United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

YOUTH 4 DISARMAMENT

THEMATIC POLICY PAPER

Crossing the Bridge Between Youth Disarmament and Non-proliferation and Youth Peace and Security

–from Parallel Tracks to Sustained Collaboration



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper identifies concrete, operational synergies between the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) and Youth, Disarmament, and Non-proliferation (YDN) agendas, and demonstrates how disarmament contributes to all five YPS pillars: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and disengagement and reintegration. Drawing on UNODA expertise and contributions from consultations with youth disarmament experts, it shows that although both agendas share common goals, they continue to be implemented in parallel. Strengthening these synergies requires institutionalized cooperation, meaningful youth participation, and removal of narrative, policy, practice, institutional, and accountability barriers.

The paper reframes disarmament as a practical peacebuilding toolbox, not a technical niche, and highlights examples from the UNODA Youth4Disarmament (Y4D) programme and alumni initiatives. By framing disarmament as part of a practical peacebuilding toolbox, the paper clarifies how disarmament connects with YPS priorities in ways that are more actionable for institutions and more grounded in the realities faced by young people. This can help Member States, UN entities, and youth actors build stronger linkages across YPS and YDN mandates, strategies, and implementation processes. Finally, the paper translates its core findings into concrete recommendations for policy and practice.

The paper focuses on concrete examples of implementation pathways and barriers that are most relevant to strengthening YPS–YDN synergies across the five YPS pillars, and translates these into practical recommendations for policy and practice. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive review of all disarmament measures or a treaty-by-treaty legal analysis. Its scope is also limited to examples linked to UNODA's Youth4Disarmament (Y4D) programme, including the work of Y4D alumni, at the global, regional, and national levels.

The overall conclusion is that progress will depend on putting in place the practical conditions to act on these YPS-YDN interlinkages with synergistic approaches, including clearer institutional roles, dedicated resources for joint work, and follow-through mechanisms that track commitments and implementation. Without these systematic actions in place, synergies are likely to remain visible only in individual initiatives, but weak in sustained policy uptake and practice.

01 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

This thematic paper draws on UNODA expertise as well as input and feedback from 24 young peace and security experts, among them Youth4Disarmament alumni and disarmament practitioners. These contributors included young scientists, diplomats, grassroots, peacebuilders, and emerging technology researchers, including from the Global South and conflict-affected regions.

The paper argues that, although both agendas have clear synergies and overlap, they are still implemented largely in parallel, in separate tracks. Yet, in times where international peace and norms are under threat, the joint implementation of the YDN and YPS can offer a solution to strengthen both. The paper reframes disarmament as a practical peacebuilding toolbox that can advance YPS outcomes across the five pillars and shows that strengthening and institutionalizing these synergies requires meaningful youth participation, and action to address narrative, policy, practice, institutional, and accountability barriers.

The analysis is organized around the five pillars of the YPS agenda and highlights concrete examples of synergies between the two agendas under these pillars. In this paper, a YPS–YDN synergy means that action under one agenda directly helps advance outcomes under the other, not simply that both agendas are mentioned or discussed in the same space. The paper then explains how these synergies translate into action through three operational bridges: narrative (how the connection is framed and communicated), policy (how it is reflected in mandates, strategies, and guidance), and practice (how it is applied through programmes, partnerships, and day-to-day work).

The selected examples span global, regional, and national levels, with priority given to those that are most concrete, impactful, and relevant to

strengthening YPS–YDN synergies. Across all examples, meaningful youth participation, inclusion, and 'do no harm' are treated as cross-cutting principles. Finally, this paper maps the main barriers to advancing these interlinkages while grouping the barriers under narrative, policy, practice, accountability, and institutional bridges. It also presents concrete recommendations to address each set of barriers.

02 CONCEPTS AND FRAMING

What does disarmament mean in the context of this paper?

This question was posed to 15 young experts (Youth4disarmament alumni), working on disarmament who contributed to this paper. Their responses reflected diverse perspectives, emphasizing the need for disarmament measures, while highlighting human security and protection.

Disarmament is a practical way to build peace and security. It provides a toolbox of complementary approaches, including: (i) norms, controls, risk reduction, and transparency/confidence-building measures that enhance cooperation; (ii) reductions and limitations on weapons and practices to reduce the likelihood and impact of violence; (iii) elimination of weapon categories that pose unacceptable risks; and (iv) post-conflict disarmament (including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; DDR), the collection and safe disposal of weapons and support for reintegration to prevent relapse into violence, and (v) the preventive governance and technical stewardship of dual-use scientific advancements (such as biotechnology and AI) to prevent the weaponization of future innovations.

While disarmament is not one of the five pillars set out in UN Security Council resolution 2250,[1] it remains central to delivering results across all five YPS pillars. This framing also aligns with the Council's Youth, Peace, and Security resolutions 2419[2] (2018), 2535[3] (2020) and 2807[4] (2025), which reaffirm and strengthen commitments to meaningful youth engagement across peace and security, including disarmament, even if disarmament is not explicitly referenced in the operative paragraphs. Meaningful youth participation also sits at the core of both the YPS and YDN resolutions.[5] It serves as the key connector between them, linking a youth-centered vision of peace and security with concrete measures to prevent, reduce, and eliminate weapons-related risks.

03 BRIDGING THE AGENDAS: MAPPING EXAMPLES

UNODA's Youth4Disarmament (Y4D) Programme[6] has broadened entry points for young people through dialogue, education, and advocacy, while connecting youth with Member States, experts, and civil society. Active since 2019, this programme is a concrete example of how creating opportunities for young people's participation in advancing disarmament can contribute to broader peace and security as evidenced by 500% increase in youth participation at disarmament and non-proliferation events through strengthened outreach efforts.[7]

Since 2019, Y4D has organized a range of initiatives for different groups (including emerging disarmament experts, communicators, and artists) to give young people the knowledge, experience, and opportunities to meaningfully contribute to disarmament decision-making.

This section presents selected initiatives drawn from inputs provided by Y4D alumni, as concrete examples of how young people can use disarmament to help build sustainable peace and security for all. The featured initiatives are either connected to the UNODA Youth4Disarmament Programme or include examples involving Y4D alumni, including initiatives not led by UNODA.

3.1 Narrative Bridge

Youth-led storytelling and creative engagement, such as the ASEAN Youth Multimedia Arts Competition and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), Youth Multimedia Contest, demonstrate how young people can reshape public discourse on security, connect disarmament to human security, and broaden participation beyond technical communities. These initiatives advance the YPS pillars of participation, prevention, and partnerships.

As a first example, the Youth Multimedia Arts Competition in 2025[8], was organized to mark the 30th anniversary of the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon Free Zone.[9] As part of the Youth Leader Fund for a World without Nuclear Weapons initiative run by UNODA, the competition invited young people from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States to submit original artworks envisioning a nuclear-weapon-free region. By connecting the need for nuclear non-proliferation to human security, sustainable development, and regional peace, and security, the competition made YPS-YDN synergies more visible in discourse, broadened access to the issue beyond technical audiences, and supported youth agency in shaping disarmament narratives.

A second example under the narrative bridge is the Youth for Humanitarian Disarmament Multimedia Contest under the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).[10] Introduced in 2024 and 2025 as a youth engagement process spearheaded by the presidency, the contest created a structured space for young people, including UNODA Y4D Alumni, to communicate humanitarian disarmament concerns and priorities through multimedia products. This helped broaden the conversation and highlight how eliminating certain categories of weapons can improve human security, especially for young people, who are often the most exposed to their effects. It also increased the visibility of youth perspectives within the CCM process and strengthened the recognition of youth as credible contributors to security-related discussions.

3.2 Policy Bridge

Youth-generated policy outputs, such as the UN Youth4Disarmament Forum recommendations, the Youth Leader Fund for a World Without Nuclear Weapons (YLF) "DeclarACTION," and youth contributions to the Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference, illustrate how youth perspectives can influence disarmament policy processes. These examples strengthen participation, prevention, and partnerships, but require more formal uptake pathways.

The UN Youth4Disarmament Forum[11], held at UN headquarters in New York, in 2025, provides a clear example of concrete policy-relevant outcomes. It invited 30 young people to produce an outcome document[12] with recommendations on emerging technologies and nuclear risk, and to engage directly with members of the UN General Assembly First Committee, creating a direct pathway for youth-generated proposals to enter disarmament policy discussions linked to broader peace and security issues.

The 2024 Youth Leader Fund for a World Without Nuclear Weapons (YLF) "DeclarACTION"[13], adopted and presented at the inaugural Youth Leader Conference in Hiroshima, adds a further example of youth-led policy output with visible institutional uptake: participants from 37 countries adopted a joint declaration with commitments and proposals for a world without nuclear weapons in a UNODA-organized initiative, strengthening youth ownership and credibility in nuclear disarmament advocacy. Following the conference, the participants worked with mentors to implement projects in their respective regions to push forward the pillars of the "DeclarACTION."[14] These projects will be presented at an upcoming side event at the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.[15]

UNODA Youth for Biosecurity initiative[16] supported a pathway for youth recommendations to be developed and presented in connection with the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in 2022[17]. The document developed by over 50 young people strengthened the case for considering youth-informed recommendations in formal treaty meetings and policy deliberations, as well as increased the visibility of youth perspectives in the biosecurity field. Similar youth-led policy outputs, including contributions by UNODA Youth4Disarmament alumni to the Seoul Youth Declaration for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (2021)[18], show that these examples build on a broader and longer-standing pattern of youth contributions to disarmament policy discourse, rather than representing isolated initiatives.

3.3 Practice Bridge

Initiatives such as GenerAcción Paz, the One Young World–Nagasaki Peace-preneur Forum, and the African Fellowship on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control show how youth-led action translates disarmament into practice and local peacebuilding. These examples advance participation, prevention, partnerships, and in some cases disengagement and reintegration.

In Latin America, UNODA's GenerAcción Paz programme[19] (2024–2025) provides a concrete example under the practice bridge. It combined substantive training, a study visit, and project design workshops, enabling 10 young participants to develop and implement initiatives in their own communities with mentorship support. This resulted in strengthening youth participation, local ownership, and practical linkages between armed violence prevention and peacebuilding. This demonstrated a locally grounded approach for discussing weapons, violence, and peace that expanded youth participation beyond formal policy spaces.

In the same year, participation of UNODA Youth4Disarmament alumni, in the (2025) One Young World–Nagasaki Peace-preneur Forum[20] shows how Youth4Disarmament pathways can extend into wider cross-sector platforms, helping sustain youth leadership, networks, and peace-oriented disarmament engagement beyond UN-led processes. In Africa (2025), the inaugural UNODA African Fellowship on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control[21,] offers a strong practice-bridge example of meaningful youth participation with the next generation of practitioners: 19 fellows from 16 African countries completed intensive training linked to implementation of the UN Programme of Action[22] and the International Tracing Instrument[23], combining policy, technical, and field-based learning in ways that strengthened national capacities and built a regional community of practice for SALW control.

04 BARRIERS AND GAPS TO STRENGTHENING YPS–YDN SYNERGIES

Despite the positive examples showcasing synergy, barriers persist.[24] Fragmented communities, technical language, politicization, and lack of youth- and gender-disaggregated data limit shared understanding. Misinformation further undermines trust. These **narrative barriers** weaken the legitimacy and accessibility of both YPS and YDN agendas. Disarmament communities, across NGOs, academia, and government, frequently operate in parallel rather than in conversation, narrowing the shared 'story' of what change requires and who is expected to drive it. At the same time, common discourses can sustain weapons as a "'necessary" feature of security, making it difficult to shift the narrative toward prevention. These dynamics are compounded when disarmament becomes politically charged, discouraging youth engagement and constraining broad coalitions. The result is a persistent perception that disarmament is specialized, institutional, and government-owned, something young people can learn about, but not meaningfully shape.

Policy barriers show up most clearly in the gap between presence and power. Youth are often present but not influential. Disarmament processes often remain technical and closed, and the separate mandates and funding streams for YPS and YDN further reinforce siloed implementation. Youth are increasingly invited into disarmament spaces yet often recognized as observers or advocates rather than as technically credible contributors whose inputs shape negotiation texts and commitments.

The architecture of many disarmament processes includes highly technical language, closed formats, and established hierarchies that reinforce divides and limit meaningful youth participation. These barriers are often reinforced by national security secrecy norms and by technical and policy elites who shape access and agenda-setting in disarmament forums, making it more difficult to connect people-centred YPS perspectives with disarmament policy processes.

At the global **policy level**, the framing of disarmament in UNSCR 2250 primarily through the narrower lens of DDR can constrain how disarmament is understood within the YPS agenda, making it harder to connect YPS policy frameworks with the broader disarmament and non-proliferation field.[25] This challenge is reinforced structurally, as YPS and YDN are often treated as separate policy tracks, with compartmentalized mandates, reporting, and funding that do not often connect. Even when youth-generated recommendations are strong, they often lack formal pathways into national implementation bodies or YPS National Action Plans, leaving policy synergy visible in statements, but thin in uptake, implementation, and continuity.

Practice barriers can result from an uneven path from learning to action. In many contexts, particularly lower-income and conflict-affected settings, limited access to quality education on peace, security, and disarmament restricts who can participate meaningfully. Where youth do gain exposure to global frameworks, they often lack mentorship, funding, and the technical support needed to translate knowledge into sustained local initiatives. Financial insecurity, visa issuance and mobility constraints, language barriers, and uneven institutional support further narrow participation, disproportionately limiting participation by youth from conflict-affected regions and the Global South. These geographic inequities also skew “global” discussions toward those who can afford and access them.

In parallel, disarmament education marginally coincides with STEM training, leaving a majority of future custodians of dual-use technologies without policy, legal, and ethical grounding. Engagement and collaboration with private sector actors also remain limited in many contexts, despite their growing relevance to dual-use technologies, information ecosystems, and implementation pathways that shape both youth, peace and security realities and disarmament risk reduction efforts.

Furthermore, **institutional barriers** explain why progress can feel irregular and scattered. Youth participation is still commonly tied to short project cycles and individual champions, rather than embedded as a sustainable feature of governance. Separate institutional homes for YPS and YDN with distinct budgets, reporting lines, and incentives mean joint work is often ad hoc, even when the overlap in many of the YPS pillars often is clear. Many youth partnerships also remain short-term and project-bound, reflecting limited long-term strategic planning for sustained YPS–YDN collaboration and reducing continuity across funding cycles. Under-resourcing across both YPS and YDN efforts, including limited funding for sustained joint programming and follow-through, further weakens the institutional foundations for synergy.[26]

In many developing contexts, weak ecosystem infrastructure, including limited institutional memory, mentorship pathways, and continuity mechanisms, constrain durable cross-agenda participation and implementation. Regional agency and self-organizing capacity are also uneven, with insufficient support for peer networks and intergenerational transfer of expertise across YPS and YDN communities.

Finally, **accountability barriers** are where momentum most often fades. Youth-generated outputs, declarations, recommendations, and forum outcomes are frequently acknowledged, but not built into mandated monitoring, reporting[27], tracking of implementation or evaluation.[28] At the same time, YPS and YDN agendas tend to measure different things:

participation and inclusion on one side, technical compliance and risk reduction on the other. Without shared priorities, tracking and clearer feedback loops, it becomes difficult to demonstrate how youth participation contributes to concrete disarmament outcomes, which may limit learning, and weaken the case for sustained investment. Over time, these gaps can fuel disengagement, especially when young people see limited opportunities to influence decisions or trace how their contributions shape real-world change.

05 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The recommendations below are grouped into short- and long-term actions for the UN system and its Member States. They should be implemented in close collaboration with young people and civil society.

A) SHORT TERM (2-4 years)

1. **Build an evidence base on "what works" and translate it into action**

Produce, in collaboration with young people, a practical collection of best practices and case studies that demonstrate YPS–YDN synergies, including tools, and guidance. Organize a regular, youth-led multi-stakeholder convening to turn evidence on "what works" into action and partnerships, with time-bound commitments. Support it with a youth-led expert working group bridging the YPS and YDN agendas.

2. **Invest in joint skills-building and support youth-led local training**

Develop capacity-building and learning materials on YPS–YDN synergies, informed by young people's feedback and linked to the five YPS pillars. This could include, for example, a standardized module on disarmament and scientific integrity (including dual-use risks) for STEM and related disciplines, incorporating relevant YPS pillars. Fund micro-grants for young peacebuilders and Y4D alumni networks to co-design and deliver training, national workshops, and local initiatives that strengthen YPS–YDN synergies.

3. **Shift narratives through joint YPS-YDN communications and community-building**

Develop joint and youth-led communications and advocacy to raise awareness of YPS–YDN synergies, including through social media campaigns and practical toolkits. Build bridges to inter-connected constituencies (climate peace and security, WPS stakeholders, and communities disproportionately affected by violence and insecurity) to widen reach while keeping a coherent YPS–YDN synergies framing.

B) LONG TERM (4-8 years)

4. **Mainstream YPS–YDN integration into policy frameworks**

Embed YPS–YDN synergies into policies, strategies, and other frameworks (including National Action Plans, where applicable) through clear cross-references and shared responsibilities. Where feasible, support joint follow-up through dedicated budget lines. At the global level, step up advocacy and outreach in partnership with young people to strengthen synergy and alignment between disarmament-related language in YPS UN Security Council resolutions and YDN UN General Assembly resolutions.

5. **Strengthen accountability through joint tracking and follow-up**
Co-develop with young people a set of joint priorities to track progress, and integrate them, where possible, into existing reporting. Require follow-up and evaluation on youth-generated outputs with named owners, timelines, and milestones, and track progress systematically through a shared dashboard or simple tracker.

Across all recommendations, the aim is to shift from participation as presence to participation as influence, so that young people shape the YPS-YDN decision making. This requires minimum standards against tokenism, enabling conditions for meaningful participation, and fair, context-appropriate compensation within available means. As global stability and shared rules face renewed pressure, bringing the YPS and YDN agendas together offers a concrete way to reinforce an international rules-based peace and security order by making joint YPS-YDN efforts more prevention-oriented, people-centred, and youth-inclusive. Crossing the bridge between YPS and YDN means moving beyond parallel tracks toward sustained collaboration. Without these in place, synergies may remain visible in individual initiatives but weak in lasting policy and practice.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: Youth Inclusive Methodology

This thematic paper was developed through a youth-participatory methodology grounded in the principles of meaningful youth participation. As a programme under the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) Youth4Disarmament (Y4D) builds on UNODA's ongoing commitment since 2019 to empower young people to lead on disarmament issues, including in global policy and decision-making spaces, contributing to building peace and security. Meaningful youth participation was the starting point for the development of this first-of-its-kind thematic paper on the synergies between the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) and Youth, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (YDN) agendas. Given the limited existing research, evidence base and data collection on these synergies, the paper was intentionally designed to draw directly from the experiences, knowledge and recommendations of young people working at the intersection of these agendas. It therefore builds on an approach that centres youth-generated evidence, lived experiences, practical examples, good practices, challenges, and forward-looking recommendations.

The contributors to the paper reflected diverse geographic and gender representation. Among the 24 contributors, participation spanned Asia and the Pacific (29.2 per cent; India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand), Europe (25.0 per cent; France, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine), the Middle East and North Africa (16.7 per cent; Egypt and Lebanon), Latin America and the Caribbean (16.7 per cent; Brazil and Mexico), Sub-Saharan Africa (8.3 per cent; Nigeria and Zimbabwe), and North America (4.2 per cent; the United States). In terms of gender balance, 66.7 per cent of

contributors identified as women, 29.2 per cent as men, and 4.2 per cent preferred not to say. This diversity helped strengthen the paper by ensuring that its evidence base and recommendations were informed by a broad range of regional perspectives, lived experiences, and practice-based insights.

The methodology unfolded in four youth-inclusive phases. In the first phase, UNODA reached out to Youth4Disarmament alumni to introduce the initiative, share its scope, and explore initial interest. Interested alumni were invited to an introductory meeting, which aimed both to present the overall vision for the paper and to co-design (together with the Y4D alumni) its initial structure. Following this meeting, young people were invited to formally express interest in contributing to the paper, and 37 youth signed up.

In the second phase, inputs were collected from the youth experts (Y4D alumni) through a structured survey instrument designed to gather concrete examples, good practices, challenges, and recommendations related to advancing the synergies between the YPS and YDN agendas. The material collected through this process served as the primary evidence base for the paper. It was reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized to identify emerging themes, patterns, and priority issues, which then informed the overall structure and substance of the draft. This drafting process was supported by a core group of UNODA colleagues/youth focal points.

In the third phase, the first full draft of the paper was circulated to Y4D alumni for review and feedback. Feedback was collected through a second structured survey, through which a total of 20 contributors provided comments. The quality of the feedback received was

exceptionally strong and played an important role in sharpening the paper's narrative, refining definitions, strengthening examples, and improving the overall direction of the analysis. This input was carefully reviewed by the core UNODA team and incorporated into the paper to the extent possible.

In the fourth and final phase, the paper's key findings and recommendations were validated through a global virtual consultation on youth and disarmament held on 19 February 2026, which brought together more than 100 young people from across the world. As part of the consultation, approximately 20 participants joined a dedicated thematic breakout discussion on the synergies between the YPS and YDN agendas. Their reflections helped validate and further strengthen the paper's core messages and recommendations. In addition, an internal validation workshop was convened among UNODA colleagues to review the feedback received from young people and to discuss the final recommendations. These inputs were taken into account in preparing the final draft of the paper.

ANNEX 2: Definition on Disarmament

Disarmament is not only about the elimination of weapons, but also about the creation of safer conditions for individuals, communities and States. It includes efforts to prevent, control, reduce, and eliminate weapon-related risks, including those associated with both weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms. It also encompasses legal and political measures, international treaties and norms, transparency and confidence-building arrangements, education, awareness-raising and practical forms of cooperation. In this regard, UNODA's work underscores the importance of public engagement and intergenerational action. Through the Youth4Disarmament programme and related youth projects and activities, UNODA has emphasized the value of engaging, educating and empowering young people to contribute to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control efforts, including at the global and regional levels. Disarmament is a foundational and fundamental pillar of international peace and security.

It is both a normative and practical endeavor: one that seeks to reduce and eliminate the dangers posed by weapons, prevent conflict and human suffering, strengthen international stability, and build a safer and more peaceful world through collective action.[1]

1. United Nations, Disarmament (Global Issues): https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/disarmament
   UNODA, Regional Disarmament:
   https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/regional-disarmament
   UNODA, Conventional arms:
   https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/conventional-arms
   UNODA, Disarmament and Youth:
   https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/cross-cutting-issues/disarmament-and-youth