European Youth, Peace and Security Network

EU YPS Network · Youth track consultations

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Schuman Forum on Security and Defence — Youth Track

Preliminary consultations — Round 1. Youth perspectives from Europe, Asia & the Middle East, Latin America & the Caribbean, and Africa on peace, security, defence and meaningful participation.

DATES

17–18 October 2026

FORMAT

Online regional consultations

PURPOSE

Inform Schuman Forum 2026 youth track

PREPARED BY

EU YPS Network

This summary consolidates regional youth inputs for the Schuman Forum on Security and Defence. It is intended for organisers, partners and members preparing follow-up advocacy and dialogue.

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REGION 1

Europe

1. What are the main security issues and concerns in the region?

Data privacy, AI, and surveillance

- **Ethical AI & data privacy:** Growing concern over how personal data (bank accounts, social media, health records) is collected and whether it is adequately regulated to prevent misuse.
- **Surveillance & harassment:** Fear of government or corporate surveillance, bank account restrictions, and severe online safety issues — particularly AI-enabled online harassment targeting women.
- **Intimidation at student demonstrations:** Reports of student online spaces being monitored or impersonated by police/authorities to gather personal details (names, family information), mirroring tactics seen in authoritarian regimes.

Youth disengagement & stigmatisation

- **Lack of participation channels:** Formal civic engagement channels feel overly complicated, inaccessible, or non-inclusive to young people.
- **Political stigmatisation:** Young people and protesters feel categorised unfairly (e.g. as “disruptive, radical left-wing militants”) rather than recognised as citizens exercising their rights.
- **Allegations of heavy-handed police responses:** Concern over what young people describe as disproportionate police reactions to peaceful youth protests (e.g. deployment of riot gear, water cannons, and physical force against minors and students).

Socio-economic insecurity & cost of living

- **Housing & salary disconnect:** Severe pressure from high rent costs relative to minimum wages (e.g. rent taking up €800 out of a €1,200 salary in Portugal).
- **Intergenerational gap:** Disconnect between older decision-makers and youth regarding economic realities; government responses urging “higher productivity” rather than addressing structural affordability issues.

2. What kinds of partnerships, civil society collaborations, or local initiatives make young people feel more protected and involved?

Grassroots & community initiatives

- **Direct community action:** Personal-capacity charity work and local volunteering (e.g. renovating/painting housing for elderly people or persons with disabilities) foster meaningful youth connection.
- **Targeted funding:** Funds dedicated to supporting social innovation and ethical AI projects led by youth.

Systemic shifts needed

- **From tokenism to genuine collaboration:** Moving away from treating youth participation as a checkbox exercise to meaningfully including young people in decision-making.
- **Changing institutional culture:** Transitioning from treating youth as a "problem to be managed" or a "youth bulge" threat to treating them as proactive partners.

3. How are cyber threats, disinformation, and foreign interference affecting young people's trust in governance?

- **Erosion of privacy rights:** Unease regarding the monitoring of online interactions and potential commercial/governmental misuse of sensitive data (e.g. insurance bias or financial lockouts).
- **Slower regulatory speed:** Frustration that legal frameworks and privacy protections advance too slowly compared to the rapid deployment of disruptive AI tools.
- **Polarisation & disillusionment:** Increasing alienation caused by polarised political discourse where basic youth demands are dismissed or politicised.

4. Three concrete priorities for the Schuman Forum 2026

1. **Risk tolerance & investment in youth-led ideas** — Create flexible, less bureaucratic funding frameworks that allow young people (even those without significant experience) to innovate, lead projects, and take constructive risks.
2. **Protect civic space and youth participation** — Ensure that young people can engage safely in peaceful civic action, dialogue, and public decision-making without intimidation or unnecessary restrictions.
3. **Genuine trust & mental health protections** — Transition from viewing youth as a risk factor to granting them genuine trust and authority; prioritise mental health support, emotional well-being, and financial security to alleviate widespread burnout.

5. How can the EU rebuild trust with young people (especially in the context of EU enlargement, security, and defence)?

- **Direct support for youth-led organisations:** Shift funding criteria away from heavily favouring legacy/established organisations that can lack youth leadership, ensuring actual youth-run teams can access resources.
- **Allow room for growth:** Provide safe spaces for young actors to learn and lead without the fear of immediate or risk-averse systemic rejection.
- **Prioritise mental and financial well-being:** Recognise that true security for young citizens encompasses financial stability, safe spaces, and mental health — not just physical security.

REGION 2

Asia & the Middle East

Young participants from across Asia and the Middle East highlighted the interconnected impacts of armed conflict, civic restrictions, displacement, economic insecurity, and barriers to participation.

> **Syria.** Youth representatives discussed violations including the abduction of children and recruitment into armed groups which continue to undermine safety and participation.

> **Afghanistan.** Young women representatives talked about the ban on girls' education and restrictions on public participation which threaten human security.

> **Pakistan.** A young member shared concerns on rising youth unemployment and insecurity, with calls for stronger partnerships to create opportunities and protect civic space.

> **Lebanon.** Discussions focused on the impact of displacement, damaged infrastructure, and loss of schools and health services which left many without safe spaces.

> **India.** Issues and concerns on police violence against student protesters were raised, including the use of pellet guns and excessive force during demonstrations.

> **Iran.** Focus was on violent crackdowns on protests, arrests, and executions of young activists, and limited opportunities for constructive engagement by young people.

> **Palestine.** Young people described daily insecurity under occupation and restrictions on movement, as well as widespread unemployment.

> **Jordan.** Participants raised issues of gender-based violence and unemployment, and talked about the need for inclusive partnerships that address everyday safety.

This consultation provides important insights for the Schuman Forum: youth across Asia and the Middle East are not only affected by insecurity but are also agents of peacebuilding.

REGION 3

Latin America and the Caribbean

The regional youth consultations for the Schuman Forum 2026 brought together young activists from Latin America and the Caribbean to identify shared concerns and priorities regarding peace, security, democracy and inclusive governance.

A strong consensus emerged on the need to move from youth consultation to meaningful youth influence, ensuring that young people are involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes. Participants called for accessible and sustainable financing, long-term partnerships, safe participation mechanisms and greater support for locally led initiatives — particularly those involving persons belonging to Indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural and other underrepresented communities. The consultation also emphasised that EU–LAC cooperation should be based on shared decision-making, mutual accountability and locally identified priorities.

One notable contribution stressed that insecurity is closely connected to economic vulnerability, lack of opportunities, violence and restrictions on civic participation. The intervention called for cooperation that creates safe spaces for young people to participate in public life and recognises them as partners in peacebuilding rather than merely beneficiaries.

Another contribution from a young Indigenous leader highlighted the importance of Indigenous governance, collective care and locally driven conflict prevention. The contribution advocated for meaningful dialogue between governments, international organisations and underrepresented communities, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge and youth recommendations translate into concrete policies. It further stressed the need to address structural drivers of violence, including inequality and limited access to opportunities, while recognising Indigenous peoples and young people as active partners in building sustainable peace and security.

Overall message: young people in Latin America and the Caribbean should not only be protected from insecurity, but recognised, resourced and empowered as actors shaping peace, security and democratic governance.

REGION 4

Africa

The Schuman Security and Defence Forum Youth Consultation brought together youth perspectives on the major peace, security and defence challenges affecting young people in Africa, with particular emphasis on youth inclusion, human security and Africa–Europe cooperation.

The consultation highlighted two major concerns: growing insecurity and the limited meaningful participation of young people in peace and security decision-making. Participants' concerns reflected the need to address both traditional and emerging security threats, including political violence, unemployment, violent extremism, digital insecurity, misinformation and disinformation, hate speech, climate-related insecurity, displacement and community violence. These challenges were recognised as interconnected, with economic vulnerability and social exclusion increasing young people's exposure to manipulation, exploitation and conflict.

Another key issue raised was that young people are often directly affected by insecurity but remain underrepresented in decisions concerning peace, security and defence. The consultation emphasised the importance of moving beyond symbolic youth participation towards genuine involvement in policy development, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, while ensuring the inclusion of young women, rural youth and young people from conflict-affected communities.

Participants' expectations centred on stronger and sustained partnerships between African and European institutions, practical support for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, investment in digital literacy and cybersecurity, and greater attention to employment, education, psychosocial well-being and climate resilience.

Central recommendation

Establish or strengthen a practical Africa–EU Youth Peace and Security Partnership that could support youth training in conflict prevention, mediation, early warning, digital peacebuilding, community resilience, research and policy dialogue. Overall, the consultation called for a shift from doing things "for young people" to working "with young people", recognising them as active partners in building sustainable peace, security and stability across Africa.