

**Empowering
Young Women in
Peacebuilding: Realities
and Opportunities
in Border Dispute
Affected Communities
of Kyrgyzstan and
Tajikistan**

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Empowering Young Women in Peacebuilding: Realities and Opportunities in Border Dispute Affected Communities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

by **Diana Uvarova**

Executive summary

Young women play an important but often overlooked role in sustaining peace and social cohesion in communities affected by border tensions along the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border. Although a border agreement was signed in 2025, many communities in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan and the Sughd region of Tajikistan continue to face long-term consequences from the 2021–2022 border tensions, including disrupted social relations, economic challenges, and persistent mistrust.

This policy brief examines the participation of young women aged 18–29 in peacebuilding and community reconciliation processes in border dispute affected areas. The research is based on seven semi-structured interviews with young women from Batken and Sughd and draws on the concepts of Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and everyday peace. The study explores how young women engage in peacebuilding activities, the barriers they face, and the opportunities available to strengthen their participation.

The findings reveal a gap between formal peacebuilding programmes and the everyday realities of young women living in rural border communities. While some participants had attended trainings organized by NGOs and international organizations, participation in formal initiatives was often limited by geographic distance, transport costs, family restrictions, and limited access to decision-making processes.

At the same time, young women described a wide range of informal activities that contribute to local stability and resilience. These include supporting families during periods of tension, promoting tolerance

among children and youth, volunteering in schools, facilitating community dialogue, and countering misinformation through social media and family networks. These everyday practices often remain invisible within existing programme frameworks despite their important contribution to conflict prevention and social cohesion.

The findings highlight that peacebuilding initiatives should move beyond narrow understandings of participation based solely on attendance at trainings or formal representation. Recognizing and supporting informal everyday contributions can help create more inclusive and locally grounded approaches to peacebuilding in border communities.

To strengthen young women's participation, this policy brief recommends expanding village-based programming, developing mentorship opportunities, engaging with families and communities, supporting locally designed initiatives through micro-grants, strengthening links with local governance structures, and reducing logistical barriers to participation. The findings provide practical insights for the OSCE and other organizations working to advance youth and women's participation in peacebuilding and post-tension recovery processes in Central Asia.

Keywords: Youth, Peace and Security (YPS); Women, Peace and Security (WPS); peacebuilding; everyday peace; young women; Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan; border communities; social cohesion; conflict prevention.

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Introduction

The Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border region had experienced increases in border tension in recent years, particularly in 2021 and 2022. These incidents resulted in dozens of human losses, hundreds of injuries, and the temporary displacement of almost 140,000 people, primarily from the Batken region in southern Kyrgyzstan and the Sughd region in northern Tajikistan.¹ Although a formal border agreement was signed in March 2025 between Kyrgyzstan's President Sadyr Japarov and Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon, de-escalation at the national level has not fully translated into restored community trust and social cohesion at the local level.² Border dispute affected villages continue to face ongoing trauma, economic challenges, and mutual distrust, creating an environment where everyday life remains tense.³

In this context, young women (aged 18–29) remain underrepresented in local peacebuilding and community recovery processes. While existing studies in Central Asia primarily document the broader exclusion of women or limited youth participation in decision-making, few explicitly focus on young women as a distinct group. Their position at the intersection of gender- and age-based barriers, however, suggests that young women are likely to face compounded constraints.

Research on women's participation highlights persistent social norms, mobility restrictions, and underrepresentation in formal mechanisms, particularly in rural areas.⁴ At the same time, studies on youth engagement indicate that young people are often excluded from decision-making processes despite their interest in contributing to community security and dialogue. Taken together, these findings suggest that young women, positioned at the intersection of these two

¹ Human Rights Watch, "When We Moved, They Shot": Laws of War Violations in the September 2022 Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Border Conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/05/02/kyrgyzstan-tajikistan-border-conflict>

² Aigerim Turgunbaeva, "Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Resolve Final Border Dispute: A Historic but Fragile Peace," Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, May 15, 2025, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13868-kyrgyzstan-and-tajikistan-resolve-final-border-dispute-a-historic-but-fragile-peace.html>

³ Rashid Gabbulhakov, Oleg Antonov, and Erkin Kyzy, *The Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan Border Conflict: Social Media Discourses and Lived Experiences* (The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, 2023). <https://pure.rug.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/1406715050/Taj-Kyg-Border-.pdf>

⁴ UN Women, *Young Women in Peace and Security: At the Intersection of the Youth, Peace and Security and Women, Peace and Security Agendas* (UN Women, 2018), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/young-women-in-peace-and-security>

groups, are likely to experience even greater limitations in accessing formal peacebuilding opportunities.

Global policy frameworks such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) emphasize the importance of inclusive participation in peacebuilding processes.⁵ These frameworks call for the meaningful involvement of women and young people in conflict prevention, dialogue, and post-conflict recovery, yet they rarely address the specific constraints faced by young women in rural and border contexts.

The OSCE's youth and security agenda, reinforced through the 2018 Ministerial Council Declaration, similarly highlights the role of young people in addressing security challenges and strengthening community resilience.⁶ In Central Asia, where many communities live in close proximity to sensitive borders, these policy frameworks underline the importance of supporting youth engagement in local peacebuilding efforts.

Existing literature on youth engagement in the Ferghana Valley highlights both opportunities and persistent constraints. Consultations conducted by Saferworld with youth in Kyrgyzstan demonstrate strong interest among young people in contributing to security and community dialogue, yet also reveal their continued exclusion from decision-making processes.⁷ Similarly, GPPAC's 2024 consultations in the Batken, Osh, and Jalal-Abad provinces document women's important roles in psychosocial recovery following tensions, while also identifying ongoing gaps in economic empowerment and intergenerational trust.⁸ Evaluations of tolerance training programmes implemented by organizations such as Interbilim show high initial youth engagement but relatively low retention among rural participants, due to mobility and access barriers.⁹

⁵ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security*, October 31, 2000, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n00/720/18/pdf/n0072018.pdf>

⁶ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Declaration on the Role of Youth in Contributing to Peace and Security Efforts (MC.DOC/3/18)*, Milan Ministerial Council, December 7, 2018, https://cdn.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/6/7/406436_0.pdf

⁷ Saferworld, *Young People's Voices on Peace and Security in Kyrgyzstan* (Saferworld, 2018)

⁸ Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), *Unlocking the Potential for Sustainable Peace in the Ferghana Valley* (Policy Brief, 2024), https://www.gppac.net/files/2024-10/Policy%20Brief_Unlocking%20the%20Potential%20for%20Sustainable%20Peace%20in%20the%20Ferghana%20Valley.pdf

⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Endline Report: Interbilim "Tolerance*

At the same time, NGO initiatives across border communities illustrate how practical cooperation can contribute to stability. For example, cross-border projects implemented by DVV International in Batken–Isfara villages demonstrate how joint infrastructure initiatives, such as solar heater projects, can reduce resource-based tensions while strengthening women’s roles in community decision-making.¹⁰ However, broader assessments of National Action Plan implementation on UNSCR 1325 in Kyrgyzstan indicate persistent rural-urban disparities, with women from border regions remaining underrepresented in formal participation mechanisms despite existing gender quotas.¹¹

While stories of urban participants in initiatives such as Young Women for Peace are increasingly documented, the lived experiences of rural young women in border dispute affected communities remain less visible in existing policy and academic literature. In particular, limited research has examined how young women in rural border areas balance family expectations, mobility constraints, and occasional participation in training programmes, and how these dynamics shape forms of participation that often remain informal or symbolic within institutional peacebuilding processes.

This research, therefore, examines the experiences of young women in Batken (Kyrgyzstan) and Sughd (Tajikistan), focusing on their current involvement in post-tension recovery and the factors shaping their potential contributions. By centring the voices of those directly affected by the 2021–2022 border tensions, the study contributes field-informed insights to the OSCE’s youth and security agenda in Central Asia, emphasizing informal “everyday peace” practices alongside formal initiatives.

Research Question: What are the key challenges and opportunities shaping young women’s participation in peacebuilding and community reconciliation in border dispute-affected areas along the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border?

and Democracy Camps” Project (2020), https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/35000/annex_8_endline_report_april_2020_final.pdf

¹⁰ DVV International Central Asia, 2021, “The Role of Women in Peace-Building between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,” <https://www.dvv-international.de/en/our-work/stories/detail/the-role-of-women-in-peace-building-between-kyrgyzstan-and-tajikistan>

¹¹ United Nations in Kyrgyzstan, *Report on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and Its National Action Plan in Kyrgyzstan*, <https://kyrgyzstan.un.org/en/202879-report-united-nations-security-council-resolution-1325-and-its-implementation-kyrgyzstan>

1. Relevance and Structure

This research is particularly timely in the context of ongoing OSCE-supported initiatives, such as Young Women for Peace, a regional programme that supports young women's leadership, dialogue, and participation in peacebuilding processes across Central Asia.¹² Its findings offer actionable recommendations to enhance gender-sensitive programmes in border communities.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents the conceptual and analytical framework; Section 3 outlines the methodology; Section 4 presents the key findings; Section 5 discusses implications; Section 6 offers some conclusions; and Section 7 provides policy recommendations.

Conceptual and Policy Framework

1. Peacebuilding in Border Contexts

Peacebuilding, in this study, refers to efforts to prevent the repetition of violent tensions, rebuild trust between communities, and foster sustainable social cohesion at the local level.¹³ This definition aligns with the OSCE's understanding of post-conflict recovery processes, focusing on both formal institutional mechanisms and informal everyday practices that contribute to stability.

In the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border context, peacebuilding includes activities such as countering misinformation in social media, promoting dialogue through schools and women's groups, and supporting economic cooperation to reduce resource-based disputes, rather than addressing formally declared conflicts. This broader understanding is particularly relevant for interview participants, many of whom may not identify their actions as "peacebuilding" but instead describe practical activities such as family mediation, tolerance education among children, and rumour control during tense periods.

¹² Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Young Women for Peace Initiative*, <https://projects.osce.org/node/660571>

¹³ Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (Routledge, 2012).

2. Everyday Peace and Informal Practices

The concept of *everyday peace* provides an analytical lens for understanding subtle but essential contributions to stability in conflict-affected environments. Rather than focusing on high-level negotiations or formal peace agreements, everyday peace highlights the routine practices through which individuals and communities reduce tensions and maintain coexistence in their daily lives.¹⁴

In border dispute-affected areas such as Batken and Sughd, where formal cross-border dialogue remains limited following the 2025 border agreement, these informal practices play a particularly important role. Everyday peace can include actions such as moderating community tensions within families, encouraging tolerance among younger generations, and countering misinformation during periods of heightened insecurity. Existing NGO initiatives illustrate similar dynamics. For example, projects implemented by organizations such as RDF.kg document how women's groups in Batken rebuild trust through joint community activities and practical cooperation.¹⁵ These initiatives demonstrate how local actors contribute to stability through small-scale, everyday actions rather than through formal institutional processes.

This concept is therefore central to the analytical approach of this study, as it allows the research to capture forms of peacebuilding that may remain invisible within formal policy frameworks but are nevertheless critical for sustaining social cohesion in border communities.

Recent scholarship on youth participation in peacebuilding also highlights the importance of recognizing young people as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries of peacebuilding programmes. Academic research similarly emphasizes that young people often contribute to peacebuilding through informal social and civic engagement outside formal political or institutional structures.¹⁶ The “We Are Here” framework, developed by the United Nations and civil society partners, emphasizes that young people contribute to peace through everyday civic engagement,

¹⁴ Roger Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace: How So-Called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁵ Rural Development Fund, *Strengthening the Capacity of Women and Vulnerable Groups in Conflict-Affected Communities* (RDF.kg), <https://rdf.kg/projects/conflicts/en/tpost/o2bg33ng71-strengthening-the-capacity-of-women-a>

¹⁶ Siobhán McEvoy-Levy, *Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peacebuilding* (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2011).

community initiatives, and informal leadership roles that often remain outside of formal institutional processes.¹⁷

These insights resonate with the concept of everyday peace used in this study, as many forms of young women's engagement in Batken and Sughd emerge through informal practices embedded in daily community life.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This Policy Brief uses a qualitative, case-based approach, focusing on two regions affected by border disputes: Batken (Kyrgyzstan) and Sughd (Tajikistan). These areas were selected for their direct exposure to the 2021–2022 border tensions and their ongoing recovery efforts. The research design aims to provide in-depth insights into the experiences of young women living in these communities rather than achieving statistical representativeness.

2. Data Collection

Primary data consist of seven semi-structured interviews with young women aged 18–29 from the border dispute affected communities of Batken and Sughd. A total of 12 potential participants were initially contacted through existing professional networks connected to youth and peacebuilding initiatives. Of these, seven agreed to participate. A purposive sampling approach was used, based on residence in border dispute-affected areas, direct or indirect experience with tensions and recovery processes, and age between 18 and 29.

The interviews were conducted between December 2025 and January 2026. Four participants were from the Batken region (three rural, one urban/migrant) and three from the Sughd region (two rural, one urban/

¹⁷ Ali Altiok and Irena Grizelj, *We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes*, United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394494932_WE_ARE_HERE_An_Integrated_Approach_to_Youth_Inclusive_Peace_Processes

NGO worker). Participants include students, teachers, volunteers, and NGO staff.

In terms of engagement, participants varied in their levels of involvement in peacebuilding-related initiatives. Five participants had attended at least one formal training or workshop, primarily focused on media literacy, conflict prevention, or youth engagement, typically organized by NGOs or international organizations. However, participation was generally short-term and limited to one-off events. Only one participant had progressed to a more active role, facilitating or supporting similar activities. Two participants had not participated in formal peacebuilding initiatives but were actively engaged in informal practices contributing to community stability, such as school-based activities, family-level mediation, or managing information flows during periods of tension. This variation allowed the study to capture both formal and informal forms of engagement and to reflect differences in access between rural and urban contexts.

Secondary data includes OSCE reports, GPPAC and UNDP programme evaluations, NGO documentation, and policy papers published between 2023 and 2025. These sources were used to contextualize interview findings and compare participants' experiences with broader programme outcomes.

Ethical considerations were integrated throughout the data collection process. Participants were fully anonymized, with only age and region referenced in the research. Written informed consent was obtained prior to each interview, and participants were informed that the study was conducted as independent research within the OSCE "Youth Dialogue" framework. Interviews followed a trauma-informed approach, using conflict-sensitive questioning and allowing participants to avoid topics that caused discomfort. Data were stored in password-protected files, and no personal identifying information was shared outside the research process. Interviews were conducted in Russian and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan and in Russian and Tajik in Tajikistan, with interpreters signing confidentiality agreements when necessary.

3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted manually to identify patterns across the interviews. The analysis was guided by the study's conceptual framework, particularly the concepts of everyday peace and meaningful participation. Four main themes emerged from the data: forms of engagement (formal and informal), cultural and familial barriers, structural and institutional limitations, and opportunities to strengthen participation.

4. Limitations

This study is based on seven interviews, and access to participants in border communities was limited due to the sensitivity of the topic and geographic constraints. The research does not aim to represent all young women in Batken and Sughd but instead focuses on understanding the experiences of those interviewed in greater depth.

Despite the small sample size, similar themes emerged across interviews. Participants from both regions highlighted mobility barriers, transport costs, family restrictions, symbolic participation in decision-making processes, and the importance of informal everyday actions that contribute to community stability. Including both rural and urban participants also helped illustrate differences in access to opportunities between villages and cities.

The findings cannot be generalized to all border communities, but they provide insight into the lived experiences of young women in rural areas affected by border disputes.

Key Findings

The findings from the seven semi-structured interviews with young women from the border villages of Batken (Kyrgyzstan) and Sughd (Tajikistan), are combined with open-source NGO reports and programme evaluations.

1. Formal Peacebuilding Engagement

Young women's involvement in formal peacebuilding centres was primarily in the form of short-term training programmes run by NGOs and international organizations focused on media literacy and preventing escalation during episodes of border tension. Five of the seven participants reported attending on to three such workshops, typically held in national or regional urban centres rather than in their home villages. One 22-year-old from a Batken village recalled: "We learned how to check information on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp because during the border tensions, there were so many rumours spreading panic." This experience taught her to challenge unverified messages in family and community chats, showing how formal training can translate into concrete local practices.

However, participants faced significant barriers, especially with regard to the cost of travel to urban places. A 19-year-old from Leilek (Batken) explained: "My parents wouldn't let me go all the way to Bishkek because of costs and safety fears, but district-level trainings were manageable if someone drove." Only one participant progressed beyond attendance, becoming a trainer herself. This Batken woman, now living in Bishkek, shared: "I sometimes lead online sessions for girls, adapting training materials for social media." This rarity, with only one out of five programme participants progressing beyond mere attendance, reveals a key limitation of formal programmes: They are frequently able to offer only brief exposure to concepts but rarely build sustained engagement.

2. Informal Everyday Peace Practices

Far more common and sustainable are the informal peacebuilding practices young women maintain daily within families, schools, and digital networks. Every participant described serving as emotional stabilizers during the 2021-2022 clashes and evacuations. A 26-year-old woman from Batken shared this: "When we had to evacuate in 2022, women focused on supporting children and elders, calming everyone while men organized transport. I tried to share verified updates with my family to prevent them from stressing and worrying." Almost all interviewees moderated family chat groups to proactively filter misinformation. These actions prevented community panic, filling voids when formal aid arrived late.

In Batken schools, three women (ages 19–22) independently organized tolerance-building activities for younger students. A 22-year-old college student from Batken elaborated: “After the tensions, I started helping my old school with meetings where we talk about respect and friendship across the border. No one from outside taught us. We just did it ourselves.” Despite these important contributions, young women face several barriers that limit their active participation in formal peacebuilding and community decision-making processes.

3. Cultural and Family Barriers

After the 2022 tensions, families became stricter with their daughters than with sons, limiting daughters’ abilities to participate in public activities. This was true for almost all interviews. A 19-year-old from Leilek (Batken) explained: “After 2022, parents got much stricter. My brothers can still travel to Bishkek, but I’m not allowed to go outside of our village alone.” Families wanted to protect their daughters during insecure times, which made it harder for them to attend trainings or take on community roles.

Traditional expectations about girls’ behaviour also held them back. A 21-year-old from Sughd said: “If a girl gets too active in public, people say she’s ‘too independent’ and it brings shame to the family.” Many families also pushed early marriages for “stability,” causing girls to leave education or stop community work.

4. Structural and Institutional Barriers

Distance and transport costs make formal trainings largely inaccessible for young rural women. District centres lie 50–100 km from border villages, while Osh, Bishkek, Khujand, or Dushanbe require 200–500 km trips on unreliable, expensive transport. All interviewees emphasized this barrier: “Even free trainings aren’t free, we have no money for the road, and our parents won’t let us go alone.”

Without independent income, participants depend entirely on family support, which rarely materializes for distant events. Formal programmes cluster in urban centres, leaving rural women in Batken and Sughd excluded despite their closeness to the tensions. Only the

urban migrant participant, now living in Bishkek, progressed to leading online trainings herself, while the six rural women remained limited to one-time attendance. This stark urban-rural divide clearly demonstrates geographic differences in access to sustained peacebuilding roles.

Trainings also end without mentorship or links to local governance, so acquired skills fade without real influence. Participants described “social cohesion” meetings as tokenistic, with men and elders deciding first, then inviting women to validate their decisions. This pattern is confirmed by UNDP/UN Women reports documenting transport barriers and persistently low women’s representation in Batken decision-making despite WPS initiatives.¹⁸

5. Emerging Opportunities

Young women identified school and village administration as key entry points for sustainable engagement. Five of seven participants already volunteer in such locales informally, suggesting there is potential to formalize these roles through partnerships with *aiyl okmotu* (Kyrgyzstan’s rural district administrations) or *jamoats* (Tajikistan’s community councils).

Online spaces offer another key opportunity. All interviewees moderate social media in families/communities, countering misinformation during tensions. Digital skills from trainings could support local campaigns if programmes address device or data access.

Participant ideas include localized programmes in villages (avoiding district centres), parent sensitization sessions, regional women mentors from their area, and micro-grants for school clubs or online initiatives. These practical suggestions address the geographic and familial barriers identified earlier.

¹⁸ UN Women, *Country Results Report: Kyrgyzstan* (2023), <https://open.unwomen.org/en/country-results/KG>

Discussion

The interviews show a clear gap between existing YPS/WPS approaches and the daily realities of young women in Batken and Sughd. Three main patterns stand out.

First, young women are already maintaining stability in their communities through everyday actions. These efforts continue independently of external programmes and provide essential and often invisible stability in remote villages. In many cases, this informal work fills gaps where formal interventions are temporary or absent.

However, a structural issue becomes visible when these realities are compared to how participation is measured. International programmes tend to evaluate success through indicators such as the number of trainings delivered or participants reached.^{19,20} These metrics are practical and easy to report, but they prioritize visible and formal activities. Everyday peace practices do not easily fit into reporting templates because they are ongoing and difficult to quantify.²¹ As a result, women's contributions remain largely unrecognized at the institutional level.

This measurement focus shapes whose participation becomes visible in a multitude of ways. UNSCR 2250 emphasizes youth participation, yet in practice, it often highlights formal engagement in urban spaces where access to training, mobility, and networks is greater. Village-level stability work, which takes place in private or semi-formal settings, rarely appears in official indicators. The findings show that, if we do not rethink how “participation” is defined and measured, YPS programmes may continue to overlook the women who are most directly affected by instability.

Second, geographic and economic barriers create an urban–rural divide. Only one participant progressed from training attendee to trainer (1/7). The six rural participants were limited to one-time workshops due to distance, transport costs, and family restrictions. This pattern aligns

¹⁹ UNDP, *Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook for Development Results* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2011).

²⁰ UN Women, *Making Women Count – Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations* (UN Women, 2016), https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/research/Making_Women_Count.pdf

²¹ Roger Mac Ginty, *Everyday Peace: How So-Called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

with UN Women findings that rural Batken women face systematic exclusion from decision-making processes despite formal gender quotas.²² Mobility, financial autonomy, and family permission become informal filters that determine who can engage effectively.

Third, several participants described local “social cohesion” meetings as largely symbolic. Women are invited after key decisions have already been made, limiting their influence. This reveals a deeper gap. Training builds knowledge and confidence, but it rarely translates into decision-making power. Participation risks becoming a formality rather than a truly influential practice.

When looking at these patterns together, it becomes clear that “meaningful participation” needs to be reconsidered in border contexts. Rather than focusing only on formal representation or attendance, participation should also recognize everyday informal contributions as foundational to peacebuilding. Strengthening these efforts through village-based mentorship, more micro-grants to local projects, and clearer pathways into local governance could help bridge the gap between daily work and formal influence.

These findings also have important implications for how the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda is interpreted in practice. While much of the existing literature and programming under UNSCR 2250 (2015) emphasizes youth participation in formal decision-making processes, the experiences of young women in Batken and Sughd point more strongly toward the “prevention” pillar of the resolution.

In particular, participants’ everyday practices, such as countering misinformation, supporting family and community members during periods of tension, and promoting tolerance in schools, directly reduce the risk of escalation and maintain social cohesion. These forms of engagement align closely with prevention-oriented approaches, even though they are rarely recognized as such within formal YPS frameworks.

These findings suggest that in border contexts, prevention-oriented everyday practices may be as significant as, or even more accessible than, formal participation mechanisms. Recognizing these contributions could help broaden current interpretations of YPS implementation beyond conventional indicators of participation and better reflect the lived realities of young people in conflict affected areas.

²² UN Women, *Country Results Report: Kyrgyzstan* (2023), <https://open.unwomen.org/en/country-results/KG>

Conclusion

This research highlights the central but often overlooked role of young women in Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border villages in sustaining everyday peace after the 2021–2022 tensions. While formal YPS and WPS initiatives focus on structured trainings and institutional participation, rural young women are already maintaining stability through family mediation, school-based volunteering initiatives, and the active monitoring of misinformation in digital spaces. Their contributions are continuous and closely connected to community realities.

However, these forms of engagement remain mostly invisible within existing programme structures, which tend to prioritize measurable, urban-based participation. As a result, a gap persists between formal inclusion frameworks and the lived experiences of women in border-affected villages.

The solutions proposed by participants, including village-based mentorship, small grant schemes, family engagement, and stronger links to local administrations, demonstrate that meaningful participation does not require entirely new frameworks. Rather, it requires adapting existing approaches to rural contexts and recognizing informal contributions as foundational to peacebuilding.

By centring the perspectives of the young women living closest to instability, this study contributes grounded insights to the OSCE youth and security agenda in Central Asia. Strengthening locally rooted forms of engagement alongside formal structures can help ensure that post-demarcation recovery processes are not only stable but also inclusive and sustainable.

Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, several policy recommendations can be proposed to strengthen young women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives in border dispute affected communities.

Support village-based peacebuilding programmes. The OSCE could expand its programming by organizing workshops and training activities in district centres or villages rather than primarily in national capitals. Activities could be implemented in partnership with local NGOs, schools, and youth centres in border communities. Bringing programmes closer to rural areas would help reduce the mobility barriers identified in this study and make participation more accessible for young women.

Develop longer-term mentorship and leadership pathways. Instead of relying primarily on one-off training sessions, the OSCE could support longer-term mentorship structures that connect young rural women with experienced women leaders, civil society actors, and peacebuilding practitioners from the region. Regional mentorship networks, including alumni of existing OSCE initiatives such as Young Women for Peace, could help transform short-term participation into sustained engagement and leadership development.

Engage families and communities in awareness efforts. Given the strong influence of family norms on young women's mobility and participation, the OSCE could integrate community and parent engagement components into youth peacebuilding programmes. Community discussions or awareness sessions could help frame women's participation in peacebuilding as a protective and community-strengthening activity rather than a socially controversial role.

Support locally designed initiatives through micro-grants. The OSCE could consider establishing small grant schemes (between \$2,000 and \$5,000) to support locally designed peacebuilding initiatives implemented by young women. These could include school-based dialogue clubs, community media literacy campaigns, or youth-led digital initiatives to counter misinformation during periods of tension.

Strengthen links between youth initiatives and local governance structures. The OSCE could encourage cooperation between youth initiatives and local administrations, such as *aiyl okmotu* in Kyrgyzstan and *jamoats* in Tajikistan. Supporting youth and women's advisory

groups within local governance structures could help ensure that young women's perspectives contribute to community-level decision-making.

Reduce logistical barriers to participation. The OSCE-supported initiatives could provide practical support mechanisms such as transport stipends, digital participation options, or childcare support where possible. Addressing these logistical constraints would help ensure that participation in peacebuilding initiatives does not depend primarily on family income or mobility.

Include informal peace and stability work in assessment metrics. The OSCE could incorporate everyday peace indicators into programme monitoring frameworks to better recognize informal community contributions that often remain invisible in traditional participation metrics. This would allow programmes to capture forms of participation that play an important role in maintaining stability in border communities.

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