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EVIDENCE ON YOUTH IMPACT: STRENGTHENING SECURITY, STABILITY AND PEACEBUILDING THROUGH INVESTMENTS IN YOUTH

The likelihood of violence is often linked to young people's access to education, employment and sense of exclusion, indicating that failure to address the needs of young people may expose a country to greater risks of conflict emerging.¹

COUNTRIES WITH A HIGH RELATIVE YOUTH POPULATION HAVE A GREATER LEVEL OF REPRESSION, CONFLICT AND/OR POLITICAL VIOLENCE

- Young people get involved in violence for multiple context- specific reasons such as their experiences of exclusion and social, political and economic inequalities (horizontal inequalities).²
- Governments facing a youth bulge are more repressive than other states.³
- Young people are the principal participants in conflict and violence, as both victims and perpetrators.⁴
- 43 percent of homicide victims globally are between 10 and 29 years old.⁵
 - One out of every 50 young people living in a low-income country will be killed before the age of 31.⁸
- Extremist groups focus recruitment on young people⁶ — for example, the average age of by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) fighters was 27 years old.⁷
- While a correlation between a high relative youth population and risk of violence has been found, it does not demonstrate causality.⁹ Many countries with youth bulges do not suffer violence and are relatively stable (e.g., Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Benin and Nicaragua).¹⁰
- There is a strong correlation between countries prone to civil conflicts and those with burgeoning youth populations.¹¹

THE LIKELIHOOD OF VIOLENCE MAY INCREASE WHEN THERE IS A LACK OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE¹⁰

- In many countries, young people are unable to access economic opportunities. This un- and

under-employment can lead to youth involvement in violent and criminal activities—such as armed groups and drug and other illegal trade—that offer livelihood opportunities.¹²

- Many recent protest movements, such as the Arab Spring, cite high unemployment among educated youth as a contributing factor.¹³

- The lack of productive work available for young people perpetuates cycles of poverty and is associated with high levels of crime, violence, substance abuse and the rise of political extremism.¹⁴

- The link between employment and violence is complex and can be affected by context-specific factors such as institutions, policies, economic trends and social relations.¹⁵ For example, research in Colombia found that many recruits to armed groups were employed at the time of joining.¹⁶

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EXCLUDED FROM DECISION MAKING MAY BE MORE LIKELY TO TURN TO VIOLENCE

- People under the age of 35 rarely hold formal political leadership positions. In one-third of countries, persons under the age of 25 are not eligible to hold roles in the national government and it is common practice to refer to politicians as “young” if they are below 40 years of age. Youth are poorly represented in political institutions such as parliaments, political parties, elections and public administrations. Young women, in particular, are under-represented in political institutions.¹⁷

- A majority of African youth are interested in public affairs, but low levels of civic engagement and political participation suggest a disconnect between the continent’s youth bulge and democratic processes. AfroBarometer surveys in more than 30 African countries suggest that youth are not sufficiently engaged in formal political processes, such as voting in elections, as well as in more informal modes of engagement, such as meeting with community members and contacting political representatives.¹⁸

- Where youth feel marginalized by formal and informal power structures, violence can provide an opportunity to have a voice.^{19,20}

- When large groups of youth aspiring to political positions are excluded from participating in political processes, they may engage in violent conflict in an attempt to force the government to democratize.²¹

- A 2013 study found that 99 percent of the youth recruited into al-Shabaab believed “[the] government only looks after and protects the interests of a few.”²²

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN VIOLENCE

- Witnessing violence or being a victim of violence can condition children or young people to regard violence as an acceptable means of resolving problems.²³

- Young people who have experienced conflict, particularly protracted conflict, have specific needs to be addressed, including missed years of education, unemployment or loss of livelihood opportunities, social rupture, trauma and—especially for those involved as combatants—a loss of status and resources.²⁴

- Young ex-combatants often face challenges in returning to civilian life and, as a result, are at high risk

of further involvement in violent activities.²⁵

- Young men are more likely to migrate in conflict, compared to women and older men. Alienation of young migrants can leave them vulnerable to potential recruitment by gangs and extremist groups.²⁶

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE CAN REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THEY WILL ENGAGE IN VIOLENCE

- Investing in young people's employment and education develops their ability to participate in social life beyond the family and promotes interaction with government and civil society, collective bargaining with employers and creativity in developing solutions to social problems.²⁷

- Increasing levels of education are generally associated with a decline in violence, particularly if education is provided universally and contributes to reductions in social inequality.²⁸

- Employment that provides a cash income increases the likelihood that young people will disapprove of the use of political violence.^{29,30}

- In order to reintegrate young, underemployed ex-combatants, programs have implemented programs to provide psychosocial counseling and training in life skills and agriculture. Results showed that program participants spent fewer hours in illicit activities.³¹

- Supporting young people's involvement in associations can build their social capital, sense of belonging and act as a deterrent to engagement in violence.³²

- Studies show that the global economic impacts of violence against and among children and young people could be as high as \$7 trillion. This cost is higher than the investment required to prevent much of that violence.³³

YOUNG PEOPLE CAN PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN PEACE AND SECURITY

- In 2015, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth Peace and Security marked the formal recognition of the positive role young women and men play in the maintenance of international peace and security.³⁴

- Youth-led social and political movements, peacebuilding and conflict-prevention interventions, taking place at the local and national level, help build more peaceful societies and catalyze more democratic, inclusive governance.³⁵ For example, evidence shows that young people have strengthened community cohesion and reconciliation in South Sudan, carried out civic awareness for peaceful social relations and development programs in Nepal and supported trust building across different ethno-religious groups in Sri Lanka.³⁶

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CLEARANCE PAGE FOR YOUTH EVIDENCE SHEETS