

**YOUTH 4
PEACE
ALBANIA**

Mapping of CSOs:

Roles, Challenges, and Perceptions of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Albania Regarding Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS).

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1. Introduction

The implementation of the YPS agenda in Albania, and the achievements so far, highlight the importance of a careful approach regarding stakeholders and collaborators interested in this agenda. CSOs in general, and youth organizations in particular, remain key partners in implementing the YPS Agenda in Albania.

This requires carefully mapping CSOs, providing a clear picture of their capacities for future strategic collaboration regarding the YPS agenda in Albania. Ensuring the effective realization of YPS objectives requires the active participation and support of a diverse range of partners, including government institutions, international organizations, and, most importantly, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and youth organizations.

CSOs and youth-led organizations play a fundamental role in operationalizing the YPS Agenda, serving as critical catalysts for change and innovation at both the community and national levels. Their unique ability to connect with and represent the interests of local communities makes them indispensable in promoting young people's active engagement in peacebuilding, decision-making, and social transformation processes.

To maximize the potential impact of these efforts, conducting a thorough and systematic mapping of CSOs and youth organizations operating across Albania is essential. This mapping process would provide a detailed understanding of their capacities, expertise, and focus areas, creating a foundation for strategic collaboration and partnerships that align with the overarching goals of the YPS Agenda. By fostering a clearer picture of the existing landscape, this approach ensures that resources and efforts are directed toward the most effective and impactful initiatives, ultimately contributing to the sustainable and inclusive implementation of the YPS Agenda in Albania.

1.1 The Importance of CSOs in Promoting YPS in the Albanian Context

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in implementing the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda in Albania. They serve as a critical link between local communities and public institutions, ensuring that the voices and needs of young people are effectively heard and addressed. Engaging in projects that empower young people, promote their active participation in decision-making processes, and foster social peace, CSOs act as a bridge between local communities and public institutions.

Through advocacy, training, and awareness-raising activities, they help address key challenges such as unemployment, marginalization, and social polarization. By equipping youth with the tools and knowledge they need to become active agents of change, CSOs help cultivate a culture of dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect within Albanian society.

In a context where youth make up a significant part of the population, CSOs are essential partners in ensuring the sustainable and inclusive implementation of the YPS Agenda's objectives. In Albania, where a significant portion of the population is composed of young individuals, the work of CSOs becomes even more indispensable. They act as facilitators of collaboration between stakeholders, bringing together governmental and non-governmental entities to create a unified effort toward achieving the objectives of the YPS Agenda. The contributions of CSOs not only ensure the inclusivity and sustainability of YPS initiatives but also lay the groundwork for a more peaceful, equitable, and prosperous future in Albania.

1.2 Main Research Objectives

The research aims to:

- Provide insights into the role, challenges, and perceptions of CSOs in Albania regarding YPS.
- Map current practices of CSOs related to the YPS agenda and consult on an ideal implementation model for UNSCR 2250.
- Assess the capacity of CSOs to advocate and implement YPS initiatives at the national level.

2. Methodology Used

To achieve a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of youth perspectives and the engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Albania, the research adopted focus groups as the primary method of data collection. Focus groups provided a platform for open dialogue, enabling participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and recommendations in a structured yet flexible environment. This approach was further enriched using structured and semi-structured questions, which facilitated the extraction of in-depth insights and allowed for a detailed exploration of key themes relevant to the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda.

The focus groups were strategically conducted in three key regions—Tirana, Elbasan, and Lezha—to ensure that the findings reflected the diverse geographical, socio-cultural, and economic realities present across Albania. These regions were selected not only for their demographic and cultural diversity but also for their unique challenges and opportunities related to youth participation and CSO activities.

Participants in the focus groups were aged 15 to 29, aligning with the definition of youth as outlined in Albania's Youth Law.

They were chosen based on their active involvement with CSOs and their engagement in local community initiatives, ensuring that the discussions were informed by firsthand experiences and practical insights. Emphasis was placed on achieving gender balance and inclusivity, ensuring that the voices of young women, men, and individuals from marginalized or underrepresented groups were equally represented.

This inclusive and methodical approach aimed to generate a holistic understanding of the dynamics of youth engagement and CSO contributions, ultimately providing valuable data to inform the strategic implementation of the YPS Agenda in Albania.

Focus group discussions served as a dynamic and interactive platform where young participants were encouraged to articulate their views and share personal insights on critical concepts related to the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, such as "peace," "security," and their implications in the Albanian context. These discussions fostered an environment of collaborative dialogue and mutual reflection, allowing participants to express their perspectives freely and engage in constructive exchanges with peers.

Through these sessions, researchers were able to identify and analyse key barriers that hinder the effective implementation of the YPS Agenda, as well as pinpoint the specific needs and opportunities that can drive progress in this area. Topics discussed ranged from systemic challenges, such as youth unemployment and limited access to decision-making platforms, to social issues, including gender inequality, marginalization, and the need for enhanced community cohesion.

The discussions were conducted with a strong commitment to ethical research principles, prioritizing the confidentiality, dignity, and autonomy of all participants. Measures were taken to create a safe and respectful environment, ensuring that participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences without fear of judgment or repercussions. Special care was given to ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups and underrepresented communities were amplified, further enriching the findings with diverse perspectives.

The insights derived from this comprehensive methodological approach not only shed light on the challenges faced by youth and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Albania but also provide actionable and practical recommendations for stakeholders. These recommendations focus on strengthening institutional support mechanisms, enhancing networking and collaboration among CSOs, and ensuring the widespread adoption and implementation of YPS principles. By addressing these areas, the findings aim to contribute to a more inclusive, sustainable, and impactful realization of the YPS Agenda across Albania.

2.1 Approach Utilized: Interviews and Focus Groups as Core Research Methods.

To effectively map Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in relation to the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda in Albania, a combination of interviews and focus groups emerged as highly suitable methodologies. These approaches provided rich, qualitative insights into the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by CSOs concerning the YPS Agenda. By employing these methods, researchers were able to delve deeply into the nuanced perspectives of various organizations, capturing the diversity of their contributions and identifying opportunities for enhanced collaboration and strategic alignment.

Focus groups proved to be an invaluable tool for this research. As a qualitative research method, focus groups involve structured or semi-structured discussions conducted with small groups of participants, creating a dynamic environment for exploring complex topics. These discussions encourage open dialogue, allowing participants to share their views, challenge assumptions, and build upon one another's ideas. This interaction fosters a collaborative atmosphere where diverse perspectives and experiences can emerge, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

The use of focus groups enabled the collection of detailed and context-specific information about how CSOs perceive the YPS Agenda, their current level of engagement, and the barriers they encounter in its implementation. Additionally, the discussions highlighted the strengths, capabilities, and innovative approaches of CSOs that can be leveraged to advance the YPS objectives. Through this process, researchers gained a clearer picture of the existing landscape of CSOs in Albania, identifying gaps in resources, knowledge, and networking that need to be addressed to ensure the sustainable and inclusive application of the YPS Agenda

- Three focus groups were conducted in Tirana, Elbasan, and Lezha. Each group consisted of 10 young participants (defined by Youth Law aged 15 to 29). Gender balance was maintained, with a 50% female-to-male ratio in Tirana and Elbasan and a 30% female-to-70% male ratio in Lezha.
- This approach ensured the collection of in-depth and authentic information directly from young people, enabling their voices to be heard. Within a conversational environment, participants shared their experiences, attitudes, and perspectives on youth, peace, and security issues.

- Initially, participants were introduced to the progress and dynamics of the United Nations Security Council's "Youth, Peace, and Security" resolution, to which Albania is a party. The process began with Resolution 2250, adopted in 2015, followed by Resolution 2419, and significantly advanced with Resolution 2535 in 2020, which emphasized practical actions.
- Through structured discussions, featuring clear, open, and unbiased questions, the youth identified key themes, challenges, and expectations, highlighting their genuine perceptions. This method provided a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the role of youth in recognizing and implementing the YPS agenda.
- Based on key questions and terms used to identify perceptions among youth, CSOs, schools, and local institutions, the perceptions of CSOs were documented, starting from the basic understanding of terms like "security" and "peace."
- The perception of the key concept of "peace" evolved from an initial understanding of peace as conflict resolution to a broader notion of peace as social justice. Similarly, the perception of "security" extended beyond mere physical protection or survival to a comprehensive sense of stability (economic, financial, health-related, etc.) that facilitates personal development and a secure future.
- The questions stimulated dialogue and reflection among youth, encouraging them to contextualize the concepts of "peace" and "security" within their environments, families, and communities. These reflections were shaped by their mindset, culture, and especially the traditions they carried out. The structured and semi-structured questions regarding Youth, Peace, and Security revealed not only their stance on the current situation in Albania but also the barriers they face when seeking change. They expressed the need for institutional involvement, both at central and local levels.
- During discussions, participants conveyed their desire and confidence in their ability to contribute meaningfully to the implementation of the YPS agenda.

2.2 Data Collection Process Through Focus Groups.

The data collection process involved qualitative methods, based on responses provided by participants to structured, semi-structured, and open-ended questions posed by the session moderator during focus groups.

Each focus group comprised 8–10 young participants, selected based on their engagement with CSOs and geographical representation. A structured question guide was prepared in advance. Participation was physical, with ethics and confidentiality maintained throughout the sessions.

The YPS agenda is a complex topic, and the focus group method allowed for detailed, in-depth discussions that captured a wide range of perceptions and contemporary views on the YPS agenda in Albania. This method also provided comprehensive insights into the practical challenges faced, aiming to improve the role of CSOs and youth in implementing the YPS agenda.

Conducting focus groups in three different cities—Tirana, Elbasan, and Lezha—helped address local realities and the specific Albanian context faced by CSOs and youth. These focus groups offered an inclusive and qualitative approach, enabling the mapping of CSOs concerning the YPS agenda. They facilitated the collection of detailed perceptions and ideas from various local actors, aiding in understanding challenges and opportunities for improvement in this field.

2.3 Data Analysis.

The data analysis derived from the three focus groups conducted in Tirana, Elbasan, and Lezha was a critical step in the research process, designed to systematically organize, interpret, and extract meaningful qualitative insights from the perceptions and experiences shared by the youth participants. The primary goal of this analysis was to identify key themes, patterns, and emerging trends that could provide a comprehensive understanding of how young people in different regions of Albania view and engage with the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda.

To ensure the integrity and reliability of the findings, meticulous attention was given to maintaining confidentiality and accuracy throughout the transcription and data analysis process. Each focus group session was carefully documented, with verbatim transcriptions prepared to preserve the authenticity of participants' responses. This approach not only safeguarded the confidentiality of sensitive information but also ensured that the analysis captured the richness and diversity of perspectives expressed during the discussions.

The analytical process involved a thorough review of the transcriptions, where responses were categorized and coded according to key themes relevant to the YPS Agenda. These themes included challenges faced by youth in their communities, the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), opportunities for greater youth engagement in decision-making, and potential strategies for addressing issues such as unemployment, marginalization, and social polarization. The regional focus on Tirana, Elbasan, and Lezha allowed for a nuanced comparison of local dynamics, highlighting similarities and differences in the experiences and priorities of youth across these areas.

By employing this systematic and context-sensitive approach, the data analysis not only provided valuable insights into the perspectives of youth but also contributed to shaping actionable recommendations.

These findings serve as a foundation for enhancing the capacity of CSOs, fostering greater collaboration among stakeholders, and refining strategies for the effective implementation of the YPS Agenda in Albania. The process underscores the importance of amplifying youth voices and ensuring their inclusion in efforts to build a more peaceful and equitable society.

Through proper data analysis, the following were achieved:

- 1. Identification of the most critical themes.*
- 2. Understanding the local context.*
- 3. Concluding potential interventions to enhance the YPS agenda in Albania*

1. Themes Identified from the Focus Groups

- **Broader and Deeper Understanding of the "Youth, Peace, and Security" (YPS) Agenda:**

There is a need to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the YPS Agenda among young people and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Albania. This can be achieved through targeted training programs, promotional campaigns, the use of traditional and digital media, and leveraging modern technology. Such efforts would empower youth and CSOs to better understand the principles and objectives of the YPS Agenda, enabling more effective engagement and advocacy.

- **Increased Funding and Resources:**

Implementing youth-led initiatives under the YPS Agenda requires additional funding and resources. Limited financial support poses a significant barrier to achieving the agenda's goals. Sustainable and diversified funding mechanisms should be developed to support CSOs and youth projects, ensuring the successful execution of YPS-related activities across Albania.

- **Absence of a National Strategy or Action Plan for Practical Implementation of the YPS Agenda**

One of the most significant challenges in advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda in Albania is the lack of a dedicated national strategy or action plan to guide its practical implementation. Such a framework is essential for providing a unified vision, setting clear objectives, and outlining actionable steps to achieve the agenda's goals. A comprehensive strategy would ensure alignment with national development priorities while addressing the unique needs of youth and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). It would also facilitate resource allocation, define roles and responsibilities for stakeholders, and establish mechanisms for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes. Collaborative efforts involving government bodies, youth groups, CSOs, and international partners are critical to developing an inclusive and effective plan.

- **Enhancing Institutional Support for CSOs and Youth in YPS Implementation, with Schools Playing a Central Role**

Strengthening institutional support is pivotal for empowering CSOs and youth to actively contribute to the implementation of the YPS Agenda. Public institutions, particularly educational institutions like schools and universities, have a crucial role in promoting the principles of peace, security, and civic engagement. By integrating YPS-related topics into the educational curriculum, schools can foster a culture of understanding, inclusion, and active citizenship among young people. Beyond education, institutional support should include technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and streamlined policies that enable CSOs to operate effectively. Partnerships between government agencies, local authorities, and the private sector can further amplify the impact of youth-led initiatives and create a supportive environment for sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

- **Promoting Networking and Coalition-Building Among CSOs Working on the YPS Agenda**

To maximize the impact of efforts related to the YPS Agenda, fostering collaboration among CSOs is vital. Networking and coalition-building create opportunities for CSOs to share knowledge, resources, and best practices while collectively addressing common challenges. Establishing regular platforms such as forums, workshops, and conferences can facilitate dialogue and cooperation among organizations working in this field. A national coalition of YPS-focused CSOs could enhance advocacy efforts, streamline coordination with policymakers, and attract funding for joint initiatives. Furthermore, building coalitions at the regional and international levels would enable Albanian CSOs to align with global peacebuilding efforts and access a broader range of expertise and support.

- **Leveraging National, Regional, and International Best Practices to Strengthen YPS Efforts**

Learning from best practices at the national, regional, and international levels is crucial for effectively implementing the YPS Agenda in Albania. Successful examples from other countries and contexts can offer valuable insights into innovative approaches, effective strategies, and potential solutions to challenges. Albanian youth and CSOs should actively engage in international networks, conferences, and knowledge-sharing platforms to gain exposure to these practices. Adapting proven strategies to the Albanian context would ensure that local efforts align with global standards and reflect the specific needs of communities. Establishing partnerships with international organizations and leveraging their expertise can also help enhance the quality and scope of YPS-related programs in Albania.

2. Understanding the Local Context:

Barriers to Awareness of the YPS Agenda at the Local Level

Despite the significance of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, a lack of awareness remains a persistent challenge at the local level in Albania. Many communities, including youth and local stakeholders, are unfamiliar with the principles, objectives, and potential benefits of the YPS Agenda. This gap in understanding limits their ability to actively engage in its implementation. Efforts must focus on raising awareness through targeted campaigns, community outreach programs, and educational initiatives that highlight the importance of the YPS Agenda in fostering peace and security. Utilizing local media, engaging trusted community leaders, and providing accessible information in local languages are critical steps to overcome these barriers.

Limited Engagement of Youth Due to Prejudices and Stereotypes

The active involvement of youth in implementing the YPS Agenda is often hindered by societal prejudices and stereotypes. Young people are sometimes perceived as inexperienced or incapable of contributing meaningfully to decision-making and peacebuilding processes. These biases discourage their participation and undermine their potential as agents of change. Addressing these challenges requires promoting a culture of inclusivity and recognizing the value of youth contributions. Public campaigns, mentorship programs, and platforms for youth-led dialogue can help combat stereotypes, empower young people, and amplify their voices in discussions surrounding peace, security, and social cohesion.

The Role of Municipalities as Primary Supporters of Local CSOs and Youth in Implementing the YPS Agenda

Municipalities play a pivotal role in advancing the YPS Agenda at the local level. As the closest government entities to communities, they are well-positioned to support CSOs and youth initiatives by providing resources, facilitating partnerships, and ensuring an enabling environment. Municipalities can serve as hubs for coordination and collaboration, fostering dialogue between local stakeholders and higher-level authorities. Developing municipal-level action plans aligned with the YPS Agenda and offering financial and logistical support to CSOs can significantly enhance local implementation efforts. Additionally, training municipal staff on YPS principles can help integrate these values into local governance.

Insufficient Funds, Human Resources, and Capacities for Local Implementation of the YPS Agenda.

The successful implementation of the YPS Agenda at the local level is often constrained by limited financial resources, inadequate human capital, and a lack of technical capacities.

Capacity-building efforts are needed to equip local stakeholders with the skills, knowledge, and tools required to carry out effective YPS-related activities. Advocacy for increased budget allocations, the establishment of funding mechanisms, and partnerships with international organizations can address these challenges and ensure sustainability.

Developing Strategies Aligned with Local Realities and Contexts for YPS Implementation

One-size-fits-all strategies for implementing the YPS Agenda are unlikely to succeed in addressing the unique needs and challenges of diverse communities in Albania. Developing localized strategies that consider the specific cultural, social, and economic contexts of each region is essential. These strategies should be informed by input from local youth, CSOs, and community leaders to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. Tailored approaches can help address regional disparities, foster ownership among local stakeholders, and build trust in the YPS Agenda. Regular evaluations and adjustments based on community feedback will further enhance the impact of these strategies.

3. Drawing conclusions related to the improvement interventions of the YPS agenda in Albania.

The YPS Agenda as a Platform for Empowering Albanian Youth

The Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda presents a transformative opportunity to empower Albanian youth across multiple dimensions, including education, employment, and decision-making. By fostering their skills, knowledge, and leadership potential, the YPS framework enables young people to become active contributors to their communities and society. Empowerment initiatives under the YPS Agenda can include providing access to quality education, promoting vocational training, creating job opportunities, and encouraging youth participation in local and national decision-making processes. These efforts not only enhance individual capacity but also contribute to the broader socio-economic development of Albania.

Preventing Emigration and Promoting Youth Retention in Albania

The YPS Agenda offers a pathway to address one of Albania's critical challenges: the emigration and migration of its youth. By creating an environment that supports personal and professional growth, the agenda can provide young people with reasons to remain in Albania. Investment in education, job creation, and career development opportunities can help counter the push factors driving emigration. Additionally, empowering youth to see themselves as agents of positive change within their communities fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility, reducing the inclination to seek opportunities abroad.

Improving Social Policies to Address Inequalities

One of the core objectives of the YPS Agenda is the improvement of social policies to eliminate social inequalities and promote inclusivity. By addressing systemic disparities in access to education, healthcare, and employment, the agenda seeks to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to succeed. Targeted interventions can focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups, fostering social cohesion and reducing gaps in opportunity. These policy improvements are integral to creating a fair and equitable society where youth can thrive.

Reducing Crime and Corruption to Foster Social Justice

The implementation of the YPS Agenda can contribute to reducing crime and corruption by addressing their root causes and promoting a culture of social justice. Empowering young people with education, economic opportunities, and civic engagement tools reduces the likelihood of their involvement in criminal activities. Furthermore, the agenda encourages transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior, laying the groundwork for a more just society. By involving youth in anti-corruption initiatives and peacebuilding efforts, the agenda cultivates a generation committed to integrity and fairness.

Facilitating Positive Personal Development Among Youth

The YPS Agenda has the potential to bring about meaningful changes in the personal development of young people, particularly in their behavior, mindset, and overall outlook on life. Programs that promote civic engagement, leadership training, and conflict resolution skills help shape confident, empathetic, and socially responsible individuals. By fostering resilience, critical thinking, and a sense of purpose, the YPS Agenda encourages youth to adopt positive attitudes and proactive approaches to challenges. These changes not only benefit individual growth but also contribute to the creation of a peaceful and progressive society.

2.4 Methodological limitations.

The methodological limitations of a focus group are related to the nature of this methodology itself. Regarding the implementation of three focus groups in the cities of Tirana, Elbasan, and Lezha, the following methodological limitations were encountered:

1. The diversity of young people, especially in local areas, creates "group confusion," meaning they tend to share similar opinions with the group even though their body language and emotions speak differently.
2. Insufficient time: despite structured guidance and respecting the allocated time, young people often repeat what others have said.
3. Cultural and linguistic limitations cause difficulties in perception and articulation.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 The role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the implementation of the YPS agenda, perceptions in the Albanian context.

The following results show the irreplaceable role of CSOs in the implementation of the YPS agenda, based on these values:

CSOs are a force for change for youth in Albania.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are a powerful force for fostering change and progress for youth in Albania. By working directly with young people and addressing their specific needs, CSOs create opportunities for empowerment, development, and active participation in society. Through their grassroots presence and community-focused initiatives, NGOs are uniquely positioned to address the challenges faced by youth while promoting innovation and inclusion. Their efforts play a pivotal role in shaping a generation capable of driving social, economic, and political change.

CSOs have the capacity to implement the YPS agenda.

CSOs in Albania possess the knowledge, expertise, and organizational capacity necessary to effectively implement the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda. They have developed robust methodologies and networks that enable them to deliver impactful programs aligned with the goals of the agenda. Their ability to mobilize resources, design innovative solutions, and engage with diverse stakeholders positions them as key actors in advancing YPS principles. By leveraging these strengths, CSOs contribute significantly to promoting peace, security, and youth empowerment at both local and national levels.

CSOs have the opportunities and trust to involve more young people.

CSOs enjoy a high level of trust and credibility within local communities, which provides them with unique opportunities to engage young people. By creating safe spaces for dialogue and collaboration, CSOs empower youth to participate in decision-making processes and take ownership of their futures. Their established connections with communities and institutions make them reliable intermediaries for fostering relationships between young people and policymakers. This trust, combined with their inclusive approaches, allows CSOs to involve a broader spectrum of youth, including those from marginalized or underserved backgrounds.

Experience has shown the support that CSOs have provided and continue to provide for youth policies.

Over the years, CSOs in Albania have demonstrated their unwavering support for youth-focused policies and initiatives. They have played a critical role in advocating for the rights of young people, influencing policy decisions, and ensuring the inclusion of youth perspectives in governance.

Their long-standing commitment to addressing the needs and aspirations of young people is evident in their ongoing projects, campaigns, and partnerships with public and private stakeholders. This experience underscores their reliability and effectiveness in supporting and advancing youth-related policies.

CSOs have served in promoting and representing young people.

CSOs have consistently served as champions for the promotion and representation of young people in Albania. They provide platforms for youth voices to be heard, ensuring their concerns and aspirations are reflected in societal development. By engaging in advocacy, awareness-raising, and capacity-building activities, CSOs amplify the perspectives of young people and advocate for their inclusion in key decision-making processes. Their role as facilitators and advocates ensures that youth are not only beneficiaries but also active contributors to Albania's progress.

3.2 Challenges identified for CSOs in the implementation of the YPS agenda.

Limited Institutional and Organizational Capacities

Many CSOs face challenges related to their institutional and operational capacities, which hinder their ability to implement the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda effectively. These limitations may include insufficient technical expertise, inadequate project management skills, or a lack of access to training opportunities. Strengthening the institutional capacity of CSOs is essential for enhancing their ability to design, implement, and monitor impactful programs that align with the YPS agenda's objectives.

Insufficient Financial and Human Resources

CSOs often struggle with limited financial resources, making it difficult to sustain long-term projects or expand their reach. The lack of dedicated funding for youth-focused initiatives restricts their ability to address the diverse needs of young people comprehensively. Additionally, many CSOs face challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals due to budgetary constraints. This shortage of human resources impacts their effectiveness in delivering programs and engaging with communities.

Unstable and Inconsistent Partnerships

Collaborative efforts are crucial for the successful implementation of the YPS agenda, but many CSOs experience difficulties in establishing and maintaining stable partnerships. Partnerships with government institutions, international organizations, and private sector actors can be inconsistent or short-lived, often due to shifting priorities, lack of mutual

understanding, or inadequate communication. Strengthening these partnerships and fostering long-term collaboration is necessary to ensure sustainable progress.

Risk of Political Manipulation

CSOs are sometimes at risk of being co-opted or influenced by central and local political entities, which can compromise their independence and credibility. Political interference may lead to the prioritization of partisan agendas over the genuine needs of youth and communities. Protecting CSOs from political manipulation is critical to ensuring their integrity and ability to serve as impartial advocates for the YPS agenda.

Limited Geographical Coverage

The geographical reach of many CSOs is often concentrated in urban or central areas, leaving rural and remote regions underserved. This limited coverage creates disparities in the implementation of the YPS agenda, as many young people in peripheral areas remain unaware of or unable to access the programs and resources available. Expanding the geographical presence of CSOs and ensuring inclusivity in their activities is essential for addressing these gaps and promoting equitable development.

4. Discussions and Recommendations based on findings

According to the findings, especially supported by focus groups, the following recommendations are made regarding the role of CSOs and young people in implementing the "Youth, Peace, Security" agenda:

Involvement of youth in CSOs at the decision-making level and not merely for "decoration." Empowering Youth in CSOs by Ensuring Their Active Role in Decision-Making.

To effectively implement the YPS agenda, it is essential to involve youth in CSOs in a manner that goes beyond tokenism. Young people should be included in decision-making processes within CSOs, contributing to the development of policies, programs, and strategies that directly impact them. Their involvement should not be merely symbolic but should reflect a genuine commitment to integrating youth voices into organizational leadership. By ensuring that youth have a real influence on decisions, CSOs can better represent the diverse needs and aspirations of young people, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility in the implementation of the YPS agenda.

Establishment of Political and Non-Political Youth Forums at Both Local and National Levels.

decision-making, there is a pressing need to organize youth forums at both local and national levels. These forums can provide a structured environment where young people can engage in political and non-political discussions, share ideas, and collaborate on addressing key issues related to peace, security, and youth development. By facilitating such platforms, CSOs can ensure that youth could voice their concerns, participate in constructive debates, and influence the policies and initiatives that shape their futures. These forums should be inclusive, representing youth from diverse backgrounds, regions, and perspectives.

Increase the Number and Frequency of Youth-Oriented Projects at the Local Level.

There is a clear need to expand the number of youth-focused initiatives at the local level, with a particular emphasis on increasing their frequency and accessibility. Local youth projects can serve as a critical avenue for fostering community engagement, developing leadership skills, and addressing local challenges faced by young people. By ensuring that such projects are more frequent and accessible, CSOs can create continuous opportunities for youth to engage in meaningful activities that build their capacity and contribute to the broader goals of the YPS agenda. These initiatives should focus on practical areas such as education, employment, conflict prevention, and social cohesion, helping youth to directly engage with and contribute to peace-building efforts.

Creation of Policies that Acknowledge CSOs and Youth as Strategic Partners in Implementing the YPS Agenda.

A key recommendation is the development of policies that formally recognize CSOs and youth as essential and strategic partners in the implementation of the YPS agenda. Governments and policymakers should adopt frameworks that not only acknowledge but also empower CSOs and youth in their roles as active agents of change. This includes providing necessary resources, financial support, and institutional backing to facilitate their involvement. Such policies should ensure that youth and CSOs are not only consulted in the design and execution of programs but are actively engaged in the entire process, from planning to evaluation. This approach fosters a collaborative environment where youth and CSOs work together with governmental and international stakeholders to advance the objectives of the YPS agenda.

Establishment of a National Fund Exclusively for CSOs to Support the YPS Agenda Implementation.

One of the key recommendations is the creation of a dedicated national fund that exclusively supports CSOs working on the implementation of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. This fund would provide

financial resources to support initiatives that empower youth, promote peace, and enhance security within communities. By having a specific fund for YPS-related projects, the government can ensure that CSOs have the necessary financial backing to design and execute sustainable programs that align with national priorities. The fund should be easily accessible, with clear guidelines, and should target both established and emerging CSOs, particularly those working at the local level. This initiative would also help to address the resource limitations many CSOs face, ensuring that youth-led and youth-focused organizations can contribute meaningfully to the YPS agenda.

Comprehensive Evaluation and Monitoring of CSOs Involved in YPS Agenda Implementation.

To ensure that the efforts of CSOs in implementing the YPS agenda are effective, transparent, and aligned with the intended goals, it is crucial to establish robust evaluation and monitoring mechanisms. Regular assessments should be conducted to evaluate the impact of the projects and programs run by CSOs, including the extent to which they have contributed to the objectives of the YPS agenda. These evaluations should not only focus on financial accountability but also assess the quality, outcomes, and sustainability of the initiatives. Monitoring should be carried out by an independent body, possibly in collaboration with youth organizations and experts in peacebuilding, to guarantee objectivity and reliability. Additionally, the evaluation process should include feedback from youth participants and community members, ensuring that CSOs remain accountable to the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

ANNEX - GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

The questions and communication during the focus groups discussion has been done in Albanian language, but the guiding questions have been translated to English for the purpose of this report:

- *What do "peace" and "security" stand for in your daily life?*
- *How do you define "peace" and "security" in your everyday life? Do you feel involved in decision-making within your school or community?*
- *How can young people help to build a fairer and safer society?*
- *What changes would you like to see to help with your more active involvement in decision-making?*
- *What are the main challenges you face as young people in your commitment to peace?*
- *What support do you think young people need from governmental non-governmental stakeholders to become important change agents of YPS in Albania?*



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