No Peace Without Pride: Integrating LGBTQI+ Perspectives into Youth, Peace and Security

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Executive Summary

This policy brief addresses the critical need for integrating Queering Peace and Security (QPS) into the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, ensuring that LGBTQI+ youth are represented, protected, and empowered within global peacebuilding frameworks. The YPS agenda, built on the pillars of Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnerships, and Disengagement and Reintegration, champions youth as active agents of positive change in peace and security. However, its existing frameworks often fail to adequately include the diverse experiences of LGBTQI+ youth. QPS aims to address these gaps by fostering inclusive, equitable, and resilient peacebuilding practices that value the identities and contributions of LGBTQI+ individuals.

Across many regions, LGBTQI+ youth continue to face severe challenges, including criminalization, social stigmatization, and legal discrimination. Over 65 countries still criminalize consensual same-sex relationships, with punishments ranging from fines to capital punishment in 12 countries. Such laws not only expose LGBTQI+ individuals to violence and systemic exclusion but also hinder their access to essential services, education, and economic opportunities, further isolating LGBTQI+ youth. Discriminatory practices extend beyond legislation; entrenched social stigmas and State-sanctioned censorship prevent LGBTQI+ youth from participating in public life, accessing safe spaces, and advocating for their rights.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in advancing LGBTQI+ inclusion within the YPS agenda. International and local organizations, document human rights abuses, advocate for legal reforms, and provide safe spaces, healthcare, and legal support to LGBTQI+ youth. These CSOs also challenge anti-rights narratives and promote inclusive policies, helping foster resilience within communities affected by discriminatory practices. Their work underscores the YPS pillars, highlighting the importance of integrating LGBTQI+ perspectives into peace processes.

To leverage YPS as a framework for LGBTQI+ inclusion, this brief outlines strategic pathways and policy recommendations for Member States and UN agencies:

1. **Expand YPS Resolutions to Recognize LGBTQI+ Needs:** Partner with regional allies to ensure that future resolutions incorporate LGBTQI+-friendly language, recognizing the unique needs and contributions of LGBTQI+ individuals within the YPS agenda. This approach seeks to mainstream inclusivity within existing frameworks rather than advocating for stand-alone resolutions, addressing challenges posed by opposition from veto-wielding Security Council members.
2. **Promote LGBTQI+ Representation in Peace Processes:** Ensure formal representation of LGBTQI+ youth in advisory and decision-making roles within peace and security dialogues.
3. **Institutionalize Intersectional Approaches:** Adopt intersectional policies to address the overlapping identities and needs of LGBTQI+ youth affected by conflict.
4. **Counter Anti-Rights Movements through Multilateral Advocacy:** Work with international bodies to challenge anti-LGBTQI+ policies, particularly in regions resistant to reform.
5. **Provide Funding for LGBTQI+ Youth-Led Initiatives:** Support LGBTQI+ youth-led programs that foster community resilience and contribute to inclusive peace efforts.

By implementing these recommendations, CSOs, Member States, and UN agencies can foster an inclusive, intersectional approach to peace and security, empowering[1] LGBTQI+ youth as leaders and advocates. This approach represents a crucial step toward a vision of peace that is sustainable, just, and reflective of the diverse identities that contribute to global resilience.

[1] The term "empowering" is used intentionally to highlight the need for more than mere inclusion of LGBTQI+ youth in peacebuilding frameworks. While inclusion ensures presence, empowerment goes further, emphasizing agency, leadership, and the ability of LGBTQI+ youth to actively shape and drive peace and security initiatives. This choice reflects a commitment to fostering environments where LGBTQI+ individuals are not only represented but also positioned as central actors in creating transformative change.

Introduction

The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) resolutions mark a transformative shift, acknowledging youth [2] as powerful agents of change in peacebuilding. However, the traditional frameworks within YPS have often failed to fully represent the diversity of young people's experiences, specifically the needs and contributions of LGBTQI+[3] youth. In many regions, LGBTQI+ youth continue to face exclusion, criminalization, and even violence, preventing them from participating in peace processes and hindering their access to safe spaces. The integration of Queering Peace and Security (QPS) within YPS provides a pathway to address these gaps, broadening peace and security to include the experiences of all young people.

The emergence of QPS owes much to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) community, who have championed gender-inclusive peace and security frameworks. WPS has been instrumental in creating policies that center women's voices, protect their rights, and acknowledge gendered impacts of conflict, establishing a model for other inclusive frameworks. QPS is born out of this foundation, extending the inclusivity of WPS to address the needs of LGBTQI+ individuals who identify as women and often face compounded risks and are excluded from traditional peace processes. This policy brief outlines how QPS can be integrated into YPS to promote more inclusive, equitable, and resilient peacebuilding practices that respect all identities.

What Does LGBTQI+ Mean?

The acronym LGBTQI+ represents a spectrum of identities related to gender, sexuality, and orientation, including:

- **L (Lesbian):** Women who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.

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[2] In the context of this policy brief, youth/young people are defined as individuals aged 18 to 30.
[3] In Canada, the acronym 2SLGBTQI+ is used to include Two-Spirit individuals—a term from Indigenous North American cultures denoting individuals who embody both masculine and feminine spirits. Two-Spirit individuals often hold unique spiritual or cultural roles, underscoring the presence of diverse gender identities in pre-colonial Indigenous societies. For the purposes of this brief, we are using the term LGBTQI+ to align with internationally recognized terminology, while acknowledging the significance of Two-Spirit identities in Canadian and Indigenous communities.

- **G (Gay):** A term primarily used to describe men who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other men, though it is also used as an umbrella term for same-sex attraction.
- **B (Bisexual):** Individuals who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to more than one gender.
- **T (Transgender):** Individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Q (Queer):** A broad term for non-normative sexual and gender identities, reclaiming a once-derogatory term to challenge binary frameworks.
- **I (Intersex):** Refers to individuals born with biological characteristics that do not align with conventional definitions of male or female.
- **+ (Plus):** Represents other identities beyond those specifically listed, acknowledging the fluid and evolving nature of gender and sexuality.

These identities each bring unique cultural, social, and historical dimensions. However, LGBTQI+ individuals worldwide face severe disparities in rights and protections. In many regions, these identities are criminalized or socially stigmatized, leaving LGBTQI+ individuals vulnerable to violence, exclusion, and marginalization, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Understanding Queering Peace and Security (QPS) and Queering YPS

QPS Defined:
QPS is a framework that reimagines peace and security from an LGBTQI+ perspective, advocating for policies that include and protect marginalized identities. QPS recognizes that peace cannot be achieved if LGBTQI+ individuals remain vulnerable to violence, exclusion, and oppression. By bringing these perspectives to the forefront, QPS advocates seek to dismantle restrictive gender norms and expand peace and security frameworks to be more responsive to the needs of queer[4] individuals, underline{especially those in conflict zones.}

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[4] The term "queer" is intentionally used in this brief as a reclaimed and empowering identifier that challenges heteronormative and cisnormative paradigms. While we acknowledge the term's history as a derogatory slur, particularly in contexts where it was weaponized against LGBTQI+ individuals, we embrace its evolution into a symbol of resistance, pride, and inclusivity. By using "queer," we seek to honour its transformative potential in fostering a more inclusive and diverse understanding of peacebuilding.

Why "Queering" the YPS Agenda?

The concept of "queering" challenges conventional, heteronormative assumptions within peace and security, promoting policies that reflect diverse identities and experiences. Inspired by WPS advocates' efforts to disrupt heteronormative paradigms, this approach advances initiatives that position LGBTQI+ youth as leaders in peacebuilding, advocates in policy dialogues, and central actors in fostering inclusive peace. By reshaping the peacebuilding process itself, queering YPS ensures that LGBTQI+ youth are no longer marginalized but integral to the vision of sustainable peace.

Acknowledging Pushback and Anti-Rights Movements: The Global State of LGBTQI+ Rights

Efforts to integrate LGBTQI+ perspectives within peace and security frameworks face significant challenges due to anti-rights movements, restrictive legislation, and entrenched social stigmas across many regions. Globally, over 65 countries have laws criminalizing consensual same-sex activities, with punishments ranging from fines and imprisonment to forced labour, corporal punishment, and, in extreme cases, capital punishment. In 12 countries, the death penalty is a legal punishment for same-sex conduct, illustrating the severe consequences LGBTQI+ individuals face under these regimes. These laws perpetuate systemic violence, reinforce exclusion, and obstruct LGBTQI+ youth from participating in public life, peace processes, or even accessing essential resources for their well-being. Legal frameworks that criminalize LGBTQI+ identities not only isolate queer youth but increase their vulnerability to exploitation, violence, and further marginalization.

Even in countries without explicit anti-LGBTQI+ laws, pervasive social stigmas pose significant barriers for LGBTQI+ individuals. Prevailing norms and biases often lead to discrimination, manifesting in bullying, harassment, and exclusion from schools, workplaces, and community spaces. LGBTQI+ youth are often isolated from educational and economic opportunities, amplifying risks to their safety and well-being. Additionally, harmful practices such as conversion therapy, which falsely claim to alter an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, inflict severe psychological

and physical harm, compounding the marginalization and mental health challenges faced by LGBTQI+ youth. These societal pressures force LGBTQI+ youth into precarious situations, limiting their capacity to lead secure and fulfilling lives.

Political and religious influences frequently fuel anti-rights movements, framing LGBTQI+ identities as foreign, immoral, or incompatible with traditional values. In some regions, political leaders and religious authorities amplify this rhetoric, portraying LGBTQI+ identities as threats to social cohesion or cultural integrity. For instance, in Eastern Europe, LGBTQI+ advocacy is sometimes framed as a foreign agenda aimed at destabilizing national values. This narrative not only isolates LGBTQI+ youth but also legitimizes widespread discrimination against them, reinforcing barriers to their inclusion in broader society.

State-sanctioned censorship further suppresses LGBTQI+ expression and advocacy. Anti-propaganda laws, such as Russia's prohibition on "gay propaganda," restrict LGBTQI+ individuals' freedom of expression and assembly under the guise of protecting "public morality." Such laws prevent LGBTQI+ youth from accessing affirming resources, advocating for their rights, or openly participating in community life, effectively silencing their voices and exacerbating their marginalization. These censorship laws hinder LGBTQI+ individuals' ability to connect with supportive networks and impede their participation in social and political processes, including peacebuilding.

The impacts of these hostile environments extend to the physical and mental health of LGBTQI+ youth, who are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and suicide. The lack of access to gender-affirming care and mental health services—often due to social stigma, legal restrictions, or discrimination within healthcare systems—places LGBTQI+ youth at a severe disadvantage. This exclusion from essential services undermines their well-being and limits their capacity to participate in society, including in peace and security efforts where their unique perspectives are critical.

The global hostility toward LGBTQI+ individuals stands in direct opposition to the core principles of the YPS agenda, which strives for meaningful inclusion and participation of all youth in building peace. Criminalization, social exclusion, and stigmatization of LGBTQI+ youth create barriers to inclusive, resilient peace processes. For QPS to succeed within YPS, it is crucial to dismantle these anti-rights structures by advocating for legal reforms, promoting supportive social policies, and challenging discriminatory narratives. Addressing these barriers is essential to building an inclusive foundation within YPS, one where LGBTQI+ youth are protected, supported, and able to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding, advancing a more just and diverse vision of peace and security.

The Role of Civil Society in Advancing LGBTQI+ Integration in YPS

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have been instrumental in advancing LGBTQI+ inclusion within peace and security frameworks, often acting as essential advocates for LGBTQI+ youth in regions where State support is limited or nonexistent. Organizations such as OutRight International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) work globally to document human rights abuses against LGBTQI+ individuals and bring international attention to discriminatory policies, State-sanctioned violence, and systemic exclusion. By exposing these injustices, these organizations provide a foundation for advocacy, urging governments and international bodies to protect LGBTQI+ rights and dismantle harmful legislation.

In regions where political or religious resistance to LGBTQI+ rights is particularly strong, local and grassroots organizations offer crucial support to LGBTQI+ youth by providing safe spaces, healthcare, mental health services, and legal assistance. These CSOs act as lifelines, especially in countries with anti-LGBTQI+ laws or stigmatizing cultural norms. Through their work, they create avenues for LGBTQI+ youth to access necessary resources, connect with supportive communities, and find platforms to advocate for their rights. This grassroots support is fundamental in bridging gaps left by national policies and is a key factor in promoting LGBTQI+ inclusion within YPS frameworks.

Furthermore, these CSOs are often at the forefront of challenging anti-rights narratives, using education, publications, and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about LGBTQI+ issues. By building understanding within communities and advocating for inclusive policies, they help to foster a culture of acceptance and resilience. These efforts not only support LGBTQI+ individuals but also promote the values of dignity, respect, and justice that underpin the YPS agenda. Acknowledging the vital role of civil society organizations reinforces the idea that inclusive peace requires a collaborative effort, with CSOs providing expertise, advocacy, and support that enrich the QPS framework.

Leveraging YPS for LGBTQI+ Advocacy

To effectively promote LGBTQI+ inclusion within peace and security, advocates can leverage the YPS agenda as a powerful tool to advance their work. YPS offers a globally recognized framework that emphasizes youth as essential agents in peacebuilding, providing a pathway to embed LGBTQI+ perspectives in peace and security initiatives. LGBTQI+ advocates, activists, and organizations can use the five pillars of YPS—**Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnerships, and Disengagement and Reintegration**—as a structured approach for their advocacy efforts, promoting intersectional inclusion across peace frameworks.

Pillar 1

Participation

LGBTQI+ advocates can use the YPS focus on youth participation to demand representation within peace and security decision-making spaces, ensuring that LGBTQI+ youth have a voice in shaping policies that directly impact their lives. By advancing the principle of participation, advocates affirm that peace processes are incomplete without inclusive representation of diverse identities.

Pillar 2

Protection

The YPS agenda's emphasis on protection aligns with the urgent need to safeguard LGBTQI+ individuals from targeted violence, discrimination, and legal persecution. LGBTQI+ advocates can draw on this pillar to call for policies that defend queer youth from systemic violence and create safe environments where they can engage openly and safely in peace efforts.

Pillar 3

Prevention

LGBTQI+ inclusion in YPS also supports the prevention of further discrimination and violence. Advocates can use this pillar to address root causes of exclusion (including the concept of "violence of exclusion" established by the 2018 Progress Study on YPS) by challenging discriminatory laws, fostering understanding, and working against narratives that marginalize queer youth. This preventative approach strengthens resilience and reduces hostility toward LGBTQI+ communities.

Pillar 4

Partnerships

The YPS pillar of partnerships highlights the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including civil society organizations, governments, and international bodies. LGBTQI+ organizations can utilize this framework to build alliances that advance intersectional peace, engaging with the YPS community to integrate queer perspectives into broader peace and security agendas.

Pillar 5

Disengagement and Reintegration

The YPS focus on disengagement and reintegration of youth affected by conflict is particularly relevant for LGBTQI+ youth who may experience exclusion or trauma due to their identities. Advocates can work to create programs that specifically support LGBTQI+ youth reintegration, addressing unique needs and fostering inclusive recovery within post-conflict communities.

The YPS agenda offers a transformative space for LGBTQI+ inclusion in peace and security, breaking away from the limitations of existing frameworks that often claim inclusivity but fail to create safe environments for individuals of various gender identities and expressions. Unlike broader peace and security paradigms that frequently center on binary gender norms and heteronormative assumptions, YPS inherently values diversity and the unique perspectives of young people, including those marginalized by traditional systems. Many global frameworks, including WPS, emphasize gender equality but often lack explicit recognition of transgender and non-binary individuals, inadvertently reinforcing exclusion. Furthermore, the spaces these frameworks provide can be unsafe for transgender participants, who may face misgendering, tokenism, or hostility in environments unprepared to address their needs. YPS, by championing the meaningful inclusion of all youth, has the potential to address these gaps, advocating for policies and practices that uplift the voices of transgender youth as central actors in peacebuilding and decision-making. By embracing this broader spectrum of identities, YPS not only ensures more inclusive peace processes but also fosters a culture of safety and respect for all participants, moving closer to a truly equitable vision of peace and security.

Integrating QPS and YPS: Strategic Pathways for Global Policy

The integration of QPS within YPS is essential to create peace and security frameworks that recognize and protect all identities. Key strategies to achieve this goal include:

1. Expanding YPS Resolutions to Recognize LGBTQI+ Needs in Coordination with Regional Allies

Expanding YPS resolutions to recognize LGBTQI+ needs requires careful navigation within the geopolitical dynamics of the UN Security Council, where certain veto-wielding members may oppose explicit LGBTQI+ protections. Given this context, advocates should coordinate with regional allies and supportive Member States outside the Security Council to promote resolutions that include LGBTQI+-friendly language, embedding inclusivity within broader YPS frameworks. Such efforts can gain traction in General Assembly discussions, regional bodies, and other forums where the veto does not apply, building a foundation of widespread support that strengthens Protection and ensures LGBTQI+ needs are recognized. This approach prioritizes integrating inclusive language within existing resolutions rather than advocating for stand-alone LGBTQI+-specific measures, advancing YPS in a politically sensitive yet impactful way.

2. Promoting LGBTQI+ Representation in Peace Processes

Recognizing that inclusive peace requires the participation of all marginalized groups, YPS frameworks should mandate LGBTQI+ representation in peace processes. Advocacy efforts can call for formalized roles for LGBTQI+ youth in advisory boards, negotiation tables, and community peacebuilding initiatives. Through representation, YPS frameworks affirm that queer perspectives are critical to constructing effective and enduring peace policies, ensuring that all youth have a stake in shaping the future.

3. Institutionalizing Intersectional Approaches in Conflict Response and Recovery

To fully integrate QPS principles, YPS frameworks must adopt intersectional policies that account for multiple, overlapping identities, such as gender, race, and sexuality. This approach allows YPS policies to be more responsive to the complex experiences of LGBTQI+ youth in conflict zones, ensuring that peacebuilding efforts remain inclusive, adaptable, and grounded in the realities of affected communities. By institutionalizing intersectionality, YPS frameworks can preemptively address and prevent exclusion, promoting cohesive and comprehensive peace strategies.

4. Countering Anti-Rights Movements and State-Led Discrimination through Multilateral Advocacy

YPS must remain steadfast in opposing anti-rights movements and discriminatory policies that threaten LGBTQI+ rights. Where Security Council dynamics limit certain actions, advocates can collaborate with multilateral allies in the UN General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, and regional organizations to reinforce LGBTQI+ protections through diplomatic efforts and coalition-building. Working outside the Security Council when needed helps avoid political roadblocks, allowing for stronger, coordinated responses that support inclusive, resilient peace.

Policy Recommendations for Member States and UN Agencies

To advance the integration of QPS within YPS frameworks, Member States and UN agencies can take the following actions:

1. Adopt LGBTQI+-Inclusive Language in Peace and Security Documents

Inclusive language is essential for affirming LGBTQI+ identities within YPS. By adopting gender-neutral and inclusive language, Member States signal a commitment to diversity and establish an inclusive standard across YPS policies, reinforcing the principle of Participation by creating welcoming spaces where LGBTQI+ voices can be heard.

2. Ensure LGBTQI+ Representation in Decision-Making Bodies

LGBTQI+ youth representation in decision-making bodies, particularly in peace and security frameworks, is crucial for policies that genuinely reflect the community's experiences. Member States and UN agencies should incorporate LGBTQI+ representatives in forums, negotiations, and advisory boards, advancing Participation and fostering an inclusive dialogue within YPS.

3. Provide Funding for LGBTQI+ Youth-Led Peace Initiatives

Financial support is essential for sustainable LGBTQI+ youth-led peace efforts. Member States and UN agencies should allocate funding to these initiatives, enabling LGBTQI+ youth to lead efforts that foster resilience, advocate for inclusive policies, and build community peace. This recommendation aligns with the Protection and Partnerships pillars, as it supports safe spaces and collaborates with diverse peacebuilders.

4. Integrate QPS within National Action Plans (NAPs) on YPS and WPS

Expanding NAPs to explicitly address LGBTQI+ perspectives strengthens the cohesion and inclusivity of peace strategies. Member States should develop and update their NAPs to incorporate QPS principles, creating a unified approach to inclusive peacebuilding that reflects the needs of all youth, thereby fulfilling the Prevention pillar by mitigating possible future discrimination.

5. Support Research and Data Collection on LGBTQI+ Youth in Conflict

Research on LGBTQI+ youth in conflict zones is critical for informed policy development. Member States and UN agencies should invest in studies documenting these experiences to guide evidence-based interventions and program design. To ensure the Protection of LGBTQI+ youth during and after the data collection phase, such research must be conducted in close collaboration with CSOs that are well-positioned to provide contextual expertise and safeguard the rights and well-being of participants. This participatory approach not only strengthens Protection but also ensures that the resulting insights are grounded in the lived realities of LGBTQI+ youth, guiding effective policy and support measures.

6. Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQI+ Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

Secure environments are necessary for meaningful LGBTQI+ youth engagement in YPS. Member States, UN agencies, and civil society organizations should work together to establish and protect spaces where queer youth can freely participate in peace dialogues without fear of social or political backlash. This recommendation supports Protection and Disengagement and Reintegration, ensuring that LGBTQI+ youth have access to both advocacy spaces and reintegration efforts in post-conflict settings.

7. Advocate for Decriminalization and Legal Protections for LGBTQI+ Youth

Legal protections are fundamental to ensuring LGBTQI+ youth can participate freely in peacebuilding without fear of persecution. Member States and UN agencies must advocate for the decriminalization of LGBTQI+ identities, reducing their vulnerability in conflict settings and promoting human rights. This aligns with Prevention and Protection, safeguarding LGBTQI+ youth from systemic violence and enabling full engagement in peace processes.

Conclusion

The integration of QPS within the YPS agenda represents a transformative approach to achieving genuine inclusivity and resilience in global peace frameworks. By leveraging the YPS pillars LGBTQI+ advocates and civil society organizations are advancing a vision of peace that recognizes the unique experiences, vulnerabilities, and contributions of LGBTQI+ youth.

Civil society organizations are essential allies in this endeavour, providing critical advocacy, education, and support for LGBTQI+ individuals in regions where State protections are limited or absent. These CSOs also create safe spaces and provide essential resources, enabling LGBTQI+ youth to access the support they need to engage meaningfully in peace and security processes. As advocates work to dismantle legal and social barriers, the YPS framework offers a globally recognized tool to amplify LGBTQI+ voices and integrate queer perspectives into peacebuilding efforts. Through an emphasis on Participation, QPS advocates can call for LGBTQI+ representation in peace processes; by focusing on Protection, they push for policies that defend against systemic violence; Prevention efforts work to challenge discriminatory laws and biases, while Partnerships create alliances that foster intersectional inclusion. Finally, the pillar of Disengagement and Reintegration aids LGBTQI+ youth affected by conflict, supporting their efforts to rebuild in inclusive, supportive communities.

With ongoing collaboration from Member States, UN agencies, and the broader YPS community, the QPS framework can build an inclusive foundation for peace that embraces all identities. This commitment is a step forward in constructing a global peace architecture that not only protects the rights of LGBTQI+ youth but also positions them as leaders, advocates, and active participants in shaping a secure, just, and equitable future. Together, this unified approach moves us toward a vision of peace that is sustainable, resilient, and accessible to all young people, advancing the fundamental goals of justice and equity within global security frameworks.

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