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# POWER AND POSSIBILITY

YOUNG WOMEN, PEACE  
AND SECURITY

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Photo: Jansky Ilano

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# 1. Executive Summary

Girls and young women live at the crossroads of power and vulnerability, and this is equally true in occupied and conflict-affected contexts. Girls and young women face specific risks and are disproportionately impacted by interpersonal, structural, and cultural violence. Centering the leadership and priorities of young women and girls strengthens peacebuilding efforts. Their perspectives and contributions are necessary to promote durable, feminist peace and dismantle systems of exclusion.



Young feminist activists are already at the forefront of global struggles for human rights and building peaceful, safe futures. Young women leaders have played instrumental roles in, for example, the 2019 youth demonstrations in Iraq, the pro-democracy movement in Sudan, and post-conflict peacebuilding in Colombia. They have achieved these successes despite facing violence, backlash and barriers to civic participation and freedom of expression, despite limited investment in their leadership and their work.

Kvinna till Kvinna recognises young people's role in peacebuilding – especially young women in all their diversities. Young women, particularly those who have experienced conflict firsthand, have a clear vision for peace in their communities and countries. They have the skills and commitment to work towards the realisation of human rights, peace, and justice.

This report seeks to contribute to intergenerational feminist peacebuilding by naming the barriers that currently exist to girls' and young women's participation and identifying opportunities to prioritise their perspectives and leadership. Through a mapping of Kvinna till Kvinna's work, desk research, surveys, and interviews, we identified four thematic opportunities to promote young women's leadership in peacebuilding, with particular entry points for feminist funders, member states, and international organisations.

**Strengthen the relationship between the YPS and WPS agendas.** The WPS and the YPS agendas are interlinked and complementary, united in the conviction that the rights and interests of young people and women – in all of their diversity – must be reflected in peace processes. This requires building decision makers' capacity to employ an intersectional approach to understanding women's and young people's diverse experiences. The perspectives and participation of young people and women are prerequisites for rebuilding systems that include, rather than exclude them.

**Build relationships with young women leaders to promote meaningful participation.** Power holders across sectors can open space in decision making processes to encourage the participation of young women peacebuilders. By building relationships and creating spaces for youth participation and consultation, duty bearers can increase the engagement of young women in policy and decision making.

**Weave connections across regions and generations:** While girls and young women face

similar challenges across contexts, this study found a rich diversity of strategies and tactics across regions. Likewise, different generations of activists have lessons and insights to share with each other. Thoughtful convening and brokering connections promotes the exchange of lessons and solidarity.

### **Invest directly in young women's power:**

Apply a feminist approach to resourcing young women and girls: invest in their collective leadership for the long term. Because the resources available to young women in conflict-affected settings are seldom geared towards building young women's agency and collective voice for peace, the philanthropic leadership opportunity in this area is enormous.

Kvinna till Kvinna invites our feminist peacebuilding allies, partners, policy makers, dutybearers, and power holders to join us to advance young women's representation and agency in peacebuilding and ensure that a plurality of voices strengthen responses to violence and insecurity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This report is part of a broader effort undertaken by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation to strengthen its work with young women and the relationship between the YPS and WPS agendas, in pursuit of feminist peace. The methodology for this review included a desk review of key reports external and internal to Kvinna till Kvinna; a survey fielded to all of Kvinna till Kvinna's 13 country offices; 16 semi-structured interviews with Kvinna till Kvinna staff and partners; and an informal dialogue with young feminists and their allies.

Interviews with partners aimed to address challenges and opportunities related to working with young women in different contexts, and to analyse factors that influence partners' willingness and capacity to work on the YPS agenda within their local and national contexts. Interviews also created a space for partners to reflect on their experiences working with Kvinna till Kvinna as a donor and as a key supporter of their efforts, in order to bridge existing gaps and build on previous achievements and progress related to engagement of young women.



## 2. Introduction:

LEVERAGING YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY  
AND WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY TO  
PROMOTE FEMINIST PEACE

For nearly 30 years, the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has advanced a broad agenda at the intersection of women's rights and peace. Kvinna till Kvinna supports partner organisations and women's human rights defenders in more than 20 war- and conflict-affected countries.





Women's This work is grounded in a vision for feminist peace that goes beyond the end of conflict. Feminist peace is the absence of all forms of structural violence, where individuals enjoy human security in an inclusive, gender equal society. Likewise, feminist peacebuilding goes beyond girls' and women's participation to reimagine and recreate social structures that include rather than exclude.

Progress towards this vision has been far from linear, with setbacks and backlash along the way. However, rich lessons have emerged. For example, robust participation of young women is required to successfully implement the Women, Peace and

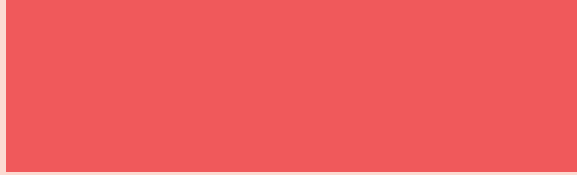
Security agenda and build feminist peace. Likewise, without recognising the heterogeneity of youth and making a strong gender equity commitment, the Youth, Peace and Security agenda will fall short of its promise.

The WPS and the YPS agendas are interlinked and complementary, premised on the belief that the rights and interests of young people and women – in all of their diversity – must be reflected in peace processes.

To advance young women's representation and agency, Kvinna till Kvinna takes an intersectional approach to understand the gendered realities of peace and conflict, including the role of age in shaping young women's experiences and political priorities. Feminist peacebuilding demands that we think intersectionally about inclusion along the lines of gender, age, class, race, disability, sexuality and other identity dimensions, open spaces for young women leaders in the WPS agenda, and rebuild systems that include, rather than exclude, girls and women in all of their diversity.

For Kvinna till Kvinna, in our support to women's movements and organisations, as well as in our role in regional and global advocacy on WPS and YPS, this report represents a commitment from us to continue to improve and develop our work on promoting the participation of young women, and bringing our experience to youth engagement spaces.





# 3. The emergence of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda

The YPS agenda seeks to promote durable, inclusive peace by addressing inequalities and structural causes of conflict. In 2000, the Women, Peace and Security agenda opened a space for recognition of “non-traditional” peace and security issues at the UN Security Council. The YPS agenda builds on this framework by prioritising the inclusion and participation of youth. Both agendas share core commitments to inclusive prevention, participation and protection. While the work to implement the YPS and WPS agendas remains incomplete, advocates have successfully used the WPS agenda as a tool to challenge gendered forms of inequality and exclusion.

# Timeline of the YPS Agenda

**2015**

The Youth Peace and Security agenda was formalised through the unanimous adoption by the United Nations Security Council (SC) of resolution 2250, which recognises for the first time that “young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.”

**2018**

The Missing Peace, a landmark independent progress study on youth, peace, and security was published. The study affirmed young people’s positive role in sustaining peace and established a strategy for implementing resolution 2250.

**2018**

SC resolution 2419 recognises the role that youth play in negotiating and implementing peace agreements and preventing conflict.

**2019**

A statement from the President of the Security Council further affirmed the role of youth in ending violent conflict.

**2020**

SC resolution 2535 calls for renewed investment in implementing the YPS agenda and requests implementation reports from the Secretary General.

**2020**

At an ambassadorial-level meeting, the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission committed to strengthen the mainstreaming of youth considerations into its work. The Commission developed a Strategic Action Plan to guide and monitor its efforts in support of the critical role of young women and men in peacebuilding.

**2020**

The Secretary-General’s first report on youth and peace and security since the adoption of resolution 2250 was released. The report highlighted the main challenges youth face in conflict contexts and emphasised the need to provide youth with effective prevention measures and safe spaces for their activism.

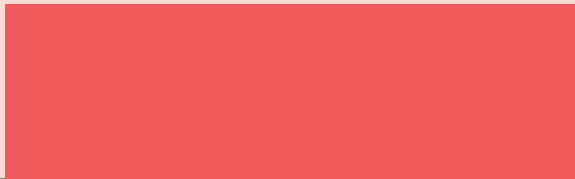
**2021**

In 2021, the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth in collaboration with the Protection Working Group of the Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security published a report documenting the lived experiences of 500 young people in civic space worldwide. The report highlights sociocultural, political, financial, legal, physical, and digital threats and barriers to youth participation in civic space.

**2022**

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution establishing a United Nations Office for Youth. With the charge of “ensur[ing] that the voices of youth are more systematically integrated across the system,” the Office for Youth will serve as a dedicated office for youth affairs in the secretariat.





# 4. Key challenges facing young women and girls engaging in peace and security

Young women can, and do, play a significant role in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction. However, without an explicit commitment to promote their participation, efforts focusing on youth or women often inadvertently overlook young women. Unless they are intentionally disrupted, existing power dynamics privilege boys and young men in youth-facing efforts and older women in women-oriented work.

While each context is unique, our inquiry identified four key barriers that girls and young women face when participating in peacebuilding. The global trend toward **shrinking civic space** is felt acutely by girls and young women engaging in peacebuilding. **Intergenerational tensions** and misalignment keeps young women from engaging in legacy feminist organisations. **Lack of reliable evidence, analysis and cultural production** contributes to the gap in young women's participation. Finally, young women's and girls' collective peacebuilding work is hampered by a **lack of financial resources**.

### Closing civic space and anti-gender backlash

Activists across generations report experiencing closing civic space and rise of severe backlash in the form of anti-rights, fundamentalist groups seeking to undermine gender equity gains. The threat and reality of sexual violence is a persistent theme in young women activists' experience, including rape threats and workplace harassment.

Political threats and pressures continue to be a common concern for young women and girls engaging in peace processes. Political threats appear in the form of arrests and detentions, house raids and property confiscation, kidnapping and targeted violence up to and including assassinations. Girls and young women face political pressures like internet shutdowns, complex registration requirements for civil society organisations, and restrictive minimum age requirements for political participation. Young women report community stigma against female empowerment projects and threats from traditional men and tribal elders.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-rights, fundamentalist groups also threaten young women's and girls' participation in peacebuilding, free expression and peaceful assembly. While anti-rights groups are on the rise globally, their influence is heightened in the context of conflict; nationalist ideologies often espouse patriarchal gender relations as a core pillar and violent struggles can reinforce harmful conceptions of masculinity. Security concerns take different forms in different contexts. For example, in Iraq and Syria, activists report targeted killings and interrogations. In Serbia, feminist and peace activists risk beatings and disruptions of public events. Whether they are labelling feminism as a Western agenda,

targeting young women activists for online and physical violence or threatening to violently disrupt public events, anti-rights movements pose a threat to young women's political participation.<sup>2</sup>

Many of today's youth use digital tools and spaces to develop their civic identities and express political stances in creative ways. These platforms allow them to claim agency that may not be afforded to them in traditional civic spaces. However, online civic participation exposes young people to online violence and digital threats. Online violence has a chilling effect on youth civic participation, particularly when it becomes physical violence in the form of beatings, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, arbitrary detention, and even the targeted killing of youth activists.

### Intergenerational tensions and conflicts

In all the contexts covered in this report, intergenerational divides exist between younger and older activists and movements. While each context is unique, common reasons for the generational divides include divergent political priorities, distinct strategies, lack of trust, and migration.

Young feminists and older feminists do not always align on political priorities. For example, in Rwanda, younger activists prioritise safe abortion, LGBTQI rights and freedom of sexuality and gender identity to a far greater degree than older feminists.



<sup>1</sup> Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space*, United Nations 2021, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Report-on-Protecting-Young-People-in-Civic-Space.pdf>, (accessed 15 November 2022).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

Activities and preferred tactics also vary across generations. Younger feminists tend to gravitate towards online activism, direct action, and public events including creative expression. From older generations there has been a greater focus on government and multilateral advocacy and developing formal NGOs, for example in the Western Balkans.

In several contexts, such as Liberia and South Caucasus, the lack of trust between generations is a challenge. Trust-building is in part hindered by stereotypes, such as young people as irresponsible and corrupt, and older activists as ineffective and patronising.

Multigenerational approaches are hampered by migration in some contexts. Younger women who lack access to livelihood opportunities either within CSOs or outside of their activism are forced to migrate to the cities or abroad in search of better opportunities. This leaves established feminist organisations with limited leadership transition avenues.

### **Lack of reliable evidence, analysis, and cultural production**

Independent media and journalism, documentation of violations, and recording young women's experiences in conflict are important strategies for young women peace activists. After active conflict, public memory work takes on heightened importance in rebuilding trust between communities. As one activist in Serbia commented: "I think it's very important to invest in culture of remembrance, women's history and contribution to peace, women's history of peace work throughout the world, and investing in knowledge, invest in mobility of researchers, activists, and scholars who are dealing with these things." Unfortunately, risk of violence and a lack of investment undermine young women's ability to use these tactics.

Global peace and security decision making spaces continue to struggle to apply a meaningful youth and gender analysis. Decision makers must engage more deeply with the root causes behind the disparate impacts of conflict and unequal access to peacebuilding processes. The field also struggles with a lack of disaggregated data. Girls and young women impacted by conflict have diverse roles and experiences; age and gender are only two of the many facets of identity that shape access to power and resources.

Without a robust evidence base, including evidence and testimonies generated by young women themselves, it is difficult to secure political commitment to open spaces for girls' and young women's participation. The evidence that does exist suggests that

gender and age inequality tend to worsen during and after conflict, impacting young women and girls in particular. At the same time, the rapid social change occurring in post-conflict situations and peace and security processes can present opportunities for transformative advances in gender equality. Further, inclusive peace processes are more sustainable. Women's full and meaningful participation in peace and security processes is core to the effectiveness and durability of peace agreements (Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, 2015).



### **Barriers to accessing financial resources**

A lack of access to sustained and flexible financial resources can prevent young activists from doing their core work in their communities, including securing their own protection. Lack of personal financial independence and economic difficulties might force them to avoid discussing sensitive issues to ensure their survival. This is a particularly important consideration for displaced people and refugees. Within the CSO context, institutional financial instability makes organisations vulnerable to manipulation by governments and power holders. Freezing bank accounts was also reported as an attempt to silence vocal youth activists.

Young women or youth-led work often occurs in unregistered, informal and flexible collectives, networks and organisations. They may operate without paid full-time or even part-time staff. Some groups are unregistered by choice and others by necessity. This makes it harder for donors to fund them directly and, in some cases, exposes them to increased security risks.

Unregistered groups face heightened vulnerability because they sit outside of formal frameworks and protections. The issue of shrinking civic space weighs particularly heavily on unregistered groups. In Jordan, for example, the government does not allow channelling of any kind of financial support directly to unregistered groups and organisations, especially if they are youth-led. One interviewee stated that when implementing activities with registered and unregistered groups, they need prior approval from governmental agencies and ministries two weeks in advance of the event.

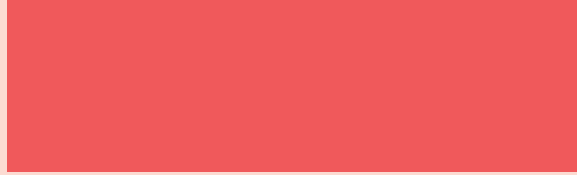
On top of government restrictions, many funders interested in supporting young women's peacebuilding work face barriers in partnering with unregistered groups. Intermediaries, multilateral actors, and regranters may have requirements from their own donors that limit the types of support they can provide to informal collectives. Partnering well with informal groups can require different processes and distinct administrative and compliance expertise than is generally required for formal NGOs. However, these barriers are surmountable. There are many examples of creative approaches to resourcing informal groups, from seeking out flexible support from back donors to outlining joint projects between formal and informal groups in service contracts.

## What it means to fund adolescent girls, young women and youth led work directly:

Youth-led initiatives often do not take the shape of traditional NGOs. They can be unregistered, informal and often have flat or horizontal leadership structures. Some actively reject institutionalised models in favour of forming movements, to avoid following any external agendas, and to avoid governmental bureaucracy. Such models have strengths, but they present unique needs and often challenges in terms of partnering with funders. Meaningfully supporting these groups means finding ways to tailor support to their needs, being flexible and responsive, and not overburdening them with eligibility and reporting requirements.

### For useful resources check out the following publications:

- No Straight Lines for practical tips on supporting young feminist-led groups and networks <https://nostraightlines.youngfeministfund.org/>
- Playbook for Resourcing Youth Led Groups and Movements, Civicus. <https://www.civicus.org/documents/en-Playbook-2020-march.pdf>
- Weathering the Storm, The Global Resilience Fund, [https://www.theglobalresiliencefund.org/\\_files/ugd/9f4592\\_9686444d84af49d7a4e27faf0849967c.pdf](https://www.theglobalresiliencefund.org/_files/ugd/9f4592_9686444d84af49d7a4e27faf0849967c.pdf)



# 5. The role of young women led organisations and collectives today across contexts

Young feminist activists are already playing leadership roles in global struggles for human rights and peaceful, safe futures. While the barriers to their participation in peacebuilding are real, in almost every geography covered by this report there are powerful examples of young feminist leadership. Here we highlight examples of the types of feminist peacebuilding work that young women and girls are leading.



## Movement Building and Direct Action

“There is no free homeland without free women” reverberated across **Palestinian** communities in September 2019 when thousands of Palestinian women took to the streets in 12 villages, towns and cities across the world in what was the launch of Tal’at, a Palestinian feminist movement informed by the lived experiences of women over decades of Israeli settler violence. Tal’at means stepping out in Arabic. Choosing the streets as their space of struggle, marchers raised their voices against gender-based violence in all its manifestations: femicide, domestic violence, embedded sexism and exploitation, asserting that the path to true liberation must embody the emancipation of each and every Palestinian, including women. This was the first time in recent history that Palestinian women took action under an explicitly political and feminist banner. Tal’at has succeeded in mobilising Palestinians across their fragmented geographies. The catalyst was the killing of Israa Ghayeb, a 21-year-old Palestinian woman from Bethlehem, who was brutally beaten by family members in August 2019.

Tal’at protesters, both women and men, chanted for refugee return, freedom, dignity, and social justice, and insisted that national aspirations can and must be achieved through a feminist revolution. Tal’at’s message is that “the safety and dignity of women in Palestine is not a women-only issue, but one that must be at the core of our emancipatory politics in discourse and action, for there is no

free homeland without free women.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Palestinian women, self-identifying as “the daughters of Palestine”, called for a revolution against “Masculinity, Patriarchy, Occupation, Zionism, Colonialism, and Oppression.” In other words, a feminism that goes beyond individual gender-based demands, to align young people in the struggle for a more just and equitable world for all.

Working with youth on peace and security issues in **Iraq** is very challenging due to oppression, harassment, and intimidation. Young women in particular have very limited and shrinking space available to express and work on issues that are important to them. The youth-led uprising of 1 October 2019, launched at Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, called for peaceful demonstrations against corruption, unemployment and authoritarianism, and demanded legal reforms. However, in the days that followed, killings and widespread arrests ground the protests to a halt. There were at least 165 fatalities and more than 6,000 wounded, including women and children. Female activists, especially journalists, lived in continuous fear and threats of being killed, arrested or injured due to their work.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the extreme challenges and violent crackdown, youth demands are more visible after the 2019 protests. Youth voices have grown louder, with clearer demands for improving legislation and advancing gender equality and equal rights. Youth movements succeeded in holding politicians and decision-makers accountable for the deteriorating situation of youth in the country, including in the 2021 national elections.

In **Lebanon**, young feminists and WHRDs, including leaders from the Syrian community, have had a critical role in recent revolutions and mobilisations in Lebanon, as they took leadership in the social movement against corruption and that demands legal, political, and economic reforms. This gave more credibility and recognition for the youth feminist movement by the public and allowed for more support by the wider generation. Reports and interviews emphasized the fearlessness and bravery of younger activists in making prominent and urgent issues visible where even the older generations could not, and in mainstreaming feminist content into Lebanese popular culture. In fact, people who are just starting to identify as feminists have increased access to feminist discourse, through comedy

<sup>3</sup> <https://mronline.org/2021/08/11/feminist-protests-in-palestine/>

<sup>4</sup> Al-Rubaie, A. Iraqi female journalists in Basra fear for safety following attacks on activists. Middle East Eye, 2020. <https://www.middle-easteye.net/news/iraq-basra-female-journalists-fear-safety-attacks-activists>



8 March demonstration in Sarajevo.

shows, storytelling events, art performances, comics, and more. Moreover, the existence of several spaces available for feminist discussions and events reinforces a sense of belonging to a wider movement.<sup>5</sup>

### Dialogue Across Communities and Generations

Young women and girls in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** navigate an environment that is shaped by nationalist and patriarchal narratives. Women's human rights defenders and women's organisations have worked to integrate gender into transitional justice policies and challenge ethno-nationalist narratives in public spaces. To support young women's leadership in this context, women's organisations in the two entities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, which together make up the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, convened young feminists. The goal of the convening was to support young women to understand and analyse the past and articulate their own needs. Through dialogue, the young women from FBiH and RS quickly found that they faced common problems. Each group developed a separate action plan. When they exchanged the plans, they identified that they shared the same goals. Both groups of young women successfully advocated with their local communities' political

representatives to adopt the youth plans. The result of this work is a strengthened youth network prepared to challenge polarising narratives in support of sustainable peace.<sup>6</sup>

The Feminist Spring School is an initiative that has been co-organised by the Alternative Girls Centre in **Serbia** and Artpolis in **Kosovo** since 2016, building on two years of co-organisation between Alternative Girls Centre and Kosovo Women's Network. The informal seminar, which draws hundreds of applications every year, brings together young women from Kosovo and Serbia and addresses a variety of topics, engaging participants in hands-on learning processes and exploring more about themselves, their feminist future and the peacebuilding process. This is an example of a hands-on peacebuilding activity, which creates a space for dialogue without political distortions, in a context of the stagnant dialogue, and tensions in interethnic relations.<sup>7</sup> A leader of the school reflected on its impact: "Since we organized this school for eight years now, we have, I think, around 160 or more young women who passed through Feminist Spring School from Kosovo and from Serbia... [Alumni have] started to be active in other organisations or individually, or they started working in institutions or went [on] to study more about peacebuilding or any other political science

<sup>5</sup> Feminist Movement Building in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities, p20, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620850/rr-rootslab-feminist-movement-building-lebanon-070819-en.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> This example is adapted from the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation's 2020 publication "A Right not a Gift."

<sup>7</sup> <https://artpolis-ks.com/eng/feminist-spring-school-2022-first-part/>

subjects... We are now developing this alumni program with them and we are trying to connect them... so that they can meet again or [continue to cooperate.]

### By Young Feminists, for Young Feminists

The women's movement in **Rwanda** is dynamic and benefits from strong leadership from individual activists. In recognition of the gendered impacts of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis, a progressive new constitution was a cornerstone of the rebuilding process. Rwanda now boasts the highest share of women parliamentarians in the world. However, patriarchal gender norms persist and work remains to secure true equality. To strengthen young women's collective action in this context, a network of over fifteen young women's rights organisations and social enterprises launched with the support of Kvinna till Kvinna and Save Generations Organisation in 2022. The network is the only space of its kind in Rwanda, where young feminist activists can mobilise together in a space that is run by and for them. Together the network is improving access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services and information and access to justice.

Youth-led partner Fe-Male is a civil feminist collective working with women and girls to eliminate injustice through young feminist movement building, empowering young leaders, and campaigning together against discriminatory norms and policies in **Lebanon**. Fe-Male works on economic empowerment, providing

opportunities, and improving employability skills are priorities for women, especially young women. In the context of the economic crisis in Lebanon, compounded by COVID-19, Fe-Male has identified the need to respond to escalating period poverty. Their work begins by providing women and girls with material support, and moves towards advocacy that aims to develop sustainable solutions for period poverty. Fe-Male's close connection with young women and girls in the communities in which they work enables them to respond quickly to emerging needs and emergencies.

In **Liberia**, the women's movement played a key role in ending war in the country and propelled women into political leadership. However, structural gender inequalities persist. To advance gender inequality in post-conflict Liberia, interactive youth clubs in schools partner with established feminist organisations to address issues like gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and political participation. While youth of all genders participate, the clubs place a priority on young women's leadership and participation in public life. The clubs aim to sustain youth dialogue and spaces for young people to exchange ideas, develop community initiatives, express themselves and discuss issues like political participation, women's rights, and youth engagement in decision making.

In **Armenia**, young women played an important role in the success of the 2018 pro-democracy Velvet Re-



As rape continue to be on the increase in Liberia, the students were thought more about sexual and gender-based violence part in the Peer Watch Club.



volution. However, active conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and accompanying nationalism and militarisation have grave consequences for girls and women. In this context, young feminist-led Frontline Youth Network invests deeply in building youth leadership to advance peacebuilding, sustainability and human rights. Through activities like summer schools, non-formal education, and public events, FYN is weaving a network of engaged young leaders making change in their communities.



### Public Art and Cultural Approaches to Healing and Dialogue

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, Kvinna till Kvinna supported the youth-led collective running the Street Art Festival, providing ongoing capacity building and strategic planning and specific support for the festival. For more than ten years, the Street Art Festival has addressed peace through the use of art, revitalising abandoned spaces and spaces damaged by war in Mostar city. The festival brings world-class artists to Mostar and engages residents to develop their own creative skills with workshops. This work aims to provide young people with open spaces to come together and discuss different issues in their highly-divided communities. The street art festival, now operating as a formal NGO REZON, uses street art as a tool for engaging with youth and citizens in general to go beyond the standard narratives and engage people in improving life in their city. REZON's work is part of a broader focus in Bosnia and Herzegovina on transitional justice, gender equality and public memory that many activists trace back to the experience of war on these territories.

### Digital Organising and Advocacy

Kvinna till Kvinna's largest cross-regional initiative on the YPS agenda to date was the Peace Academy for Young Women, implemented during 2014-2016. Participants included 140 young women from countries affected by conflict including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, and also Sweden. The main aim of the project was to increase young women's leadership, advocacy and communication skills and to strengthen their capacity to influence policymakers towards positive change at a local and international level. Coming out of the Peace Academy, young women in the Western Balkans region launched successful social media campaigns that reached approximately 80,000 people with young women's demands.

Artpolis in Kosovo have also been using digital spaces for storytelling and public memory, creating a virtual museum of women artists and activists from Kosovo and the broader region: "It is really important to know their stories from each and every country."



## 5. Recommendations

Globally, today's youth population is the largest ever, with young people making up the majority in conflict-affected countries. A young feminist from Kosovo reflected, "Especially being focused in Kosovo, we work a lot with young feminists. [We have] a special focus on that for the future, it is also in line with the population here. It doesn't make any sense... to not engage young people, and especially young feminists and feminist agenda, in Kosovo," where more than half of the population are under 30 years old. It is essential to partner with youth actors when addressing peace and security challenges, violence, exclusion, and discrimination in all forms. Youth, particularly girls and young women, are uniquely positioned to promote dialogue and social cohesion.

The Youth, Peace and Security agenda is broadly relevant, especially in countries experiencing armed conflict, in transition, or post-conflict. Recognising the complementarity between the YPS and WPS agendas should not come at the expense of acknowledging the specific needs and challenges of young men and boys, adult women, and young feminists in all of their diversity.

Our inquiry revealed a number of gaps that require collective action at the local, national, regional, and global level to address. While Kvinna till Kvinna has decades of experience supporting women peace builders and human rights defenders, including young feminists, we are newer to the YPS agenda. This review identified opportunities for Kvinna till Kvinna to continue our journey to embrace the YPS agenda and deepen our support of young feminist peacebuilders and human rights defenders through our work with partners, allied donors, and the global WPS space.

A collective commitment is needed to ensure that girls and young women can inform the decisions and policies that shape their lives. We invite feminist funders, member states, and international organisations to join us in this work. Each institution has different strengths, resources, and roles to play. Therefore, we identify particularly promising opportunities for each type of actor below.

## Recommendations to feminist funders and networks

• **Build meaningful relationships with young feminists:** Seek out young women-led organising to learn about their context and work and listen to emerging needs and opportunities. Then follow up with direct and indirect funding and connections. The full potential of the YPS agenda depends on exchange between the local and global levels with young women's local experiences informing global decision making, and global tools and frameworks strengthening grassroots work.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- Create youth-exclusive spaces in all consultation processes, and set quotas or benchmarks for young women's representation in broader spaces, in particular those related to the WPS and YPS agenda.
- Practice bringing an intersectional analysis to the country context so that you do not overlook the experiences of young feminists from marginalised ethnic

groups and religious backgrounds, young feminists with disabilities and from the LGBTI community.

• **Directly resource young feminists' collective work:** Feminist funders are uniquely positioned to directly resource girl- and young women-led peacebuilding work. Resources from feminist funders are crucial to the development of strong, autonomous intergeneration and young feminist movements for peace. While there are unique barriers to supporting young feminists' work, it is important to start somewhere. Consider learning from the active community of funders developing creative practices to truly partner with young women-led groups<sup>8</sup>. Seek out the guides and recommendations for funders that have already been developed by girls and young women for funders seeking to support their work directly.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- Think specifically about how to inform and communicate about grants and funding opportunities in spaces (physical and digital) where youth organisations are present.
- Seek to connect with other peer funders who are doing this work and building learning communities. This could include looking at youth, girls and children's rights funding alliances.
- Consider accompaniment or grantmaking opportunities that bolster young feminist activists' safety and security.

## RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS:

1. Global Resilience Fund: <https://www.theglobalresiliencefund.org/copy-of-report>
2. Generation Equality Forum Youth Manifesto: <https://gefyouthmanifesto.wixsite.com/website>
3. Girl and/or Youth Manifesto from ACHSR: [https://acshr2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ACSHR-Youth-Pre-conference\\_FINAL.pdf](https://acshr2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ACSHR-Youth-Pre-conference_FINAL.pdf)

• **Take an ecosystem approach:** Take time to learn from young women leaders about their local realities and their partners and allies. They are experts on their contexts. As much as possible, invest in the whole, multigenerational ecosystem by making funding, networking, and/or accompaniment opportunities broadly available. This approach builds on the strength of young feminist movements, which are often collaborative and coalitional, rather than inadvertently creating competition between groups or generations. Funders also operate within an ecosystem – strengthen your impact by bringing peer funders along with you by making introductions and exchanging learnings about how to meaningfully fund young women-led work;

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Include young women in the design of funding opportunities, to ensure that conditions are adapted to the realities of youth organisations.

– Be mindful of what you are asking from young women volunteers. Providing stipends in recognition of young women’s time and expertise may be important to avoid exacerbating existing power dynamics.

• **Open doors for girls and young women:** Feminist funders have access to agenda setting spaces where decisions are made that impact girls and young women. Use your convening power to support the development of intergenerational spaces.

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Invite representatives from your girl- and young women-led partners along with you, ask them to join you on panels, and support them to participate in convenings and conferences.

## A NOTE OF CAUTION ON DONOR-DRIVEN AGENDAS:

While donor support and partnership can be incredibly valuable, donors should take care not to impose their agendas on autonomous grassroots partners. For example, in the Western Balkans, specifically in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, available funding from foreign donors has focused on policy change, a priority of older feminists.

Limited resources have been available for movement building around young women’s priorities, responding to girls’ and women’s needs in rural areas or for Roma girls’ and women’s activism. This disparity has at times created tensions and competition between activists from different generations.

## Recommendations to governments in support of the YPS and WPS agenda

• **Prioritise meaningful participation beyond tokenism:** In many national contexts in which Kvinna till Kvinna works, young people, especially young women, are underrepresented in governments and decision making. Particularly in contexts characterised by nationalism and conservative politics, women espousing these positions are prioritised over those committed to peacebuilding and gender equality. Further, their voices and priorities are not meaningfully influencing public decision making. Member states have a role to play in opening space for young women’s participation. As one young feminist noted, National Action Plans are an important strategy to bring the YPS agenda to life: “that’s how we attract [government] attention to implement policies and programs within the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. When designing programs and policies, member states should prioritise effective consultation with young people to gain a “comprehensive understanding of young women’s needs, aspirations and their challenges.” to incorporate their perspectives and demands.

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Include youth representatives in civil society advisory mechanisms related to National Action Plans (on WPS and YPS).

– Support youth-led watchdog mechanisms, both financially and by recognition in formal decision-making spaces.

• **Protect space for young women’s civic participation:** Closing space for civic participation is felt acutely by young people, who experience pushback against their rights to free expression and peaceful assembly. In many contexts young people are being sidelined from policymaking because youth movements are so powerful. Member states must uphold their human rights commitments at home and use their influence to encourage other states to the same. Member states can encourage partners to work in more equitable ways with young women by setting a positive example

for other institutions and power holders.

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Stand with and express support for young women’s movements and their demands for more meaningful participation, safety, and access of young women to peacebuilding processes.

– Demonstrate **zero tolerance** against violence against women human rights defenders, including gender-specific violence that is used in a political way to silence women (including online). **Fight impunity** when it comes to violence against WHRDs.

– Increase the availability of **emergency funding** for WHRDs under direct threat.

• **Build policymakers’ capacity to apply a youth and gender analysis to peace and security policy:** To reflect the diverse experiences of girls and young women across ethnic groups, races, religions, sexualities and other lines of difference, global peace and security decision makers must build capacity to apply a youth and gender analysis. Disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data are also needed to deepen public understanding of the experiences of girls and young women in conflict and peacebuilding.

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Collaborate with youth and gender justice movements in capacity development efforts, such as training and courses for decision-makers led by civil society.

## Recommendations to International Organisations that implement the YPS and WPS agendas

• **Strengthen the connections between the YPS and WPS agendas, weave networks and break down silos:** The WPS and the YPS agendas are interlinked and complementary, united in the conviction that the rights and interests of young people and women – in all of their diversity – must be reflected in peace processes. When advocating for the YPS and WPS agendas at the global level, embrace the overlap between these agendas while retaining the specific needs of diverse constituencies. Seek to weave connections across agendas and issues relevant to girls and young women, like broader human rights movements, to share lessons and resources.

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Invest in capacity strengthening within your organisation to better understand the linkages between the YPS and WPS agendas.

– Take time to build relationships for learning and exchange with peers with other entry points to the YPS and WPS agendas.

• **Build relationships with young feminists:** Prioritise seeking out young women-led organising to learn about their context and work and listen to emerging needs and opportunities. Then follow up with funding, connections and resources. The full potential of the YPS agenda depends on exchange between the local and global levels, with young women’s local experiences informing global decision making, and global tools and frameworks strengthening grassroots work.

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Prioritise language access and invest in translation and interpretation to lower language barriers to participation.

– Make a point to host consultations outside of country capitals in spaces accessible to young feminists.

• **Increase investment in young feminists’ collective work:** Where possible, international organisations with funding strategies that implement the YPS and WPS agendas should seek to directly resource girl- and young women-led peacebuilding work with direct, flexible funding. For international organisations that work with local intermediaries, seek to harmonise your practices and processes with the needs of young feminist movements.

FOR EXAMPLE:

– Design due diligence and reporting requirements that allow partners to re-grant to young feminist collectives and networks.

– Nonfinancial support like accompaniment, convening and networking, and invitations to agenda-setting spaces are also valuable sources of support.

# Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation's work in Regional & National Contexts



## Liberia

Kvinna till Kvinna has worked with Liberian civil society and WHRDs since 2007. The non-violent Liberian women's movement played a key role in bringing an end to war in the country. Liberia elected Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the continent's first elected female head of state, established a national action plan on Resolution 1325, and has made progress in women's legal equality. However, girls and women continue to face gender-based violence, gendered poverty, and lack access to SRHR services and information. Kvinna till Kvinna's partners in Liberia work to close the gap, working on gender-based violence, women's participation in decision-making and peace building, conflict resolution, economic opportunity, and HIV/AIDS.

## Rwanda

Kvinna till Kvinna has supported women's rights in Rwanda since 2017. In recognition of the gendered

impacts of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis, a progressive new constitution was a cornerstone of the rebuilding process. Rwanda now boasts the highest share of women parliamentarians in the world. However, patriarchal gender norms persist and work remains to secure true equality. Kvinna till Kvinna's work in Rwanda is focused on preventing gender-based violence, conflict resolution, and women's participation and decision making.

## Western Balkans

**Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Kvinna till Kvinna has worked in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1993. Despite the war's gendered impacts, with thousands of girls and women experiencing sexual violence, women were excluded from peace negotiations after the end of the war in 1995. To this day, there has not been accountability or redress for most survivors. Today the women's movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is promoting peace, transitional justice, and working to mend division across ethnic lines despite mounting threats and nationalism.

**Kosovo:** Kvinna till Kvinna has supported women's rights in Kosovo since 1994. Although Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, Serbia does not recognise Kosovo as an independent country. On top of lingering ethnic tensions, this adds uncertainty to women's lives in Kosovo. Against this backdrop, and women's experiences of violence and abuse during the war in the 1990's the women's movement has been uniquely effective at promoting dialogue for sustained peace. Additionally, survivors of sexual violence in the war achieved a major victory in 2014 when they became entitled to compensation, similar to veterans. However, work remains to curb widespread violence against girls and women.

**North Macedonia:** Kvinna till Kvinna has supported women's rights in North Macedonia since 1999.

Gender equality advocates in North Macedonia work against the backdrop of ethnic tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. Women's rights organisations have been working to advance progress on gender equality in the context of North Macedonia's EU accession agenda.

**Serbia:** Kvinna till Kvinna has supported women's rights in Serbia since 1994. Today, women's rights organisations are working in a difficult context of rising nationalism and anti-gender movements. Women's rights organisations in Serbia are working to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, educate the government on women's rights and advance women's participation, promote peacebuilding, advocate for women's rights with a focus on minorities such as Roma women, and work for reconciliation in the Western Balkans and document Serbia's war history.

## South Caucasus

Kvinna till Kvinna has worked in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia since the early 2000s.

Conflict between **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan** over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh continues. Over half a million people are internally displaced in Azerbaijan. For decades, women have had limited opportunities to take part in peace talks. In Armenia, women and girls played an important role in the pro-democracy Velvet Revolution in 2018, but political and economic inequality persists. Women's rights and peace activists continue their work despite facing headwinds in the form of nationalism, militarisation, and traditional gender roles. In Azerbaijan, there is very limited space for women's rights activism and for women's peacebuilding. Despite the challenges, activists persist in calling attention to gender inequality and violence against girls and women and calling for space for women in peace talks.

After **Georgian** independence from the Soviet Union, two breakaway regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – formed as a result of internal conflicts. Armed conflict over the regions, which remain outside of Georgia's control, has occurred with Russia. Women have been largely excluded from peace talks and must contend with conservative gender stereotypes. However, civil society in Georgia is somewhat more open than elsewhere in the region, and women's rights organisations are working to build trust between opposing sides of the border

conflicts, promote peacebuilding, support IDPs, address gender based violence and promote gender equality, advise the government and promote access to SRHR services and education.

## Middle East & North Africa

Kvinna till Kvinna works in Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Tunisia. This report included Kvinna till Kvinna's work in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon.

**Iraq:** Kvinna till Kvinna has supported women's rights in Iraq since 2005. After the US invasion, Iraqi society has become increasingly unstable, creating space for fundamentalist and authoritarian movements. This has had dire consequences for women, particularly ethnic and religious minorities. The 2019 youth mobilisation in Iraq faced severe violence but created space for important conversations about the needs and demands of young people.

**Lebanon:** Kvinna till Kvinna has supported women's rights in Lebanon since 2005. Despite a somewhat more favourable context for their organising, women and girls in Lebanon continue to struggle with social, political and economic inequality. In the context of the economic crisis and the 2020 Beirut explosion, women's rights organisations have worked to address the harsh consequences for girls and women and improve the conditions of refugees in Lebanon.

**Palestine:** Kvinna till Kvinna has supported women's rights in Palestine since 2001. Israel's occupation has eroded and fragmented Palestinian territory. Palestinians in Gaza are facing a humanitarian crisis with very limited access to basic needs, electricity and medicine. Women have been deeply affected by recent violence in Jerusalem and face arrest and violence when they demonstrate. Despite decades of occupation and war, Palestinian women continue to work collectively to bring an end to the Israeli occupation and demand respect for women's rights.

**For all women's rights,  
in every corner of the world.**

