10 Years of YPS Agenda in South Asia: Unmasking Deficits

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1. Introduction

When the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) in December 2015 on the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda, it established a transformative framework around recognizing, empowering, and supporting young people as essential partners in the promotion and maintenance of peace and security.[1] Its five pillars (*Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnerships, and Disengagement & Reintegration)* contain cross-cutting principles to advance the agenda and ensure the meaningful inclusion, protection, and leadership of youth across all stages of peace and security processes. The subsequent three UNSC resolutions on YPS (UNSCR 2419, 2535, 2807) have since reinforced this mandate, recognizing young people's political agency and calling on governments to translate these normative commitments into concrete institutional mechanisms and targeted resource allocations.

The imperative of this agenda is evident in South Asia, where a total population exceeding 2 billion includes more than 550 million young people aged 15–29 years. In recent years, Gen Z and youth-led movements have emerged as a primary catalyst for political accountability and democratic transformation across the region.[2] Even as they navigate unprecedented economic hardship, active conflicts, and systemic repression, young people in the region persistently choose civic action over disillusionment, demanding accountable and democratic systems that serve the public good.

Yet, a decade after the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 2250, the operationalization of the YPS agenda in South Asia stands as a sobering study in institutional neglect and lack of political will. While global normative progress has expanded through 13[3] National Action Plans (NAPs) worldwide (and many more in development), South Asia presents a critical policy void for youth, peace and security: **none of the region's eight nations[4] has adopted an official YPS National Action Plan**, meaningfully integrated YPS principles into other policies, or backed youth-led multi-stakeholder YPS coalitions.[5]

Far more concerning than the absence of policy documents is the systemic failure of international and national institutions to support youth peacebuilders. Unlike in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where UN agencies, multilateral regional bodies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have actively driven, funded, and shepherded YPS frameworks, South Asia has been largely abandoned by the multilateral system. With the sole

[1] United Nations Security Council. 2015. *Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security.* S/RES/2250 https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2250(2015)
[2] Tharoor, Shashi. 2026. *Youth-Led Protest Movements Are Changing South Asia's Political Trajectory. Project Syndicate* https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/youth-led-protest-movements-changing-south-asia-political-trajectory-by-shashi-tharoor-2026-08
[3] by mid August 2026
[4] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka
[5] Upadhyay, Mridul. 2026. *NAP Overview and Analysis.* YPS Monitor. https://www.ypsmonitor.com/naps

exception of Sri Lanka[6], UN entities and major international partners have failed to integrate YPS into their core country programming, strategic frameworks, or funding allocations across the region.

Consequently, the burden of keeping the YPS agenda alive has fallen almost entirely on under-resourced youth-led peacebuilding organizations and informal youth-led coalitions. Operating without institutional recognition, sustainable core funding, or legal protection, these youth networks have been pushed to their operational limits. Today, most national YPS coalitions in South Asia are either fully or partially inactive, exhausted by governance inertia and financial starvation.

This thematic paper synthesizes the findings of the **YPS Monitor's Policy & Implementation Audit**[7] and the **YPS Index 2026**[8] to provide an unvarnished overview of YPS governance[9] in South Asia. To enhance transparency and accountability in peace and security governance, it identifies structural bottlenecks and outlines actionable pathways to institutionalize the YPS agenda in South Asia over the next decade.

2. YPS Index 2026: Country Priority Analysis

The **Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Index** is a Country Priority Analysis - an analytical global framework designed to measure, rank, and track the relative urgency for Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) implementation across countries. Conceptually, it synthesizes a multi-dimensional ecosystem to evaluate both acute security risks and the broader structural conditions that dictate youth agency in the peace and security field in the country. It was developed in 2023 and enhanced methodologically and statistically in 2026.

Developed by the YPS Monitor team, the YPS Index assesses nations across the five YPS pillars by synthesizing twelve core indicators, drawing data from internationally renowned, peer-reviewed global repositories that are updated frequently (at least once every two years).[10] These twelve data points cover interconnected domains of peace, safety, security, governance, rights, civic space, youth development, agency, wellbeing, environmental resilience, and institutional YPS infrastructure.[11] By integrating these dimensions, the index moves beyond narrow conflict tracking or presenting youth vulnerabilities to deliver a holistic diagnostic of whether young people face acute structural vulnerabilities and whether their local ecosystems support safe, meaningful peace and security.

A higher numerical rank (with Rank 1 representing the highest priority) signals an acute, immediate necessity for targeted YPS interventions, protective mechanisms, and resource allocations, guiding governments, international agencies, donors, civil society organisations, and YPS advocates.

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[6] Smith, Sarah. 2020. *The United Nations: A Champion for Youth?* Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. Development Dialogue Papers, Issue 28. https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/the-united-nations-a-champion-for-youth/
[7] Done by YPS Monitor team with the support of young peacebuilders
[8] Upadhyay, Mridul. 2026. *YPS Index (Country Priority Analysis).* YPS Monitor. https://www.ypsmonitor.com/cpa
[9] Institutions and decision-making mechanisms on YPS-related local and national policies.
[10] Key data repositories include the Institute for Economics and Peace (GPI, GTI, ETR), the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (WPS Index), the CIVICUS Alliance (Civic Space Ratings), the World Justice Project (Rule of Law Index), Freedom House, and the European Partnership for Democracy (Global Youth Participation Index), etc.
[11] These twelve data points captures the structural barriers faced by young peacebuilders, as documented in the Missing Peace report and If I Disappear report, and were selected through a rigorous screening process prioritizing direct thematic alignment with YPS domains, universal global coverage (~196 states/territories), conceptual non-redundancy, and relative methodological independence.

In South Asia, the YPS Index illustrates a broad spectrum of structural engagement needs. Among 169 countries, Afghanistan holds the 1st global rank on the index, marking an acute national crisis where youth civic space and agency are severely restricted, followed by Pakistan (18th). Then Bangladesh (48th) and India (65th) both exhibit high structural necessity for YPS governance and youth inclusion. Nepal (80th) and Maldives (81st) occupy moderate priority ranks, followed by Sri Lanka (102nd) and Bhutan (114th) at the lower end of the regional priority spectrum.

YPS Pillars	Participation		Protection			Prevention				Partnership		D&R			
Country/Index[12]	GYPI*	FHI*	RoLI*	WPS*	GMMI-Y*	GPI*	YPI*	ETR*	CPI*	Civicus Monitor*	YPS Monitor*	GTI*	Total	Priority Rank	Data Not Available
Afghanistan	100.00	92.00	92.19	100.00	59.02	88.17	93.79	96.00	91.25	96.45	72.22	77.89	91.75	1	0
Pakistan	51.43	68.00	82.81	72.27	60.66	79.69	67.66	58.25	76.25	81.22	72.22	100.00	69.06	18	0
Bangladesh	47.14	56.00	79.69	62.58	68.85	48.28	58.90	40.25	81.25	72.08	72.22	26.66	58.39	48	0
India	35.71	38.00	64.06	50.30	59.02	56.57	50.18	48.00	62.50	70.56	72.22	74.97	52.45	65	0
Nepal	35.71	41.00	59.38	46.67	NA	44.51	52.43	55.25	68.75	53.30	88.89	3.36	48.52	80	1
Maldives	37.14	59.00	NA	35.61	NA	NA	37.37	NA	62.50	52.28	100.00	NA	48.50	81	5
Sri Lanka	31.43	37.00	60.94	35.30	32.79	33.95	37.14	38.25	67.50	60.41	72.22	0.00	41.68	102	0
Bhutan	30.00	31.00	NA	40.30	NA	17.45	39.07	47.50	22.50	49.24	100.00	0.00	37.44	114	2

Table 1: YPS Index - South Asia

3. YPS Policy & Implementation Audit: Comparative Realities

This audit by YPS Monitor gathers findings on the institutionalization, policy integration, and civil society mobilization of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda across eight South Asian nations. A comparative audit of South Asia's governance architecture reveals a complete institutional vacuum regarding the YPS framework across three critical policy fronts:

[12] Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI); Freedom House Index (FHI); Rule of Law Index (RoLI); Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index; Global Mind Health Index - Youth (GMHI-Y); Global Peace Index (GPI); Youth Progress Index (YPI); Ecological Threat Report (ETR); Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI); Civicus Monitor - State of Civic Space; YPS Monitor - National Partnerships; and Global Terrorism Index (GTI).

a. To date, none of the region's eight nations has enacted a standalone YPS-NAP to translate international mandates into actionable domestic commitments.
b. Existing public frameworks, ranging from national youth policies to security and development strategies, fail to systematically mainstream YPS principles or guarantee youth leadership in formal decision-making.
c. Compounding this policy inaction, state institutions continuously withhold dedicated financial, legal, and structural backing from emerging youth-led multi-stakeholder coalitions. These leave the region's primary peacebuilding actors isolated, resource-starved, and unable to aid governments in meeting community needs and improving social trust efficiently.

South Asian Country	YPS Roadmap / NAP	YPS Policy	Policy with YPS principles included	YPS Coalition
Afghanistan	Not Available	Not Available	No	**Exists, Inactive Currently.**
Bangladesh	Not Available	Not Available	**Yes,** somewhat in the National Charter 2025[13].	**Exists**
Bhutan	Not Available	Not Available	No	Doesn't Exist
India	Not Available	Not Available	No	**Exists**
Maldives	Not Available	Not Available	No	Doesn't Exist
Nepal	Not Available	Not Available	**Yes,** somewhat in the National Youth Policy 2082 (2025/26)[14] and Youth Vision 2025.	Doesn't Exist
Pakistan	Not Available	Not Available	No	**Exists, Inactive Currently.**
Sri Lanka	Not Available	Not Available	**Yes,** somewhat in the upcoming National Policy on Reconciliation & Coexistence (2025–2029)[15].	**Exists, Inactive Currently.**

Table 2: Policy & Implementation Audit Matrix

Most South Asian countries exhibit systemic institutional resistance and administrative apathy toward the YPS agenda. The region exhibits only a few other pathways toward YPS implementation. State policies in nations such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka channel YPS principles to some extent through National Charter, Youth Policy, and Reconciliation frameworks. While India prioritises youth volunteerism, states like Pakistan and Bhutan prioritise youth socio-economic inclusion, employment packages, and mandatory national service, respectively, over explicit YPS/peace framing.

[13] Government of Bangladesh. 2025. *July National Charter 2025*. Unofficial English translation by International IDEA https://constitutionnet.org/vl/item/july-national-charter-2025-bangladesh-english-translation
[14] Government of Nepal. 2025. *National Youth Policy 2082 (2025-26)*. https://opmcm.gov.np/content/359/national-youth-policy--2082/
[15] Government of Sri Lanka. 2025. *Cabinet Decision to develop the National Policy on Reconciliation & Coexistence (2025-2029)*.https://www.cabinetoffice.gov.lk/cab/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16&Itemid=49&lang=en&dID=13329

The agenda remains predominantly driven by civil society organizations and youth networks in South Asia. Active YPS coalitions exist in Bangladesh and India, while coalitions in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are inactive now. All these YPS coalitions are often youth-led and operate without major funding or UN and government support, limiting sustainability and institutional impact. For policy mainstreaming, YPS Advocates frequently leverage adjacent policy instruments, including National Youth Policies (India[16], Nepal), Reconciliation frameworks (Sri Lanka), and UN/International statements (Maldives).

4. Country Profiles

Afghanistan (YPS Priority Rank 1): As the highest-priority country globally on the YPS Index, Afghanistan represents an acute crisis in peace and security governance. Following major political shifts, formal democratic channels and civic spaces for young people, particularly young women, have been drastically dismantled. The YPS Coalition, active in the pre-Taliban era, is no longer functional, with its entire leadership forced into exile due to existential threats. International frameworks operate almost exclusively through emergency humanitarian assistance, human rights monitoring, and informal diaspora networks, leaving state-level transparency and institutional accountability effectively absent.

Pakistan (YPS Priority Rank 18): Despite exhibiting high structural urgency, it lacks a YPS policy framework or an operational coalition. Federal and provincial authorities have consistently deprioritized youth peacebuilding agency, framing youth primarily as security threats or channeling them into economic development initiatives. While the Federal Government approved the National Youth Employment Policy and Punjab province designated 2026 as its 'Year of Youth', YPS-aligned policy channels remain dormant. Meanwhile, the youth-led national coalition is currently inactive, starved of financial resources and suffering from advocacy fatigue after two years of engagement.

Bangladesh (YPS Priority Rank 48): The National Youth Policy (2017–2022) prioritized civic youth engagement to safeguard democratic principles, promote communal harmony, mitigate violent radicalization, and strengthen social cohesion. While Bangladesh currently lacks an official NAP, YPS principles were partially institutionalized through the National Charter 2025. Concurrently, young peacebuilders established the Bangladesh Coalition for YPS (BCYPS); however, the platform receives no dedicated financial or structural support from the state, UN entities, or major international civil society organizations. Consequently, while BCYPS attempts to drive the YPS agenda, it faces risks of operational exhaustion and lacks the formal institutional leverage required to hold state actors accountable for the substantive implementation of the National Charter.

India (YPS Priority Rank 65): To date, the state has made no official commitments or roadmaps to develop a NAP. Furthermore, the country's previous National Youth Policy (NYP) expired over seven years ago without an official replacement so far. Since 2019, young peacebuilders and civil society actors have actively engaged in nationwide consultations for the NYP revision. Organizing into a youth-led YPS coalition, these stakeholders consistently advocated for inclusion of YPS pillars in the policy through direct high-level meetings and extensive policy review submissions on the 2022, 2024, and 2025 draft iterations. Despite these sustained efforts, the publicly available draft of the NYP omits explicit references to

[16] Government of India. 2025. *Draft National Youth Policy*. https://yas.gov.in/sites/default/files/Draft%20NYP-2025.pdf

peace or YPS and only briefly acknowledges social cohesion. Rather than establishing institutional support for grassroots conflict transformation or formal avenues for youth participation in peace and security governance, its framework primarily channels the nation's vast youth demographic into civic volunteerism and mass digital mobilization. Meanwhile, the national coalition faces chronic resource shortages and advocacy fatigue as it struggles to sustain momentum against persistent state inertia spanning over seven years.

Nepal (YPS Priority Rank 80): While not having a YPS NAP, Nepal's recent policy frameworks, such as the National Youth Council's Youth Vision 2025 and the amended National Youth Policy 2082 (BS), explicitly adopt youth participation, leadership, and peace-sensitive language. The operationalization of peacebuilding, direct tie-ins with local peace committees, localized social campaigns, conflict management through dedicated 'Youth Peace Ambassadors' and frontline 'Youth Clubs', and legalizing structural youth participation across all three tiers of the federal government is explicitly laid out. However, in the absence of ring-fenced budgetary allocations, youth peacebuilding initiatives remain unfunded. Furthermore, without a resourced national coalition to monitor progress, young peacebuilders are left with limited mechanisms to enforce governmental accountability.

Maldives (YPS Priority Rank 81): In the Maldives, the YPS agenda remains confined to foreign policy rhetoric rather than domestic application. While state representatives regularly reference youth peace and security during UN Security Council debates and multilateral summits, concrete domestic actions are limited to generic UN agency frameworks, such as the UN Maldives Youth Strategy. Crucially, no independent domestic civil society coalition exists to track implementation or hold the government accountable to its international commitments.

Sri Lanka (YPS Priority Rank 102): Operating in a post-war landscape, Sri Lanka's peacebuilding frameworks focus intensely on transitional justice, cross-ethnic healing, and preventing violent radicalization.[17] Sri Lanka stands as the sole country in South Asia where UN agencies have provided targeted, multi-year support for implementing the YPS agenda. An important policy entry point currently exists with the upcoming National Policy and Action Plan on Reconciliation and Coexistence (2025–2029). However, due to chronic resource deficiencies, the civil society YPS coalition (the first ever National YPS Coalition in the world) has become inactive over recent years, preventing youth peacebuilders from mobilizing collectively to shape or monitor this national window.

Bhutan (YPS Priority Rank 114): While Bhutan's ranking reflects stronger baseline indicators relative to its regional peers, substantial room for growth remains when compared to higher-performing global contexts. Rather than developing a civil society-led YPS framework or supporting independent youth peacebuilding organizations, the state addresses youth civic duty exclusively through top-down mandates, most notably the Gyalsung National Service (compulsory national military service). Consequently, youth engagement is structured strictly around state-administered service rather than autonomous peace and security governance.

[17] Government of Sri Lanka. nd. *Strategy Framework for Social Cohesion and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka*. Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR). https://onur.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/National-Strategic-Action-Plan-for-Social-Cohesion-and-Reconciliation-Full-Document.pdf,

5. Analysis

Cross-referencing the empirical findings of the YPS Policy & Implementation Audit with the 2026 YPS Index ranks reveals a stark disconnect between structural urgency and institutional response across South Asia. While the Index highlights acute vulnerabilities and an undeniable need for YPS implementation, state leadership and international development partners have consistently failed to make formal policy commitments or offer core funding and protected civic spaces for young peacebuilders.

Consequently, the YPS implementation void in the region is a combined result of state apathy (national policies omitting YPS, peace framed as an education and employment issue), international abandonment (UN entities & INGOs fail to fund or prioritize YPS), and coalition exhaustion (youth networks unfunded, unprotected, and becoming partially/fully inactive). While South Asian Member States routinely endorse YPS in UN open debates, high-level meetings, and regional summits, domestic translation into statutory policies remains minimal. This institutional inertia is possibly rooted in an entrenched assumption that peacebuilding is an emergency intervention or reserved only for post-conflict rebuilding. Also, within this state-centric framework, peace and security are treated as exclusive sovereign mandates, while young people are viewed through a paternalistic lens.

State frameworks frequently treat young people either through a security-centric risk lens (as potential drivers of instability or violent extremism) or a socio-economic demographic lens (as passive beneficiaries who require education, skills training, or employment), rather than active political agents capable of co-designing governance and peacebuilding solutions. State institutions frequently co-opt the terminology of 'youth empowerment' while excluding the conflict-sensitive and peace and security decision-making components of the YPS agenda. In many cases, UN country teams conform to state institutions' priorities.

As a result, governments across the region often substitute the need to have explicit YPS implementation mechanisms with generic youth development, volunteerism, or employment packages. By steering youth programs toward skill development or national/voluntary service, governments avoid addressing structural causes of conflict, human rights violations, and civic exclusion. While valuable, these initiatives fail because they treat education and job creation as a complete substitute for political agency and structural reform.

Across nations like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and India, young people consistently demonstrate their commitment to positive peace through grassroots organizing, community reconciliation, and constitutional advocacy. As a recent Gen Z Movements study highlights, when young people fulfill every traditional requirement, such as working hard in school, but only to face systemic unemployment and lack of opportunity, their resulting frustration stems from a deeply shattered social contract.[18] Their public mobilizations are not unprovoked threats to security, but a direct demand to repair these broken societal promises and secure meaningful governance reform.

In other global regions, the institutionalization of YPS has relied heavily on the technical, political, and financial backing of UN Resident Coordinator Offices, UNDP, UNFPA, and international peacebuilding INGOs. In South Asia, this institutional anchor is almost entirely

[18] Prelis, S., & Qanie, Y. (2026). *Building the Alternative: Bridging Gen Z Movements and Governance for Lasting Change*. Search for Common Ground. https://cnxus.org/resource/building-the-alternative/

absent. UN country teams in the region have overwhelmingly failed to prioritize YPS within their Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).

Because state institutions have shown minimal interest and international partners have failed to provide structural resources, the survival of the YPS agenda has depended on voluntary, youth-led coalitions. However, passion cannot substitute for institutional infrastructure. All the existing youth coalitions across South Asia have faced severe operational burnout. Deprived of core operational funding, office infrastructure, and legal recognition, these networks are collapsing. Several national coalitions are now partially or fully inactive, while others exist in name only, operating through sporadic, unfunded volunteer actions rather than sustained policy advocacy. Young peacebuilders across the region not only face administrative barriers, but also surveillance and security risks, making them vulnerable when addressing sensitive governance and security issues.

6. Recommendations for the next decade (2026-2035)

Adopting a formal YPS approach allows governments to move past paternalistic paradigms and create protected, safe channels for institutional co-governance. Recognizing YPS as a fundamental tool for youth-inclusive, democratic health enables states to transform informal civic energy into structured partnerships that reinforce long-term societal stability and trust. To reverse a decade of neglect and build genuine accountability, national governments, UN entities, and international donors must commit to the following structural reforms:

1. UN Accountability: UN Country Teams across South Asia must immediately integrate YPS indicators directly into their UNSDCF frameworks and report to the SG's Biannual Report on YPS. UNCT should also enable engagement of multilateral donors and INGOs in making long-term core funding mechanisms directly accessible to independent youth peacebuilding organizations and national coalitions. Meanwhile, UNPBF should focus on YPS in South Asia by making more countries from the subregion eligible for youth promotion initiative funding, which is the largest YPS-specific funding mechanism.
2. In the absence of political will for standalone NAPs, states must meaningfully embed binding YPS mandates into existing laws and policy frameworks, with sufficient youth participation in design and implementation, budgetary specifications and allocations, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting plans. YPS advocates and national coalitions can focus their limited advocacy capacity in these directions.
3. Recognize national YPS coalitions as important collaborative spaces to advance YPS implementation and thus join and support them. Such multi-stakeholder spaces have proved to meaningfully contribute to planning, oversight, transparency, and accountability in other national YPS implementation processes. UN agencies must provide protective diplomatic backing and technical support to youth coalitions in countries where civic space is actively shrinking.
4. Governments intending to establish national Youth Engagement and Development Indices should leverage the global YPS Index framework to operationalize key metrics, specifically monitoring civic space openness, youth participation in high-level peace and security decision-making, and national budget allocations for youth-led peace activities.

This thematic paper has certain limitations. Future research could be strengthened by reviewing other national policies, programmes, and services from a YPS perspective, focusing on why social issues lack attention in these countries, examining overall civil society participation in security matters, and governance's understanding of peace.

The first decade of the YPS agenda in South Asia has been marked by missed opportunities, Government apathy, UN neglect, and the gradual exhaustion of unfunded YPS coalitions. Without these structural shifts and support from both national governments and the international community, the YPS agenda in South Asia risks remaining an unfulfilled promise. The next decade must focus on structural integration, measurable impact, and institutional accountability.