

Introduction

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Over the last few years, youth issues have gained increasing relevance within the main international fora, and the United Nations have been strongly engaged in promoting youth empowerment.

Italy, which firmly believes that investing in youth means investing in the future, has immediately embraced the turn of pace brought about by Secretary-General António Guterres.

Our country supported from the outset the Youth 2030 initiative, which the same Guterres launched in September 2018 with the goal of strengthening UN action in favor of young people, promoting greater integration between the activities carried out by Funds, Programmes, Agencies and departments of the UN Secretariat. This initiative reflects the United Nations' growing attention to young people, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognized young people for the first time as agents of change and progress. Italy was also the first Member State to provide financial support to the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, Jayathma Wickramanayake, after her appointment in 2017. Over the last few years, Italy has constantly endeavoured to empower young people and to enable them to make their voices heard. Starting from 2017, Italy has appointed two Youth Delegates who, through a nation-wide advocacy action as well as participation at meetings here at the UN, are helping promote the active participation of the youngest generations in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. The Italian Youth Delegates had an active role in the negotiations of the last UN General Assembly resolution "Policies and programmes involving youth", contributing to reaching significant results, in particular by successfully introducing a reference in the text to respect for their reciprocal different cultural backgrounds as a tool for peaceful integration.

In September 2018, we started funding a multi-country initiative in partnership with UNDESA for "Promoting sustainable peace through national youth policies in the Framework of 2030 Agenda". This project is currently under implementation in three countries and includes the constitution of national and local youth-led "Youth, Peace and Security Civil Society Coalitions".

In April 2019, we co-created and financed the SDG 16 – 16x16 Young Leaders Programme, a global initiative launched during the ECOSOC Youth Forum and implemented by UNDP’s Youth Global Programme. This initiative aimed to recognize, value and support the positive role that 16 young women and men play as leaders of youth organisations, movements and networks.

In May 2019, our Ministry invited these 16 young leaders to the preparatory conference on SDG16 it organized in Rome, and enabled them to meaningfully engage in the discussions.

As the Chair of the G20 in 2021, last July we hosted the Y20 Summit in Milan, which enabled young people to entrust the G20 leaders with their recommendations on the matters they value the most, such as sustainability, climate change, innovation, digitization and inclusion. Beginning tomorrow, as co-Chair of the COP26, Italy will host the 3-days event “YOUTH4Climate: Driving Ambition”. Around 400 young people from 197 countries that have ratified the United Nations Convention on Climate Change will take part in the event and will have the opportunity to elaborate and present concrete proposals for the Pre-COP26 in Milan and the COP26 in Glasgow.

Italy is especially committed to the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. During our mandate on the United Nations Security Council, in 2017, we promoted the systematic inclusion of provisions on the protection of civilians, especially the most vulnerable categories, including youth, in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. More recently, last year we duly co-sponsored Security Council Resolution 2535, which encouraged member states to ensure the full, effective and meaningful participation of youth in peace processes, recognizing that their marginalization is detrimental to building sustainable peace.

Italy firmly believes that young people are a vital driver for peace, change, and prosperity. Their specific sensitiveness and forward-looking approach, their desire for justice and inclusion, as well as their capacities, idealism, enthusiasm and energy, can meaningfully contribute to promoting awareness about the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, building and sustaining peace, providing long-term sustainable solutions and fostering conflict prevention and reconciliation.

Young people contribute to peace processes in multiple ways, from monitoring ceasefires to resolving local-level disputes, building relationships across social divisions and shaping peace agreements. However, in spite of a growing awareness of young people’s role for peace and security, young people continue to be excluded from decisions that will directly impact their present and future

prospects for peace. Young people continue facing significant structural barriers to participation in decision-making, and many young peacebuilders report that their participation is not welcomed by the public or by those in positions of power, pointing to an overall disregard for their work.

Nevertheless, it is essential to ensure that young people have a say in peace discussions, as they account for many of those adversely affected by armed conflict. Actually, we must not forget that over two billion of the world population are under 24, 90% of whom live in developing and vulnerable countries, and one in four young people are affected by violence or armed conflict.

Italy has been very active in creating spaces for the participation of young people in discussions and in creating a dialogue with policy-makers, other than in raising awareness on the value that youth can bring to peace processes. In December 2019, we invited several representatives of youth organizations to the High-Level Seminar on “Strengthening Women’s Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for Member States?”, which we organized in Rome in collaboration with UN Women. Furthermore, within the implementation of our Third National Plan on Women Peace and Security, we funded the “2020 Torino Forum for Sustaining Peace: Women and Girls at the Frontlines of Peace”. This event, which has been organized by the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), focused on the meaningful participation of women and girls in conflict prevention.

Let me conclude by reaffirming that Italy will continue to spare no effort in promoting youth empowerment, as investing in youth is the wisest way to build a more sustainable future.