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## editorial

Young people in particular are often profoundly affected by conflicts and therefore have specific needs. They are usually the ones on the front line who experience physical and psychological violence. On December 9, 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250, which specifically addresses the role of young people in peace and security issues. Ever since then, the crucial role that young people can play in conflict and post-conflict situations has been acknowledged across the board.

The debate on “youth and peacebuilding” can largely be divided into one of the following three categories: Firstly, young people in the role of peacebuilders who drive forward the peace process with innovative and courageous projects. Secondly, the “youth bulge” theory states that a disproportionately large number of young people, especially men, who lack prospects have a major potential for conflict. The third category concerns the prevention of violent extremism, which is often associated with young people.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Amélie Lustenberger, editor of KOFF Magazine

# Empowering youths to be actors of change



Excerpt from the video "Empowering youth for change" by terre des hommes schweiz

In 2016, an estimated 408 million youths (aged 15–29) resided in settings affected by armed conflict or organized violence. This means that at least one in four young people is affected by violence or armed conflict in some way. Estimates of direct conflict deaths in 2015 suggest that more than 90 per cent of all casualties involved young males.

In 2018 the UN published a detailed study focusing on youth, peace and security: "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security."

This report based on a comprehensive participatory research stresses the importance of breaking one-sided stereotypes of youth as security risks. It recommends recognizing the huge and often underestimated potential of young peoples as changemakers for peace.

These recommendations reconfirm the intervention strategies of terre des hommes schweiz in its youth violence program for Latin American countries. In Latin America, young men aged 15-29 make up 50% of all homicide victims. This high homicide rates can be explained by young men's involvement in high-risk illicit activities such as street crime, gang membership, drug consumption and easily accessible firearms.

## **Stigmatization and negative stereotyping of youth**

In many countries, the public discourse and mainly the media focus on characterizing youth as a risk to society. Especially in Central America, and also in other parts of Latin America,

specific groups of young people and, to a certain degree, the younger generation as a whole are socially constructed as a threat to public security. In particular, the members of youth gangs (so called maras) are constructed as the number-one menace to the security of the whole region. In many Latin-American countries, governments and political leaders systematically shape perceptions of youth violence for political ends. Especially in electoral campaigns, politicians reinforce these stereotypes on violent youth in a manipulative way in order to promote themselves as “mano dura” (hard hand). Lurid media coverage furthermore sustains these public discourses. Hard-fisted law enforcement and security approaches are being widely applied across different country contexts, although there is mounting evidence that measures such as including punitive policing, harsh sentencing and mass incarceration are counter-productive. These policies are also simply not cost-effective and divert fund away from social services that are necessary to tackle the drivers of violence.

According to the young people consulted in the UN Progress Study, concerns about youth and violence result in policy responses that denigrate and often repress the legitimate participation of youth in political processes, social movements, peaceful protest and expressions of dissent. The extremely violent repression of mass protests of youths in Nicaragua in 2018 has been the most recent and explicit example of closing civic spaces for the voices of youth and delegitimizing them as “terrorists”.

### **Youth agency for positive peace**

In its violence prevention program terre des hommes schweiz aims at contributing to a deconstruction of simplistic discourses that stigmatize young people in general as troublemakers and associate youth with violence. The project interventions implemented by local community-based partner organizations strengthen the potentials and peacebuilding capacities of young people and evidence their positive contributions to society.

The project Juventude Negra e Participação Política (Black youth and political participation) of the Brazilian partner organization Cipó is a best practice experience how youth participation approaches contribute to social inclusion and consequently to violence prevention. Cipó trains Afro-Brazilian youth multipliers in Favelas in Salvador (Bahia) who are active in different youth groups. With an intensive leadership training, marginalized youth are empowered to be actors of change in their communities characterized by high violence and exclusion.

In this context, young black men are facing strong negative stereotypes as potential security risks. Especially police actors perceive them as suspicious just because they are black and poor. Police violence is a commonplace. Consequently, these socially excluded young people feel hopeless, isolated and powerless. The burden of constant discrimination makes them insecure; often they internalize a self-perception of marginalization.

Therefore the project developed a comprehensive **leadership training** to empower black youths to stand up for their rights. This training aims at sensitizing the young favela youth to get an understanding of existing societal hierarchies, the historic roots of racism and social exclusion, the concepts of structural and institutional violence. This training lays the basis of knowledge and skills development and fosters interest and motivation of youth in

organizing themselves to become agents of change.

As a first step, the group process focuses on **personal development**, enhancing **self-understanding and self-worth** by group discussions on black identity and affirmative action using artistic and cultural activities.

Apart from outcomes related to strengthened cultural and personal identity, the training also puts a lot of emphasis on improving **communication and technical skills** of the young leaders. Through media training (video, writing, photography, and online communication), they learn how to make their voice be heard by a broad audience. In the training, they learn how to politically claim their rights and counter the injustice they experience on a daily basis.

Overall, the youth **leadership training** enhances the participants' leadership capabilities, communication skills, self-reflection and cultural identity. This is the basis for the young actors of change to get active in their communities and multiply their learnings among their peers and in the broader community. Youths who are involved in community activities are appreciated as **role models** for other young people. As their cultural activities get a lot of visibility, the whole community changes its views on these youth activists. Through music, theater and dance, the young leaders express their positive resilience.

Because of the enhanced visibility of young people's concerns in the public sphere, decision makers start to listen to young people's voices. Youths are invited to participate in decision-making spaces on a local level, e.g. local youth councils. Through active political participation and networking, organized youths are perceived as relevant political actors in violence prevention policy development. Youth are taken seriously. Consequently, violence prevention policy debates are more youth-sensitive.

These **political empowerment- and sensitization aspects** of the project can be conceptualized in three levels:

- **'Power within'** involves working with poor and excluded youths and their communities to make them aware of their rights and to strengthen their **ability to undertake a collective analysis** of the ways in which their rights are being denied. (raising consciousness)
- **'Power with'** focuses on **building solidarity** among young rights holders through alliance and platform building (youth groups), mobilizing supporters and networking. (mobilization for collective action)
- **'Power to'** aims to **enhance the ability of young rights holders to effectively campaign and advocate** for changes in policies and practices (participation in policy or political processes, participation in councils, youth forums, parliamentary hearings).

By working on these different levels terre des hommes schweiz recognizes and fosters the **vast potential of young people** to build more peaceful and inclusive societies. Partner organisations identify extraordinary young people who creatively are seeking innovative ways to prevent violence and consolidate peace in contexts of increasing social polarization.

Terre des hommes schweiz

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links

- [The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security](#)
- [Terre des hommes – Brazil \(in German\)](#)
- [Terre des hommes – violence prevention \(in German\)](#)
- [Security Council resolution 2250 \(2015\)](#)

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reports

# Studio Yafa: promoting dialog with young people in Burkina Faso



Report in the streets of Ouagadougou by a young journalist from Studio Yafa, the new program of the Fondation Hirondelle in Burkina Faso. Photo: Kalidou Sy / Fondation Hirondelle

**Studio Yafa, the new multimedia program for young people in Burkina Faso run by Fondation Hirondelle, was officially opened on Friday, March 1 in Ouagadougou, with the aim of promoting intergenerational dialog in a country that has several problem areas.**

Five years on from the popular uprising in Burkina Faso, which was followed by elections and a democratic transition, the population continues to have high expectations of the government. The poverty rate remains extremely high and the opportunities for young people (over 70% of the population is under the age of 35) are limited. The basic conditions for violent extremism do exist in society.

In view of this situation, it is extremely unfortunate that the young people in Burkina Faso are not being listened to. It is really important to offer them places where they can express themselves and be heard by all sections of society. This is the aim of Studio Yafa, the new multimedia program launched by Fondation Hirondelle and its partners in Ouagadougou. A team of young Burkinabe journalists and translators produce radio programs, debates, and videos in four languages. A network of media partners throughout the country broadcasts



the contributions.

The content is produced by a team of young journalists and professional translators in a studio in Ouagadougou, who have been recruited, trained, and supported by experts from Fondation Hirondelle, including an experienced former journalist and editor-in-chief of BBC Africa. A network of correspondents from partner media associations throughout the country will complement the team from May 2019.

This project is being run in cooperation with 15 radio stations that broadcast Studio Yafa programs, two television channels, an online medium, and a Burkinabe youth organization. The project is being funded by the Swedish and Swiss cooperation centers.

The Studio Yafa website will go live in May. The productions have been available on social networks (Studio Yafa Facebook and Twitter pages) since March 4.

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### [links](#)

- [Fondation Hirondelle](#)
- [Studio Yafa Facebook \(in French\)](#)
- [Studio Yafa Twitter \(in French\)](#)

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reports

# Portraits of people: Imagining positive masculinities



Will McInerney

## **About Will McInerney**

Will likes challenges. That is why he originally decided to do electrical and civil engineering – the hardest program his university offered. However, that spark that gets the engine running was missing. Balancing numbers with words, he turned to poetry and discovered not only who he was, but also who he wanted to be and, as it turned out, that was not an engineer. Thus, it was time to change gears and study peace and conflict rather than working for a power company. His passion for poetry and his commitment to peacebuilding acted as an exponential function and soon he was a poet, a journalist as well as an educator, supporting others in their own personal development through spoken word poetry. His experiences in these different fields led him to focus on young men. After multiple years as a practitioner working with youth and young men in particular, he realized there were certain recurring obstacles he could not overcome and decided to find the answers to them through scholarship. Eventually, this brought him to doing a PhD in Cambridge while continuing his work as an educator such as, most recently, teaching a Master Class on poetry, gender and peace at KOFF.

## Engaging Young Men

Throughout the years and through his different roles mentioned above, he discovered what he calls the “pattern of he”. Whether he was covering conflict areas as a journalist or working with youth, the issue at hand was violence and he learned that it was disproportionately violence committed by men. Hence, it seemed obvious to him that, if he wanted to contribute to a more peaceful society, he needed to focus on those who were often making it a less peaceful place. His focus thus shifted from youth in general to young men. It is crucial to stress that while most violence is committed by men, most men are not violent in its most direct form.

“Certainly, not all men commit violence, certainly women and gender non-conforming people do commit violence and men are certainly also the victims of violence; but men are disproportionately within the category of perpetrators of violence based on our understanding of data and that is a globally consistent phenomena.”

Nevertheless, Will sees a particular responsibility lying upon *all* men. On the one hand because there is no strict dichotomy between good and bad guys; refraining from direct forms of violence against women but remaining silent when witnessing others commit (in)direct violence makes one complicit. On the other hand, gender inequalities in a patriarchal society are intrinsically linked to privileges accorded to the men of this society. Men thus hold a powerful position in this context regardless of their personal preferences and therefore have an important responsibility.

“I am getting away from the dichotomy of ‘good’ guys and ‘bad’ guys [...].Not hitting people is not good enough, we have a higher standard, we believe that men can, should and will live up to that.”

## Towards a more just and equal society

Striving towards a more equal and just society in terms of gender thus means fundamentally challenging rigid gender norms and recognizing that, while this entails losing some privilege, a shift in paradigm also benefits men. Current prevalent interpretations of masculinity, known as dominant, hegemonic or toxic, contribute in part to men living shorter lives, doing worse in school and having higher suicide rates. In contrast, moving towards alternative, peaceful or feminist masculinities allows for more complex and nuanced senses of identity. Essentially, being “disloyal to patriarchy“ means fighting for a world where men will lose some of their unearned privileges, but could live healthier and happier lives.

Achieving such a paradigm shift is a long process and, according to Will, a creative process. Poetry can help young men imagine alternative masculinities. It is a means to develop a personal blueprint for what positive masculinities could look like based on one’s individual life experiences. However, he also emphasizes the importance of young men understanding masculinities as going beyond the personal sphere. They rather should be understood as practices that operate personally, relationally, structurally, materially and discursively.

“Peaceful masculinities are creative masculinities. In order to foster change, we have to engage in creative critical work to reimagine, transcend and disrupt rigid and violent masculinities as well as rigid and violent gender orders.”

While Will stresses repeatedly that it is not women’s job to lead men in this debate, it is nonetheless vital to include their perspectives. He considers men’s place in this conversation as one that needs to be negotiated and built with care. Due to women’s past and present experiences with violent masculinities as well as their work of trying to counter these gendered norms, they can provide valuable insight on these issues, help shape this conversation and continue to hold men accountable.

In essence, the key message Will is trying to convey to young men is: It is very simple and very complex at the same time. While it is simple to understand that we need to work towards a less violent, more just and equal world, envisioning possible ways to achieve this rapidly becomes highly complex. That does not mean, however, one should not try.

“I have no delusions about the fact that I am a very, very small gear in a very, very large complicated machine; but I am that gear and the question is what am I going to do? I want to use that to try to make a positive contribution and to be part of communities, systems, cultures and structures that are also part of this change.”

#### Portrait of

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PhD student in education at Cambridge, spoken word poet, journalist and educator

#### Interviewer

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#### links

- [Will McInerney’s website](#)
- [Podcast “Stories with a heartbeat”](#)
- [TedxNCSU “Poetic Portraits Of A Revolution”](#)
- [Critical Reflection “Art Initiatives in Fragile and Conflict Affected Regions”](#)

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reports

# Citizenship and art for and by young people



MURALES RACCS, Nicaragua 2018. Photo by Aurélien Vallotton

Eirene Suisse is an organization working to promote peace and human rights. As part of our activities, we run projects with and for young people, with our partner organizations. In the countries where we work, it is rare for domestic policies to take account of young people's specific needs. The situation is even more complicated if they are part of an ethnic or social minority, or in countries plagued by conflict. They are often drawn into crime to survive or help their families, and a lack of guidance can lead them into high-risk behaviors.

To make an enduring change to their situation, Eirene Suisse supports a number of projects based around citizenship: teaching young people their rights and duties as citizens, how to assert their rights constructively and effectively, and giving them the tools to do so, all in a participative way.

On the South Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, in partnership with the MURALES RACCS foundation, this is done through art. Young people meet, talk about the difficulties they are experiencing and what can be done to change their situation. They then express the outcome of their discussions in the form of a mural to cheer up the streets of their town or village. The community and local authorities are invited to discuss the meaning of the mural with the young people. The young members of MURALES RACCS organize themselves through regional networks to pass on suggestions to the local authorities for new laws or for better enforcement of existing laws.

To give feedback in Switzerland on the project, a number of South-North exchanges have been organized in the last few years with an artist and art therapist from the MURALES RACCS foundation. He was able to use the mural technique with groups of young people in the Romandy region of Switzerland.

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### links

- [Eirene Suisse project page with videos \(in French\)](#)

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reports

# Young people and the prevention of violent extremism: mobilized but fragile players



Young people are not the future, they're the present. Image: Jean-Daniel Biéler

In North, West and Central Africa, extreme violence is far from being on the wane. From Mali to Chad, Libya to the Central African Republic, armed groups continue to use radical violence despite the efforts of governments and communities to curb the problem.

The violence is mostly perpetrated by young people, both male and female – a fact which, in recent months, has prompted numerous researchers to try to understand why they engage in this behavior.

Poor future prospects (unemployment, stagnant development), protection of family assets, the need for security, the feeling of belonging to a group with a cause, the resurgence of unresolved past conflicts, the dangers of emigration, and religious indoctrination (religion is just one factor among many) are mentioned as the main reasons for joining these groups.

The studies also show that families are struggling to prevent the indoctrination and recruitment of young people. Abdication of parental responsibility prevents the

transmission and acquisition of societal values. What can be done when a society is dominated by a solid patriarchy and an unscrupulous elite? What can be done in the coastal nations of West Africa when violent young union activists, bands of young armed citizens (who fund themselves by selling drugs) and unintegrated, unpaid demobilized combatants seem set to become potential targets for extremist groups? What can be done when years of violence of every kind and the attraction of easy money act as an incentive for the violence they are now steeped in?

For this reason, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs has taken a particular interest in these issues in the last four years and has sought to give a voice to young people. Through Regional Conversations (which it supports and funds) held in the African subcontinent, political leaders, military and civilian personnel, traditional and religious leaders, and researchers discuss these issues with young people.

The conversations have shown that young people are key players in prevention and that their active participation in the long-term solutions proposed by governments or civil society is essential, though there is still little recognition of this.

The conversations have also highlighted the fact that there are already lots of initiatives in existence and that it is important for them to be understood and supported: whether in Mauritania ('Je m'engage' movement very active in the role of social therapy and setting up projects to get people into work), in Tunisia ('Beder pour la Citoyenneté et le Développement Equitable' and 'Mobdiun' associations, which promote the importance of culture for the social cohesion of young people), in Morocco (Sidi Moumen Cultural Center), in Chad (politics cafés and community radio), in Niger (community radio), or in Cameroon (young mothers engaged in the reintegration of former members of Boko Haram and the prevention of more departures), young people are mobilized and dialog has begun.

One core fact remains: these projects need to be multiplied. What's required is not complicated: to facilitate the sharing of experiences and to secure recognition for the vitally important role of the dialog and participation that these young people aspire to.

And in the countries themselves, the involvement of young people in policies that concern them and the promotion of the principles of living together in all social contexts is required.

A future full of creativity, but one that still receives little support, is therefore in sight in Africa for the young people mobilizing to ensure it's not a future of violence.

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### [links](#)

[- Third Regional Conversations in Algiers 'Investing in Peace and the Prevention of Violence in the Sahel-Sahara: Third Regional Conversations on the Plan of Action of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the Prevention of Violent Extremism' \(June 24-25, 2018\)](#)



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reports

# Boosting self-confidence to promote peace



Workshop of the course leaders. Photo: Stephanie Hofer

Conflict transformation and peacebuilding are the overarching objectives of cfd projects. Based on an analysis of a society's inequalities, tensions, and power structures and their causes, the projects are designed to include peacebuilding elements. The cfd always takes a human rights-based approach.

The Nashat – Action project in Algeria, for example, is aimed at young adults and zeros in on their social inclusion. Youth unemployment is one of the biggest problems in Algeria. Exclusion from the paid labor market also leads to social exclusion, combined with feelings of frustration and a lack of prospects. Furthermore, the brutal violence of the civil war still weighs heavily on society; cruel massacres took place in the 1990s in the Sidi Moussa project region, south of Algiers.

## **Violence is widespread and diverse**

Since repression and social prohibitions are widespread in society, youth violence is not just being directed against others, but also against themselves. This violence affects their self-esteem, self-image, and self-confidence.

Of the various forms of violence, domestic violence is the most widespread. So-called El Harraga (illegal migration) is also a precarious and well-known issue. El Harraga, or Harga,

literally means “to burn papers or laws.” This means that someone is not only “burning” their identity papers, but also their culture, identity, and origin and migrating illegally across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe – a widespread response to the economic and political blockade, especially among young men. It reflects the fears of a fragile society – impoverishment, unemployment, fractured social relations, loss of values, especially when it comes to raising children, violence in all its forms and contexts.

### **Raising awareness and providing education and support**

El Harraga is one of four issues – in addition to violence at school, sexual abuse of children, and violence against women – that the young people address as part of the Nashat – Action project. Two years ago, a group of course leaders were trained to head up the various stages of raising awareness and providing education and support to the young people. In order to raise awareness about illegal migration, the course leaders produced their own film featuring young people (see link). After screening the film, they discuss the issue with vocational school pupils, youth groups, and young people from associations like the scouts. The aim is also for the young people to build up a more positive self-image. The awareness-raising workshops have aroused great interest. For many young people, finding out about a different view of the issue of Hargra and exchanging ideas with one another is a new concept.

After the initial experiences with the project, the course leaders developed a program early this year to work with the young people over a longer period of time. The course leaders impart knowledge and skills for communicating, dealing with conflicts, leading groups, and planning and carrying out activities. The aim is to strengthen their personal skills and competences. Participating in the project helps young people to boost their self-esteem, enabling them to cultivate friendships. They become aware of their abilities and begin to see their future and their place in their own environment.

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#### [links](#)

- [Nashat – Action \(in German\)](#)
- [«Takhemima» film \(in French\)](#)

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reports

# “Cameras in Hands” - young people of Kyrgyzstan raising their voices



Participatory Video Kyrgyzstan. Picture: GPPAC

Young people comprise a large proportion of the world population, in conflict regions often forming the majority, thus, they should be treated as partners for peace. GPPAC values highly the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda and recognizes the necessity to work on developing platforms for youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes. The GPPAC project “Cameras in Hands”, funded by UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and led in four regions of Kyrgyzstan, is a perfect example for showing that young people can bring great changes to peace processes, especially if they have the right tools and access to decision-makers.

Children from different social, ethnic and gender backgrounds were trained in the participatory video methodology, brought to Kyrgyzstan by one of its creators, Clive Robertson, and the Organization “Middle East NonViolence and Democracy” (MEND), a GPPAC member from Palestine. According to the project manager in the “Foundation for Tolerance international” (FTI), the implementing partner in Kyrgyzstan, through videos participants “can showcase the social problems in their communities” and convey their

messages to policymakers. Youth engagement and participation in dialogue is also one of the key pillars mentioned in the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on YPS. In the project, cooperation and trust are being built through meetings with local, national and international decision-makers as well as through social media campaigns.

Even before the end of the project, the participants exceed all the expectations and act as agents of change. For example, one of the participants, Melis Azimov, started conducting trainings about tolerance and peace with his friends, which helped to bridge the divides in his community. Some gender stereotypes were eliminated – boys recognized the necessity to cooperate with girls on equal terms and raised the problem of gender-based discrimination in the movie. The case of Kyrgyzstan proves that, if the contributions of young people are supported, they can do a lot for building a peaceful future, even more than expected.

## GPPAC

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## links

- [The factsheet about the project](#)
- [Example of the participatory video created by children within the project](#)
- [Example of the participatory video created by children within the project and article about the project](#)
- [The story of Melis Azimov \(video\)](#)
- [Movie on gender-based discrimination](#)

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reports

# "Let's build a world in which children can live"



144 young people from nine countries took part in the European Youth Forum Trogen in March 2019 and discussed how European solidarity can be saved. Photo: Pestalozzi Children's Foundation

**The founding idea of the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation is based on the then widespread idea of ensuring lasting peace through nations meeting and communicating on an educational level. The aim of the League of Nations of Children was to practice peaceful coexistence in Trogen and thus show the world that peace can be learned by example.**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is celebrating its 30th birthday this year – reason enough to approach the topic of youth and peacebuilding from this perspective. The preamble of the CRC states that “the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality, and solidarity.” This spirit of peace or the creation of a culture of peace is also enshrined in UNESCO and other UN agencies' documents and is declared in the SDG 4.7 as a criterion for quality education for all to be achieved by 2030. It is clear that education does not lead to peace per se. However, the right educational content and child-friendly pedagogy undoubtedly contribute to peaceful coexistence. In 1944, Corti was certain of this against the backdrop of World War II. The projects of the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation (SKP) in Switzerland and abroad still embody this conviction today.

*“If the kingdom of heaven is within us, we will find it only if we learn from children as we teach them.”*

In the last quarter of a century, the Pestalozzi Children's Village has developed from a village for orphans of war and refugee children to an international meeting place for intercultural exchange. In 2018 alone, well over 2,000 children and young people from Switzerland and 18 other European countries visited the Children's Village in Trogen and took part in various types of exchange projects.

As part of its Swiss program, the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation provides non-formal education. Looking at the department of leisure, you can see that the informal area of education is also addressed, with a youth club based on free youth work existing in the Children's Village. The Children's Village as a whole functions as a protected learning lab. Education is understood as a dynamic process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and competences which enables and strengthens learners to adopt a value-based attitude and to change their own behavior in a way that allows conflicts to be resolved without violence.

The project work is based on three principles: An awareness of the self and the world among the participating children and adolescents within the framework of group dynamic educational work with the dialogical pedagogy methods. The content focuses on intercultural and political education, dealing with social diversity, and media literacy. In accordance with Article 12 CRC, topics are determined with the participation of the children. Four overarching goals are to be achieved: critical and reflected self-determination, solidarity and a commitment to sustainability, the ability to react and resist, and the ability to articulate and non-violent forms of articulation among the participating children and adolescents. This covers all essential areas identified in UN Resolution A/52/243 as fields of activity for the promotion of a culture of peace.

Considering these requirements for a culture of peace, the statement that children are our future is more than a platitude. Those who learn at an early age to see diversity as an opportunity and strangers as a source of enrichment will be less willing as adults to accept violence as a mode of conflict. The SKP's intercultural exchange projects offer preventive peacebuilding by initiating developments with individuals who are then likely to mature into peaceful personalities who stand up for their values and are committed to peaceful coexistence.

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#### [links](#)

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reports

# A paradigm shift at the UN



International Youth Day, 2015. Foto: UN Photo/Loey Felipe

In a rapidly changing world, youth is one of the main drivers of change. The integration of young people into peace processes is an end in itself, but it is also a way to prevent terrorism, as young people are too often its instrument.

With resolution 2250 (12.2015), the Security Council recognizes the importance and the contribution of young people to the promotion of peace, as well as their related skills and vulnerabilities. The council somehow creates a new social class, youth, with the clear goal of integrating it in peace processes. While the resolution itself is binding, it contains few obligations, mostly relying on incitement. More than all, the resolution is the beginning of a developing process in favor of youth. Therefore the United Nations made two important reports: following resolution 2250 itself, a report on youth and peace. It was partly written by young people themselves. More generally, the UNH also issued a report on the role of young people in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Christophe Barbey made for APRED an analysis (in French) of the text of resolution 2250. He confirms the founding role of the resolution: young people have their place in society and in the construction of peace, therefore they have right to better integration in decision-making processes and in peacekeeping operations. The resolution has some gaps. Its language is indirect: it is made for the young people and the institutions concerned, but it does not address them directly; it mentions neither the strengthening of democracy nor

conscientious objection.

It is nonetheless a landmark text, on which it is possible to build to advance the cause of youth and which should be supported and reinforced in the coming years.

#### APRED

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#### links

- [Resolution 2250](#)
- [Its analysis by Christophe Barbey \(in French\)](#)
- [The report of the Secretary General on 2250 made in cooperation with young person's \(interactive website\)](#)
- [Youth and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, from the page of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Youth](#)



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in depth

# “Youth Bulge” or the question of whether young people jeopardize peace



Did demographics play a role in the Arab Spring? Demonstration on Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt. Photo by Omnia Khalil/flickr

On an individual level, the connection between age and violence is seemingly obvious. The fact that young people are more violent than their older fellow citizens is not only confirmed by crime statistics but is also suggested by studies from the fields of sociology and psychology. It is also noticeable that the proportion of young people – most of whom are men – is disproportionately high in violent uprisings, rebel groups, drug cartels, or terrorist groups. Young people are particularly susceptible to politically or religiously extreme ideologies on a developmental psychology level. In addition to this, young people are less incorporated into society through work or social ties such as marriage and family. Economists would therefore say that, for young people, joining a violent organization is associated with lower opportunity costs.

But can these observations really be so readily applied to a higher level? Or, put differently: Are countries with a particularly high proportion of young people automatically more vulnerable to uprisings and civil wars? This is the conclusion of a thesis called “Youth

Bulge”, the name alluding to the bulging of age pyramids in populations with lots of young people. A radical exponent of the theory, the controversial German genocide researcher Gunnar Heinsohn sees a direct causal connection between the proportion of young men in a society and conflicts. His argument is that the number of promising social positions is insufficient when families have as many as three or four sons. Thus, it is not poverty that drives conflicts, but rather demographics and a lack of prospects: “People beg for bread, people shoot for social positions,” Heinsohn was once quoted as saying in a newspaper interview.

Few go as far as Heinsohn and declare the proportion of young men to be the main cause of conflict. And yet the Youth Bulge theory has seeped through into mainstream thought: In a report on armed violence published in 2011, for example, the OECD wrote that this violence was increasing due to “increasing youth populations without prospects”, among other things. Last but not least, during the “Arab Spring” in 2011, the high proportion of young people was often cited as an explanation for the uprisings. Daniel LaGraffe, for example, writes that demographic factors in the region have “played an important role in the widespread instability”.

Many questions nevertheless remain unanswered, especially with regard to methodology. The birth rate is directly related to other factors such as poverty or education. To say the least, this makes it difficult to form an independent variable to explain conflicts from the age structure. To cite the demographic increase as the main explanation for conflicts is also problematic because it cannot explain why, out of two countries with similar age structures, one is spared from conflict and the other not.

According to a recent study by Hannes Weber, having a large proportion of young people in a population does not automatically lead to instability or conflict. Under certain circumstances, however, an age structure like this is actually problematic. This is specifically the case when secondary and tertiary education in the population is expanded and the national economy stagnates at the same time. In this case, the labor market is not able to absorb the school and university graduates. Better education therefore leads to increased demands which, left unfilled, can lead to dissatisfaction and ultimately aggression. In any other environment, however, a high proportion of young people can be conducive to business and peace. We are then speaking of a “demographic dividend”.

However, the various studies on the impact of age structures on the risk of conflict also show that there is no consensus whatsoever. Whether a statistically relevant effect can be proven often depends on the specification of the model and the control variables included. This does not suggest that the theory is robust and requires a more detailed scientific investigation of the phenomenon at the very least.

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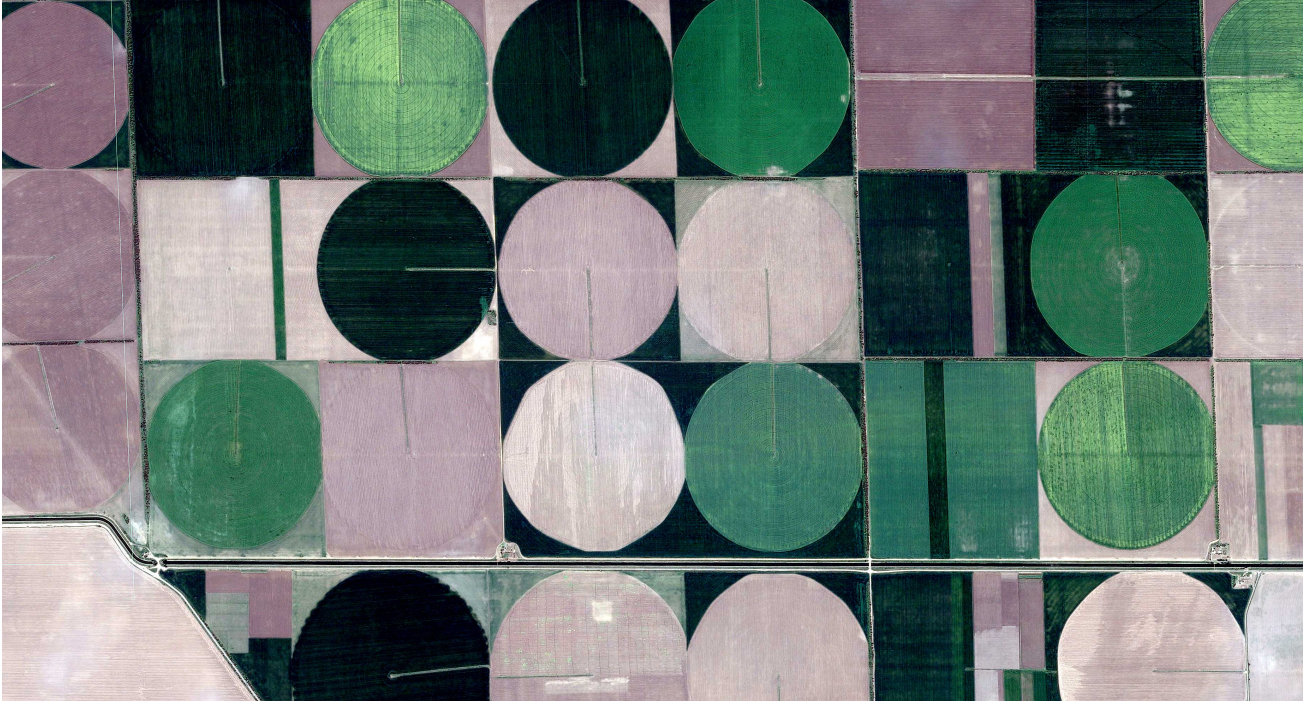
- [OECD report](#)
- [Study by Hannes Weber](#)

- [NZZ interview with Heinsohn \(in German\)](#)
- [Book by Heinsohn \(in German\)](#)
- [Article by LaGraffe](#)
- [Competitiveness, risk taking, and violence: the young male syndrome](#)
- [Explaining the relationship between age and crime: Contributions from the developmental literature on personality](#)
- [Age and the Explanation of Crime, Revisited](#)

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Ukraine 2018. Photo: swisspeace

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