



# LGBTQI+ Youth at the Margins:

## A Thematic Paper for the Second Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security

Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 in 2015, the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda has significantly expanded global recognition of the role young people play in sustaining peace and preventing violence. The resolution marked an important shift in international peace and security discourse by acknowledging that young people are not only affected by conflict but are also essential actors in building peaceful and inclusive societies. Subsequent resolutions, including UNSCR 2419 and UNSCR 2535, have reinforced the importance of youth participation in peace processes and called for stronger institutional support for youth-led initiatives.

Over the past decade, the YPS agenda has also influenced the development of national policies, civil society initiatives, and multilateral programs aimed at strengthening youth participation in peace and security processes. Governments, international organizations, and youth-led networks have increasingly recognized that sustainable peace requires inclusive governance structures that enable young people to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes at local, national, and global levels.

Despite this progress, discussions of youth participation within peace and security frameworks often overlook the diversity of young people's lived experiences. In particular, the perspectives and security concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other gender-diverse (LGBTQI+) youth remain largely absent from global peace and security policy discussions. While the YPS agenda emphasizes the importance of inclusive youth participation, many policies and programs continue to approach youth as a relatively homogenous group, without fully accounting for intersecting forms of discrimination linked to gender identity, sexuality, and social marginalization.

### Acknowledgements

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Author: Alexandria Bohémier

Contributor: Imogen Fraser

Editor: Katrina Leclerc

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The paper was drafted in consultation with members of the LGBTQI+ Working Group of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security under the leadership of the Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace & Security (CCYPS) and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY).

This gap is particularly significant given the ways in which LGBTQI+ youth experience conflict, insecurity, and exclusion. Legal discrimination, social stigma, and violence against LGBTQI+ individuals remain widespread in many parts of the [world](#). These factors can significantly affect the ability of LGBTQI+ youth to engage in civic life, participate in policy discussions, or contribute to peacebuilding initiatives.

At the same time, LGBTQI+ youth are increasingly active in social movements, community organizing, and advocacy initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion and [social justice](#). Youth-led initiatives have emerged across regions to challenge discrimination, support community resilience, and advocate for policies that address structural inequalities.

This thematic paper examines how LGBTQI+ youth intersect with the YPS agenda. It explores global trends affecting LGBTQI+ youth, analyzes the extent to which current YPS frameworks address these issues, and identifies key barriers that limit the participation of LGBTQI+ youth in peace and security processes. The paper also highlights examples of youth-led initiatives and civil society engagement and proposes recommendations for strengthening inclusive implementation of the YPS agenda.

By examining these dynamics, the paper aims to contribute to broader discussions on how the YPS agenda can more effectively reflect the diversity of young people’s experiences while supporting inclusive approaches to sustaining peace.

## Global Trends Affecting LGBTQI+ Youth and Peace and Security

The global peace and security landscape has undergone significant transformations over the past decade. Geopolitical tensions, democratic backsliding, and the [expansion of anti-rights movements](#) have reshaped civic and political environments in many regions. These developments have had important implications for young people, particularly those who already face social and political [marginalization](#).

Among the most significant trends affecting LGBTQI+ youth is the growing visibility and influence of anti-rights movements targeting [gender and sexual minorities](#). In many countries, political actors and advocacy groups have [mobilized narratives](#) portraying LGBTQI+ identities as threats to cultural traditions, national identity, or social stability. These narratives are frequently framed around the concept of “[gender ideology](#),” which has become a rallying point for campaigns aimed at restricting LGBTQI+ rights.

Such movements have contributed to the introduction or expansion of restrictive legislation targeting LGBTQI+ individuals and

*“We are facing the worst backlash globally ever for LGBTIQ people. In 2024, 85 percent of the countries that we looked at that had elections had anti-LGBTIQ messages in their campaigns. There's a funding crisis. This backlash is very real, and I don't think we have seen the peak of it yet.”*

[Maria Sjödin](#)  
Executive Director, Outright International,  
January 2026

[organizations](#). These policies can limit the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to operate, restrict public advocacy on gender and sexuality issues, and contribute to broader environments of hostility toward gender-diverse communities.

Legal frameworks continue to play a critical role in shaping the security and participation of LGBTQI+ youth. In numerous countries, same-sex relationships remain criminalized, and legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity are limited or absent.



### Map of Jurisdictions that Criminalise LGBT People

LGBT people are criminalised in 65 jurisdictions worldwide. Find out where with our map.

 Human Dignity Trust

The interactive map is available at: <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/>

Criminalization and legal discrimination create structural barriers to civic participation. When LGBTQI+ identities are stigmatized or criminalized, individuals may face harassment, arrest, or violence as a result of their activism. These conditions make it significantly more difficult for LGBTQI+ youth to participate openly in community initiatives, civil society organizations, or policy processes.

Conflict and displacement contexts can further intensify these vulnerabilities. Reports indicate that LGBTQI+ individuals are often exposed to heightened risks of violence during conflict and humanitarian crises. LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers may face discrimination within humanitarian systems, which can limit access to protection services, shelter, and legal support.

Young LGBTQI+ people may experience these challenges in particularly acute ways. Social stigma, discrimination within families and communities, and legal exclusion can contribute to higher levels of [homelessness](#), unemployment, and [mental health](#) challenges among LGBTQI+ [youth](#).

*“Discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community goes beyond criminalisation and prosecution, and it often intersects with age. Young queer people do not only experience harsh attitudes and legislations, but it may limit their access to healthcare, employment insecurity, bullying or harassment in the workplace, which could force them into precarious work. Another interrelated factor is that people from the LGBTQIA+ community are at a higher risk of experiencing poor mental health, such as higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies.”*

[Fatma Escalante](#)  
UNOY Blog, June 2023

*“As the Secretary-General has pointed out, gender and sexual violence are one of the main obstacles hindering lasting peace and stability, as many women, LGBT and gender-diverse activists and human rights defenders are targeted on the basis of both their gender and/or sexual identity and their role as social leaders.”*

*Report of the Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, [Victor Madrigal-Borloz](#), July 2022*

Despite these risks, LGBTQI+ youth continue to play active roles in social movements and community initiatives. Youth-led organizations and advocacy networks have emerged across regions to address discrimination, support vulnerable individuals, and [advocate for more inclusive policies](#). These initiatives demonstrate that LGBTQI+ youth are not only affected by insecurity and conflict but also contribute to broader efforts aimed at strengthening social cohesion and promoting inclusive societies.

## LGBTQI+ Youth and the Implementation of the YPS Agenda

Since 2015, the YPS agenda has evolved through a range of policy developments at global, regional, and national levels. The adoption of three additional Security Council resolutions, the creation of youth strategies within international institutions, and the development of National Action Plans have all contributed to expanding recognition of the role young people play in peace and security processes.

These initiatives have helped to create new spaces for youth participation and have supported the development of youth-led peacebuilding initiatives in many contexts.

However, the implementation of the YPS agenda has also revealed important gaps in how youth participation is conceptualized and operationalized.

One of these gaps relates to the limited attention given to the diversity of youth populations. While many YPS policies refer broadly to gender equality and youth inclusion, explicit references to LGBTQI+ youth remain absent from all four YPS resolutions. As a result, the specific experiences of gender-diverse youth are often overlooked in program design, policy discussions, and funding frameworks.

This gap reflects a broader tendency within international policy discussions to treat LGBTQI+ rights primarily as human rights issues rather than as relevant concerns within peace and security governance. While human rights frameworks play an important role in addressing discrimination and violence, the separation of LGBTQI+ issues from peace and security policy discussions can limit opportunities for more integrated approaches.

National Action Plans on YPS represent one potential entry point for strengthening inclusive implementation of the agenda. These policy frameworks allow governments and civil society actors to identify priorities, allocate resources, and establish mechanisms to

support youth participation.

However, out of the thirteen National Action Plans on YPS and four regional frameworks that have been published, only three explicitly reference LGBTQI+ youth. Despite this gap, National Action Plans and regional frameworks offer an important opportunity to advance LGBTQI+ integration within the YPS agenda, particularly given the lack of inclusion in the YPS resolutions themselves. By including the LGBTQI+ community in these frameworks, the YPS agenda can better respond to the realities of the diverse global youth population while also strengthening the agenda's broader goal of inclusive and sustainable peace.

**National Action Plans with any type of mention of sexual orientation, gender-diversity or expression:**

*One or more mention(s)*

- Finland (2021-2024)
- Finland (2025-2028)

*No mention*

- Bangsamoro (2024-2028)
- Burundi (2024-2028)
- Cameroun (2025-2030)
- Democratic Republic of Congo (2023-2027)
- Jordan (2025-2027)
- Kyrgyzstan (2025-2027)
- Liberia (2025-2030)
- Malawi (2024-2029)
- Nigeria (2021-2024)
- South Sudan (2024)
- The Gambia (2025-2030)

**Regional documents with any type of mention of sexual orientation, gender-diversity or expression:**

*One or more mention(s)*

- ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation Regional Study (2025)

*No mention*

- Arab Strategy (2023-2028)
- African Union's Continental Framework (2020)
- African Union's 10-Year Implementation Plan for the Continental Framework (2020-2029)
- OSCE-wide Roadmap (2025)

*This data is from the available national and regional frameworks as of March 9, 2026.*

Strengthening the integration of LGBTQI+ perspectives within YPS implementation would require greater recognition of the diversity of youth experiences and the ways in which intersecting forms of discrimination shape participation in peace and security processes.



## Youth-Led Initiatives and Civil Society Contributions

Civil society organizations and youth-led networks play an important role in advancing inclusive approaches to peace and security. Across regions, LGBTQI+ activists and organizations have developed initiatives aimed at addressing discrimination, supporting vulnerable communities, and advocating for policy reforms.

Organizations such as Outright International and International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) World have documented the experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals facing violence and persecution while advocating for stronger legal protections and policy change. LGBTQI+ organizations frequently collaborate with community-based partners to document abuses, provide emergency relocation services, and support advocacy initiatives aimed at strengthening protections for LGBTQI+ communities.

Civil society networks working on YPS have also emphasized the importance of integrating LGBTQI+ perspectives into discussions on youth participation. The Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace & Security (CCYPS) has highlighted the need for policy frameworks that reflect the lived experiences of diverse youth populations and recognize the leadership of LGBTQI+ youth in community initiatives.

*“Recognizing that inclusive peace requires the participation of all marginalized groups, YPS frameworks should mandate LGBTQI+ representation in peace processes. Through representation, YPS frameworks affirm that queer perspectives are critical to constructing effective and enduring peace policies, ensuring that all youth have a stake in shaping the future.”*

*Alexandria Bohémier and Katrina Leclerc in No Peace Without Pride (CCYPS), January 2025*

Youth-led initiatives frequently operate at the intersection of multiple policy areas, including human rights, social inclusion, and peacebuilding. By addressing issues such as discrimination, social exclusion, and community resilience, these initiatives contribute to broader efforts aimed at strengthening social cohesion and preventing violence.

*“Experts and practitioners in the field cited such issues as a factor explaining why only a small minority of peacebuilding projects work specifically on LGBTQI+ issues, at least explicitly. One YPS expert argued that this dilemma has gotten worse recently, with a rollback on LGBTQI+ rights in many countries creating a ‘cloak of invisibility on marginalized identities.’”*

*[UN Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security, April 2025](#)*

However, youth-led organizations often face significant financial and institutional constraints. According to the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on YPS, this can be especially true for LGBTQI+ youth organizations or organizations working with the LGBTQI+ community. Given the ongoing stigma globally, some organizations working on LGBTQI+ issues have lost their status or have been fined. For example, a [UN Peacebuilding Fund project in El Salvador](#) that centred the inclusion of young LGBTQI+ activists in its peacebuilding programming reported notable successes in shifting attitudes and expanding participation.

Nevertheless, the initiative continued to face persistent barriers linked to stigma, safety risks, and concerns around visibility associated with LGBTQI+ inclusion. Limited access to funding can therefore restrict the ability of youth-led initiatives to expand their activities, sustain long-term programming, or engage in policy processes. Addressing these financing gaps is an important component of strengthening youth participation in the YPS agenda.

## Barriers to LGBTQI+ Youth Participation in Peace and Security

The participation of LGBTQI+ youth in peace and security processes is shaped by a range of structural, political, and social factors explored above. While inclusive institutions and supportive policies can facilitate participation, discriminatory laws and social stigma often create substantial barriers.

In contexts where LGBTQI+ identities are criminalized, youth activists face significant risks when advocating for their rights. Legal restrictions may limit the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to register, operate, or receive funding. In some cases, individuals may face harassment, arrest, or violence as a result of their activism.

Social stigma can also limit participation. Negative attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals

may discourage young people from engaging in public discussions or joining civil society initiatives. Family rejection and community discrimination can further isolate LGBTQI+ youth and reduce access to support networks.

Another barrier relates to the separation of LGBTQI+ issues from peace and security policy discussions. This siloing reinforces the perception that LGBTQI+ inclusion is unrelated to conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. However, exclusion and discrimination can contribute to broader social tensions and undermine efforts to build inclusive and peaceful societies. Addressing these issues therefore requires a more integrated policy approach that recognizes the links between human rights, social inclusion, and peace.



## Recommendations

Strengthening the inclusion of LGBTQI+ youth within the YPS agenda will require coordinated action across governments, international institutions, and civil society organizations. The following recommendations highlight areas where policy and programmatic efforts could support more inclusive implementation of the YPS agenda.

**1. Explicitly recognize the diversity of youth populations in YPS policy frameworks.** Youth policies and strategies should more clearly acknowledge the diversity of youth experiences, including those of LGBTQI+ youth. National Action Plans on YPS and related policy frameworks provide important opportunities to identify barriers faced by marginalized youth groups and outline practical steps to address these challenges.

**2. Strengthen protection mechanisms for LGBTQI+ youth activists and peacebuilders.** Young LGBTQI+ activists involved in advocacy and community initiatives may face heightened risks in contexts where discrimination and criminalization persist. Strengthening protection mechanisms and supporting safe spaces for youth engagement can help ensure that young activists are able to participate in civic and policy processes.

**3. Expand financing for youth-led initiatives that promote inclusion and social cohesion.** Many youth-led organizations working on social inclusion and community resilience operate with limited financial resources. Increasing access to funding for youth-led initiatives would allow these organizations to expand their activities, sustain long-term programming, and contribute more effectively to policy discussions.

**4. Improve data collection and research on youth diversity within YPS implementation.** More comprehensive data on the diversity of youth populations participating in YPS initiatives would support more inclusive policy design. Strengthening research and documentation efforts could help policymakers better understand the experiences of marginalized youth groups and identify opportunities to support their engagement.

## Conclusion

Over the past decade, the YPS agenda has contributed to important shifts in how young people are recognized within peace and security discussions. However, the continued marginalization of LGBTQI+ youth within many policy frameworks highlights the need for more inclusive approaches to implementation.

Recognizing the contributions of LGBTQI+ youth and addressing the barriers they face will be essential for strengthening the effectiveness of the YPS agenda. By integrating LGBTQI+ perspectives into policy frameworks and supporting youth-led initiatives, governments and international institutions can help ensure that the YPS agenda reflects the diversity of young people's experiences and supports more inclusive approaches to sustaining peace.

