveness and respect for diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, language, disability, sexual orientation, migrant or refugee status, political ideology, socioeconomic class, etc. This should be done through curricula, program design, and broader education policies, including language of instruction, certification, access for people with disabilities, and so on. At the school and community levels, engagement with parents and community leaders, including religious, cultural, and education leaders, is a key feature of a more holistic and integrated approach to fulfilling education’s potential to support social cohesion.

Young people and their representative organizations should participate in decision-making processes where relevant and feasible. Youth should strive to create partnerships within their formal and non-formal learning settings and with relevant actors in the community. Parents, teachers, school leaders, and policy-makers should nurture youth-led initiatives and ensure that young people engage with support networks that ensure continued capacity-building, skill-building, and training, thereby enabling them to constructively challenge, engage, innovate, and transform the education systems of which they are a part.

Educators in both formal and non-formal settings should seek training and capacity-building in conflict-sensitive and transformational pedagogical approaches, and strive to foster nonviolent and safe learning environments, as well as respect for diversity. Educators should pay attention to students’ varied needs and talents and encourage young people to think critically and act constructively, while simultaneously discussing the inherent challenges involved in peacebuilding activism, especially in conflict situations.

Due to the global attention given to youth as change agents for peace, the research community has an opportunity to narrow a gap in its knowledge of how formal and non-formal educational programming affects the lives and choices of young people in terms of building sustainable peace. Researchers should partner with young people and with civil society to encourage broader use of participatory research strategies and to ensure that the benefits of research are disseminated to those who will benefit from them in practice. This could be done, for example, by training education system stakeholders to critically analyze the ways the content and practices used in education systems either hinder or contribute to peacebuilding.

SECTION VI

The paper concludes with a set of key messages and recommendations on the steps that lie ahead in terms of policy and practical implementation for UN, governmental, and non-governmental actors, focusing both on formal education systems and on non-formal mechanisms for learning and transformation.

REFERENCES


