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A Decade of Adoption and Implementation of the UNSCR 2250 in West Africa: Progress, Challenges and Way Forward

Policy Brief

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POLICY BRIEF

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Abstract

A decade after the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), this policy brief assesses the agenda's implementation across West Africa. In the past ten (10) years, youth-led movements and peacebuilding networks have proliferated, and countries such as Nigeria, Liberia, and The Gambia have validated National Action Plans, however, formal youth participation in peace and security decision-making remains largely symbolic. The policy brief identifies key obstacles, including political instability following the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS, the risk of youth priorities being diluted through mainstreaming, weak accountability mechanisms, chronic funding shortfalls, and elite capture marginalising rural and vulnerable youth, as well as fragmented regional frameworks between the African Union and ECOWAS. That notwithstanding, the policy brief argues that translating commitments into outcomes requires governments, regional bodies, and international partners to move beyond consultation toward genuine decision-making power, sustained financing, and accountability. It concludes the next decade of YPS implementation must be judged by tangible impact, not policy adoption alone.

1. Introduction

In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), “recognising the important and positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security,” and “affirming the important role youth can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and as a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts”.¹ The resolution emerged from a confluence of global upheavals that exposed both the potential and the peril of youth exclusion from governance and peacebuilding.

The Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 had demonstrated the transformative power of youth-led movements, as young people across the Middle East and North Africa rose demanding dignity, economic opportunity, and political reform in the face of corruption and poor accountability, unemployment, and authoritarian rule². The adoption of the Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security in 2015³ further consolidated global political recognition of youth as peace actors, reinforcing the normative momentum that culminated in UNSCR 2250 and strengthening transnational advocacy networks driving the agenda.

That notwithstanding, youth policy engagement in West Africa did not begin with Resolution 2250. Even before

2015, several West African countries had developed national youth policies, youth development strategies, and institutional frameworks to promote youth inclusion and empowerment. In fact, eight (8) countries in the region had youth policies of some sort, four (4) had policies under review, and only three (3) had no policies at all. For instance, Ghana had its first in 2010⁴, Nigeria in 2001⁵ and Cape Verde in 2009⁶. The YPS agenda was therefore expected to build on and complement existing efforts across the different countries.

Ten years on, however, the region presents a mixed record. While several states, such as Nigeria, The Gambia, Liberia, Ghana and Senegal, have either completed or initiated processes to develop their national action plans (NAPs) or youth-inclusive peacebuilding programmes, others continue to struggle to translate commitments into practice. The peace and security architecture of West Africa has been characterised by recurring coups, hybrid political systems, and a deepening youth bulge⁷, intensifying socio-economic pressures linked to unemployment, mass insecurity, and violent extremism.

Nonetheless, the decade since UNSCR 2250 has witnessed the emergence of new youth-led movements, from civic mobilisations such as #EndSARS, #FixTheCountry and the Y'en a Marre movement to community peacebuilding

¹ UN, S. C., ed. (2015). *Resolution 2250*, 70th year. United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/814032>.

² Kern, L. (2025). ‘Do National Action Plans Actually Lead to Action on the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda?’ *United Nations University, UNU CPR*.

³ Global Forum. (2015). Amman Youth Declaration on Youth Peace and Security. *United Nations*.

⁴ Parliament of Ghana. (2010). *National Youth Policy of Ghana*. <https://repository.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/564/>

GHANA%20YOUTH%20POLICY.pdf.

⁵ UN. (2001) National Youth Policy – Nigeria.

⁶ Foresight for development. Youth Policy. <https://www.foresightfordevelopment.org/bibliozone/youth-policy>.

⁷ over 60% of the population is under 25

networks, such as the Youth for Peace (Y4P) networks in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Mali, and Burkina Faso. However, youth participation in formal peace and security decision-making processes within the legislative and executive structures remains largely symbolic, often confined to problem-solving as consultees identifying problems or validating pre-determined priorities rather than co-creating policies, shaping implementation strategies, or influencing outcomes⁸. In 2018, the UN commissioned an authoritative study on UNSCR 2250, titled “The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security.”⁹ This study challenged the prevailing narratives about young people and violence. The study served as the foundational document for implementing UNSCR 2250, calling for a seismic shift from reactive security responses to comprehensive violence-prevention approaches with young people at the centre. Moreover, limited studies have assessed the resolution’s implementation, particularly in West Africa, over its ten years of operation. Therefore, this paper assesses the implementation of the YPS Agenda in West Africa, particularly, the goals and objectives of the UNSCR 2250.

2. Overview of the UNSCR 2250

The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda evolved through a sequence of Security Council resolutions that collectively established a comprehensive

framework for youth engagement in peace and security. The landmark UNSCR 2250, adopted unanimously on 9 December 2015, marked the first time the Security Council formally recognised young people’s positive contributions to peace processes and conflict resolution. This historic resolution established the foundational architecture for global YPS policy. The YPS framework was subsequently strengthened through UNSCR 2419¹⁰, adopted in June 2018 and UNSCR 2535¹¹, adopted in July 2020. The YPS resolutions emphasised the need for dedicated resources and institutional mechanisms to support youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, further advancing the agenda by focusing on youth’s role in countering violent extremism and terrorism, while stressing the importance of addressing root causes such as social exclusion, economic marginalisation, and political marginalisation. Resolution 2250, together with associated resolutions, collectively institutionalised five pillars for youth engagement in peace and security imperatives. The five pillars (Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnerships and Disengagement/ Reintegration) are also used to measure progress comparatively, identify implementation barriers, and highlight lessons from regional and national experiences.

Resolution 2250 urged Member States to establish mechanisms enabling young people to participate meaningfully in peace processes and dispute resolution¹². There has been growing

⁸ UNFPA. (2018). *Youth*. United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unfpa.org/youth-peace-security>.

⁹ Simpson, G. (2018). *The missing peace: independent progress study on youth, peace and security*. UNFPA and UN. Peacebuilding Support Office, UNFPA; UNPBSO. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3846611>.

¹⁰ UN. S. C., ed. (2018). *Resolution 2419*. 73rd year, United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1628896>.

¹¹ UN. S. C., ed. (2020). *Resolution 2535*. 75th year, United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3872061>.

¹² UN. ‘Youth, Peace and Security | PEACEBUILDING’. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/policy/youth>.

operationalisation of YPS within the UN system and globally^{13,14,15}

However, as this policy brief will demonstrate, significant gaps remain between the normative commitments enshrined in these resolutions and the lived realities of young people in conflict-affected areas of West Africa. The following sections examine how these global and regional frameworks have been translated into national action in West Africa, analysing both achievements and challenges in realising the YPS agenda for the region's youth.

3. Implementation Progress of YPS in West Africa

3.1 The West African YPS Landscape (2015-2025)

West Africa stands at a critical juncture in the implementation of the YPS agenda. With youth constituting the demographic majority across all West African countries and facing an average unemployment rate of approximately 24.95%¹⁶, the promise of UNSCR 2250 has taken on urgent, life-and-death significance. The security landscape has also deteriorated dramatically since 2015, with the Sahel accounting for 19% of all terrorist attacks worldwide and 51% of global terrorism-related deaths in 2024¹⁷. The expansion of violent extremist groups¹⁸ has created an “*alarming*” situation where a vast territory stretching from Mali to northern Nigeria could fall

under extremist control. The violence, however, has not remained confined to the traditional epicentres in the Sahel. Terrorist activity is increasing in the littoral states of West Africa, including Benin and Togo. This security deterioration has affected youth prospects and deepened their vulnerabilities, such as denied access to education, disproportionate representation among refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as unemployment crises. This is the paradox at the heart of the implementation of YPS in West Africa.

Also important, the institutional architecture for YPS implementation in West Africa operates at two levels, continental and regional, each with distinct approaches, strengths, and limitations that shape national implementation efforts. On the continent, the African Union's Youth for Peace Africa Programme (Y4P), launched in 2018, provides continental momentum for the implementation of UNSCR 2250. The programme emphasises institutional mechanisms, including the AU Continental Framework on YPS, adopted in 2020, youth focal points, and the African Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP) network. Y4P represents a comprehensive approach that goes beyond rhetoric to establish concrete structures for youth engagement in peace and security processes.

Regionally, ECOWAS has integrated YPS commitments into its existing peace and security architecture. Unlike the AU, ECOWAS does not have an exclusive

¹³ UN. (2020). *First Biennial Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Youth, Peace and Security*. United Nations.

¹⁴ UN. (2024). *Second Biennial Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Youth, Peace and Security*. United Nations.

¹⁵ Gaston, E., Karimou, I., Kern, L. & Bapt, E. (2025). 2025 *Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security*. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research.

¹⁶ Gazette, P. (2025). West Africa's 25% Unemployment Rate among the Highest Globally, Says ECOWAS MP. <https://gazettengr.com/west-africas-25-unemployment-rate-among-highest-globally-says-ecowas-mp/>.

¹⁷ Bojang, S. (2025). *Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: Report Shows Sahel Accounted for 51% of Global Terrorism Deaths in 2024*. The Africa Report.

¹⁸ including Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

standalone framework inspired by the 2250 and dedicated solely to youth, peace and security. Instead, YPS priorities are mainstreamed within the ECOWAS Youth Policy (EYP)¹⁹ (4.11 and 4.12) and Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)²⁰, which includes a Youth Empowerment component. The EYP and the ECPF both recognise young people as stakeholders and beneficiaries in conflict prevention efforts, and calls for the creation of opportunities for youth participation in governance, economic empowerment programs, early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms. Since 2023, ECOWAS has intensified its support for the implementation of YPS by convening regional consultations on NAPs, bringing together Member States, CSOs, and youth-led groups to share experiences and coordinate efforts.^{21,22,23}

3.2 National Action Plans: From Policy to Practice

At the national level, the YPS NAPs are led by Ministries of Youth, National Youth Authority/Council or related institutions, and YPS steering committees. These efforts are supported by ECOWAS, the AU, UN agencies and country offices, CSOs, youth networks and groups. While the proliferation of NAPs signals growing political recognition of UNSCR 2250, their translation from policy frameworks into tangible outcomes remains uneven and contested. Nigeria holds a distinctive place in the African YPS landscape as the first country on the continent to

adopt a NAP, validated in 2021. This milestone positioned Nigeria as a regional norm-setter and generated early optimism about youth-inclusive security governance. Liberia's validation of its YPS National Action Plan in August 2025 represents a recent milestone in the region and reflects renewed momentum for youth-inclusive peacebuilding in a post-conflict context. The process was facilitated by a relatively open civic space and strong engagement from civil society organisations, youth networks, and international partners.

Liberia's experience underscores the importance of democratic consolidation and civil society capacity in enabling YPS processes. Similar dynamics are evident in The Gambia, where YPS NAP validation in November 2024 followed years of political transition after the fall of the Jammeh regime. The democratic opening created space for civil society reorganisation and youth mobilisation, enabling renewed engagement with the YPS agenda. As in Liberia, the Gambian case highlights the role of political transitions as windows of opportunity for normative reform. Several West African countries, including Ghana, Benin, and Senegal, remain in the consultation or inception phases of YPS NAP development. These early stages reveal significant variation. Some countries demonstrate forward momentum through strong coordination, clear political ownership, and active youth engagement, while others remain stalled due to bureaucratic delays or shifting

¹⁹ ECOWAS. (2010). ECOWAS Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action. ECOWAS Commission.

²⁰ ECOWAS. (2008). Regulation MSCA/REG.1/01/08 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. Economic Community of West African States.

²¹ Mayaki, H. (2024). ECOWAS Commission Organises Youth Summit to Unleash Potentials of Young Minds for Growth, Self-Development, Regional Peace, and Stability. Economic Community of West African States.

²² Mayaki, H. (2025). ECOWAS Commission Holds a 3-Day Regional Conference on Sustainable Participation of Youth In Governance in The ECOWAS Region. Economic Community of West African States.

²³ Mayaki, H. (2025). ECOWAS Commission and Partners Conclude Youth, Peace and Security Consultations in Senegal. Economic Community of West African States.

political priorities. In other countries, such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, YPS implementation has taken a more tentative form due to the emergence of military regimes. In Guinea, the agenda has centred on the formation of a National YPS Coalition and the development of a roadmap.

4. Challenges

Despite normative progress and the expansion of policy architectures, the implementation of the YPS Agenda in West Africa since UNSCR 2250 has continued to face profound structural, political, and institutional challenges. The following are some of the challenges.

i. Fragmentation and Overlapping Regional Frameworks

The existence of overlapping and non-identical regional frameworks for YPS implementation poses a challenge to implementation. While the AU's Continental Framework and ECOWAS youth policies are normatively aligned with UNSCR 2250, differences in scope, institutional anchoring, and implementation modalities create coordination challenges for states, regional bodies, and partners. This fragmentation has resulted in duplication of efforts, competing reporting demands, and gaps in coverage, particularly for countries with limited institutional capacity, and has also complicated engagement for national institutions, youth, and civil society by dispersing advocacy across multiple, poorly aligned regional entry points.

ii. Political Turbulence and Regional Fracture

Regional YPS implementation has been further complicated by political instability and shifting regional alignments. The

withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS in 2024, following the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), represents a significant rupture in regional peace and security cooperation. These three countries are among those most affected by violent extremism, youth recruitment into armed groups, and acute protection challenges, precisely where coordinated YPS action is most urgently needed. Furthermore, the prevalence of military regimes in parts of the region further constrains YPS implementation, as restrictions on civic space, securitised governance, and limited tolerance for dissent undermine the participatory ethos of UNSCR 2250. In such contexts, youth engagement risks being reframed as mobilisation or control rather than inclusion and partnership.

iii. The Mainstreaming Dilemma: Visibility versus Dilution

ECOWAS's decision to mainstream YPS across existing normative frameworks, rather than develop a standalone YPS policy, reflects a strategic choice with both advantages and risks. While mainstreaming can promote integration and avoid policy silos, it also carries a significant danger of invisibility. In practice, mainstreaming has too often translated into rhetorical inclusion with no measureable milestones rather than operational prioritisation, as youth issues risk being diluted within broader agendas dominated by state priorities. Where the youth are everyone's responsibility, they risk becoming no one's priority.

iv. Limited Enforcement and Accountability Mechanisms

In the context of YPS implementation, the AU and ECOWAS rely entirely on voluntary state compliance. There are no binding enforcement mechanisms or meaningful

consequences for countries that fail to develop NAPs, allocate resources, or report on implementation. As a result, regional frameworks often function as aspirational instruments rather than drivers of behavioural change. This gap between commitment and accountability weakens incentives for sustained national action, particularly in politically fragile or resource-constrained contexts. It also limits the ability of youth and civil society actors to leverage regional commitments in domestic advocacy, as governments face little external pressure to deliver on them.

v. Funding Gap

Perhaps the most critical constraint on YPS implementation is the absence of dedicated, predictable funding. At the regional level, ECOWAS hardly has a substantial regional financing mechanism, not unlike the UN's Youth Promotion Initiative established in 2016 under the Peacebuilding Fund, which, although not a standalone global fund dedicated exclusively to UNSCR 2250 has become the principal financing mechanism for YPS implementation. National governments are, therefore, expected to mobilise domestic resources or rely on external donors. This model has proven deeply problematic. Relying on donor funding has also fallen short as it is often short-term, project-based, and unevenly distributed, favouring countries with stronger absorptive capacity or geopolitical relevance. Funding precarity undermines sustainability and limits the ability to scale successful initiatives. The result is a cycle in which YPS remains perpetually under-resourced despite its rhetorical prominence.

vi. Symbolic Participation and Absence of Intersectionality

Across West African countries, YPS processes appear to be symbolic rather than substantive. While young people are increasingly "included" in the processes at the national level, participation is often perceived as a box-ticking exercise, with limited influence over agenda-setting, resource allocation, or decision-making. Evidence from multiple countries also highlights a tendency to privilege elite, urban, and internationally connected youth while marginalising rural and vulnerable youth outside formal settings who often face multiple barriers to participation. In some cases, YPS structures risk creating new youth elites, reproducing existing hierarchies and gatekeepers rather than transforming them.

5. Way Forward

The gap between commitments and outcomes indicates the need for greater action. The following recommendations are proposed to move the YPS Agenda beyond policy endorsement toward concrete, coordinated, and accountable action by national governments, regional bodies, and international partners.

- i.** National governments should promote youth participation beyond consultation by granting young people formal decision-making roles, clear mandates, access to resources, and influence on outcomes.
- ii.** National governments should establish dedicated institutional mechanisms and inter-ministerial coordination structures to ensure coherent and sustained YPS engagement across relevant sectors. This includes clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability for YPS implementation

across government agencies.

iii. National governments should develop and implement robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks for YPS initiatives that include youth-led data collection and analysis to regularly assess the impact and effectiveness of youth participation in peacebuilding and inform adaptive management of strategies and policies.

iv. National governments, together with relevant stakeholders, should establish multi-year, flexible funding mechanisms directly accessible to youth-led and grassroots organisations within National Action Plans and youth policies.

v. ECOWAS and the AU should align their YPS frameworks through a joint implementation mechanism to reduce duplication and create coherent implementation at the national levels with a single entry point.

6. Conclusion

A decade after the adoption of UNSCR 2250, the YPS Agenda has become firmly embedded in the normative architecture of peace and security in West Africa. NAPs, regional frameworks, and growing programming attention reflect increased recognition of young people as stakeholders in peacebuilding. Nonetheless, only three West African countries have developed NAPs. This implementation gap reveals a fundamental tension that, while there is an impressive normative and institutional framework, translating

these commitments into national action has proven extraordinarily difficult. Challenges such as political instability, limited funding, weak accountability mechanisms, and the marginalisation of grassroots youth initiatives continue to constrain meaningful participation and limit the impact of YPS frameworks. On 12 December 2025, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2807²⁴ to continue considering the YPS agenda a decade after, with efforts to address these challenges. This implies that the next decade should see increased efforts and substantial results, and will be judged not only by the number of policies adopted but also by the impact of youth-led peacebuilding processes in the region. Therefore, all efforts must be geared toward realising that.

²⁴ UN. S. C. ed. (2025). *Resolution 2807*. 80th year, United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4095916>.

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