

CONSIDERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES

WHEN CONDUCTING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION PROJECTS?

The political, financial and ecological crises currently facing the world are having a significant impact on daily life and life trajectories for populations living at the core of these upheavals. Young people are no exception: a fragile context will have more or less significant impacts on their integration as adults, citizens and professionals.

Through its JADE* programme, GRET and its partners are exploring new ways to support young people by taking an overall approach to integration that includes the economic and professional aspects, as well as the social, civic, environmental and climatic aspects of integration. One of the basics of this approach is the conviction that to make young people actors in their own development and that of their territories, it is important to design and test innovative, relevant ways to support young people, taking account of the social and political dimensions with a view to overall integration. To do this, the stability — or lack thereof — of the context in which young people live must be considered in each element of support.

* Jeunesses actrices du monde de demain / Young People as Stakeholders in the Future. n 2022, 23% of the world's population were living in fragile contexts or amidst recurring, violent crises¹. For young people, in 2016, around 408 million people aged 15 to 29 were already living in regions affected by armed conflicts or organised violence, i.e. approximately one out of four young people worldwide². Across all continents, we are seeing significant participation by young people in the various social and civic mobilisations. Whether committed, mobilised activists, or an instrumentalised and manipulated group, young people "have been a vital force for the advent of social justice" Perceived by societies as both perpetrators and victims, young people are playing an increasingly central role on

^{1.} According to the OECD, 2022.

^{2.} United Nations and Folke Bernadotte Academy, *Youth, peace and security - A programming handbook,* New York, 2021, p. 2.

^{3.} TOURE Ibrahima, Jeunesse, mobilisations sociales et citoyenneté en Afrique de l'Ouest : étude comparée des mouvements de contestation « Y'en a marre » au Sénégal et « Balai citoyen » au Burkina Faso, Africa Development/ Afrique et Développement, Vol. 42, No. 2, Special Issue on Study on Oblique Identity Dynamics, 2017, p. 57-82.

the international stage, which recognises that they are positive forces in conflict prevention and resolution, and in the construction of sustainable peace⁴. With this is mind, in just four years, three resolutions on youth encouraging the involvement of young people in efforts to consolidate peace were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly⁵.

Supporting overall integration in a fragile context requires taking account of young people's specific social and political integration objectives in their training and professional integration projects. Projects conducted by development organisations are sometimes rolled out in unstable political contexts that generate fragility over the long term. In such conditions, it is vital to determine the objectives of taking young people in fragile contexts into account in training and professional integration projects.

This note will firstly cover some key concepts concerning the characteristics of fragile contexts, and what the concept of "youth" means. Secondly, it will present the impacts of fragile contexts on young people's integration paths. Lastly, it will identify areas for improvement in the consideration of young people in fragile contexts.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY FRAGILE STATES AND FRAGILE SITUATIONS?

Generally, the state of being fragile is defined by the existence of an imbalance between the extent of challenges and tensions faced by countries, and their aptitude to manage these. Fragility can affect any State to varying degrees and in various ways⁶, but each State's fragility or vulnerability is defined by its resilience to deal with possible shocks.

There are several different definitions of and approaches to fragile contexts, for example:

- an approach based on public authorities' lack of capacity and will to resolve crises and actively address development;
- an approach based on crises cycles (according to whether the country is in a situation of deterioration, active conflict, prolonged crisis, exiting crisis and gradual improvement)⁷;
- an approach based on the presence of chronic insecurity, recurrent cycles of violence and poverty in a country⁸.

The state of fragility is therefore not solely related to a situation of conflict or open crisis. There are different characteristics and manifestations of fragility, featuring economic, social and political factors.

It should be noted that several studies have expressed reservations about the use of the term "fragility" or "fragile State". While some researchers are concerned that the term "fragility" could become a "catch-all" expression devoid of content⁹, others recommend using "fragile contexts" rather than "fragile States".

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "YOUTH"?

There is no homogenous definition of "youth". "Being young" goes beyond issues of age, differs from one society to another, and depends on the position socially and culturally constructed based on access to certain attributes and resources such as marriage, access to employment, financial autonomy and the creation of a home separately from one's parents. At GRET, youth is defined as a phase of transition between childhood and adulthood, during which an individual learns to become an adult through a process of socialisation within a family and community group. During this phase, young people have more or less easy access to attributes and resources that give them a role, a place and skills that are more or less valued in their social environment. GRET uses the term "young people" in the plural because it refers to the social and cultural diversity of young people within specific historic, sociological, economic, legal and institutional contexts.

FRAGILE CONTEXTS HAVE IMPACTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTEGRATION

Factors of fragility are multi-dimensional. They include the challenge to young people's integration, which is exacerbated in some contexts featuring intense demographic growth, a lack of opportunities, rapid urbanisation, climate disturbances, and urgent issues such as natural resource management¹⁰, persistent poverty and exclusion of a category of citizens who are deprived of resources or services¹¹. These are increasing pressures and demands for inclusion and fairness, job creation (especially for young people) and improvement of services. If these demands are

- Resolution 2250 of the United Nations Security Council on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), 9 December 2015.
- 5. Security Council on Youth, Peace and Security resolutions n° 2250/2015, n° 228215/2016, n° 2419/2018.
- African Development Bank Group, Bank group's strategy for addressing fragility and building resilience in Africa (2022-2026).
- 7. African Development Bank's 2008 Strategy for consolidated commitment in fragile States.
- 8. "Employment and decent work in situations of fragility, conflict and disaster", Guide, International Labour Organization, Fragile States and Disaster Response Group, Development and investments department (Devinvest), Labour policy department Geneva: ILO, 2016, p. 14.
- 9. "Employment and decent work in situations of fragility, conflict and disaster", Guide, International Labour Organization, Fragile States and Disaster Response Group, Development and investments department (Devinvest), Labour policy department Geneva: ILO, 2016, p. 16.
- 10. Competition for resources such as water and land for grazing can be combined with social and economic factors and create a violent conflict, as is the case in Darfur.
- 11. African Development Bank Group, "Strategy for addressing fragility and building resilience", Department of support for transition, 2019.



not met, situations can degenerate, ranging from low-level instability to violent conflict¹².

Multi-dimensional, long-term fragility, accumulated with aggravating endogenous and exogenous factors, can therefore create a high risk of social collapse and violent conflict¹³. Although young people are considered to be at the forefront of various mobilisations, it should be noted that they are also the first victims of these fragile situations in States and societies.

PRECARITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Apart from recurring problems around access to school and training, young people in fragile contexts sometimes have to deal with "wasted years" or temporary interruptions in the course of their training due to an unstable environment¹⁴.

Whether they are due to ethno-political factors (in the African Great Lakes Region, notably Burundi, Uganda and DRC)¹⁵, environmental and political factors (Haiti), demands for inclusion (in the Mediterranean zone, notably Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen)¹⁶, or due to security factors (in the Sahel)¹⁷, the consequences that fragile situations generate for living conditions, particularly for the labour market, have contributed to an exacerbation of young people's vulnerability.

For example, in the Great Lakes region, the majority of young people, in particular those who are refugees and internally displaced, are either unemployed or in very precarious jobs¹⁸. Consequently, a significant cohort of young people in border areas are demanding better social services, subsistence opportunities and participation in governance¹⁹. The Sahel region, which has a distinctively young population, is facing a massive

- 12. African Development Bank Group, "Strategy for addressing fragility and building resilience", Department of support for transition, 2019.
- 13. Ibid.
- 14. Groupe initiative Afrique, "Jeunesses africaine : 'bombe à retardement' ou opportunité historique ?", third international conference, October 2014.
- 15. UNOY Peacebuilders and Cordaid, Youth in the peripheries: extending the evidence on youth contribution to peace in the Great Lakes region, The Hague, 2022, p. 10.
- 16. DUHAUT Sébastien (Altai Consulting), Les dynamiques d'inclusion/exclusion de la jeunesse en zone Méditerranée, Notes techniques no 28, AFD, 2017, p. 6.
- 17. ARNAUD Clara, Jeunesses sahéliennes : dynamiques d'exclusion, moyens d'insertion, Notes techniques, AFD and Urgence Réhabilitation Développement, March 2016, p. 2.
- 18. Département des affaires économiques et sociales des Nations Unies, Division de la population (2020). Faits marquants du vieillissement de la population mondiale en 2020 - Conditions de vie de personnes âgées) : https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www. un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd-2020 world_population_ageing_highlights.pdf
- 19. UNOY Peacebuilders et Cordaid, Les jeunes dans les périphéries : renforcer les évidences sur les contributions des jeunes à la paix dans la région des Grands Lacs, La Haye, 2022, p. 10.

influx of young people onto a labour market that is incapable of providing them with a subsistence activity, in economies with very low levels of dynamism²⁰. This will increase the fragility of the context and make it difficult to address these issues. In Haiti for example, after the 2010 earthquake, global underemployment (including unemployment, invisible and visible underpaid jobs) affected 68% of young workers (aged 10 to 25), compared to 56% in 2007²¹.

DELAYED EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Due to deteriorating living conditions, the "transitory" period of youth is growing longer in some contexts, because it is becoming increasingly difficult to reach the major stages of entering into adulthood²². This situation can generate a sort of social pressure, and be associated with a "state of irresponsibility", which is a source of tension between generations²³. These constraints weigh heavily on the empowerment of young people, who find themselves "trapped in a transitory state" and doomed to enter adulthood later and later, with a high level of dependency on their entourage²⁴. This quest for groups in contexts of emancipation, which is sometimes heightened by a social culture symbolising "a search for adventure" (a phase that is essential or socially valued in some cultures such as that of the Fula and Soninke peoples in Sahelian Africa for example), drives young people to leave and discover other horizons²⁵.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VULNERABILITY TO INDOCTRINATION

According to some studies, unemployment may favour the recruitment of young people by extremist groups in fragile contexts due to "economic distress on the one hand, and the negative psychological and social connotations associated with unemployment on the other hand (inner void, disdain of family and neighbours, loss of self-esteem), which recruiters can easily take advantage of by offering training in self-assertion, a mission to accomplish and power"²⁶.

Young people are therefore targets for criminal networks that take advantage of their idleness to recruit the most vulnerable among them, promising them an income and security. Researchers indicate that social dissatisfaction has facilitated Boko Haram's recruitment of young people. Once new recruits are integrated in the group, they are indoctrinated, and from their initial simple opportunism, they end up being committed to the cause. Breaking their social ties with the place they come from, new recruits often participate in attacks against their own village²⁷.

It should therefore be noted that, apart from searching for a means of subsistence, marginalised young people aspire to being valued and acquiring an identity and status. Idleness in itself is not a direct cause of young people turning to violence. According to some studies, this correlation between unemployment and violence

- ARNAUD Clara, Jeunesses sahéliennes: dynamiques d'exclusion, moyens d'insertion, Notes techniques, AFD and Urgence Réhabilitation Développement, March 2016, p. 2.
- 21. ZANUSO Claire, ROUBAUD François, TORELLI Constance, "Le marché du travail en Haïti après le séisme : quelle place pour les jeunes ?", *Autrepart*, 2014.
- 22. According to a study conducted in three African capitals: Dakar, Yaoundé and Antananarivo.
- 23. ANTOINE P. et al., "Contraints de rester jeunes ? Evolution de l'insertion dans trois capitales africaines", Autrepart, 2001: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers_urb_change/urb_society/pdf_social_emancip/DIAL_ANTOINE_Contraints_rester_jeune.pdf
- 24. ARNAUD Clara, Jeunesses sahéliennes: dynamiques d'exclusion, moyens d'insertion, Notes techniques, AFD and Urgence Réhabilitation Développement, March 2016, p. 7.
- 25. Ibid., p. 46.
- DUHAUT Sébastien (Altai Consulting), Les dynamiques d'inclusion/exclusion de la jeunesse en zone Méditerranée, Notes techniques n° 28, AFD, 2017, p. 8.
- 27. HIGAZI A., BRISSET-FOUCAULT F., "Les origines et la transformation de l'insurrection de Boko Haram dans le Nord du Nigeria", *Politique africaine* n° 130, 2013, p. 137-164.





could be "dangerous" because it could lead to the implementation of inappropriate solutions, considering employment to be an "antidote to violence" 28. It would be more appropriate to consider employment as a provider of economic opportunities, a factor in the reduction of inequalities and the improvement of intergroup relations 29. These feelings of exclusion generate dynamics of marginalisation among young people (low rate of participation in social cohesion and economic development, impossible to express demands via formal channels), migration and choosing violence as a means of expression 30.

YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKING FOR PROSPECTS

There are high levels of migration among populations, particularly young people living in unstable or fragile situations. For example, in a context of massive forced displacements, young Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi refugees moved to other countries in the Middle East, which accommodate around 39% of the world's displaced people³¹. These young people face various challenges: loss of bearings, denial of rights, poverty, and de-structuring of the family unit³². They are subjected to racism and various forms of violence.

However, emigration is also a risk factor. In 2011, the war in Libya caused the rapid return of almost 700,000 foreigners to their countries of origin. Many young seasonal workers who returned home without any prospects in the short term found re-integration difficult.

These young people form a "pool of recruitment" for criminal and radicalised networks in a context where a massive inflow of people and weapons is generating a deterioration of the security situation in some regions of the Sahel³³. Emigration is not necessarily related to the social precarity of an individual, it is above all related to a person's lack of local prospects in their country.

YOUNG PEOPLE INITIATING VARIOUS MOBILISATIONS

While young people were sometimes very active in mobilisations leading to political change, they can subsequently be frustrated by the feeling they have been betrayed by political leaders. A breakdown in trust between public bodies and young people is emerging; "governments see young people as a threat to their stability, whereas the latter dissociate themselves from a State they view as a "predator" 34.

- ARNAUD Clara, Jeunesses sahéliennes: dynamiques d'exclusion, moyens d'insertion, Notes techniques, AFD and Urgence Réhabilitation Développement, March 2016, p. 39.
- 29. Ibid., p. 39 reference to ILO data.
- 30. ILO, The ILO in Fragile Situations: An Overview, 2014, p. 3.
- 31. Global Trend, 2015.
- 32. DUHAUT Sébastien (Altai Consulting), Les dynamiques d'inclusion/exclusion de la jeunesse en zone Méditerranée, Notes techniques n° 28, AFD, 2017.
- 33. Ibid., p. 80.
- ARNAUD Clara, Jeunesses sahéliennes: dynamiques d'exclusion, moyens d'insertion, Notes techniques, AFD and Urgence Réhabilitation Développement, March 2016, p. 39.

Although this feeling of exclusion among young people has given rise to collective movements and social and civic mobilisations, it can also lead to various expressions of anger, either through street demonstrations or, in more extreme cases, by young people joining radical armed groups³⁵. A study demonstrates that poor governance and a low level of political participation by young people are among the major factors of young people's exclusion and entering into violence³⁶. This feeling of not being represented or supported by the State is a powerful vector for their mobilisation by armed or radical groups³⁷. Due to mistrust of conventional systems of expression, other forms of violent expression are sometimes prioritised. For example, the street demonstrations that led to the fall of the Compaoré government in Burkina Faso in 2015, the departure of Abdoulaye Wade in Senegal in 2012, or the enrolment of young people in radical armed groups contesting the State's legitimacy, which led to the destabilisation and fall of the government in Mali in 2012.

GREATER CONSIDERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

A new concept of the role of young people in these contexts should be adopted³⁸. Considering young people in a different light makes it possible to realise that they are among the first victims of public policy failures. They are excluded from processes to prevent and resolve conflicts, and are targeted by criminal networks. Yet, they are also drivers of various societal transitions (ecological, ethical, economic, institutional).

Conscious of the challenges of including young people, a number of organisations are working to strengthen young people's civic participation. This can be done for example by working on their capacities to demand their rights; their participation in the implementation of projects³⁹; the creation of spaces for young people to meet⁴⁰; the promotion of the right to reliable information in order to foster fair, calm participation of young people in public debate⁴¹; support for civil society⁴² and support for the development of an inclusive education system suited to local contexts. These initiatives are based on the empowerment of young people so that they can become citizens and actors of change, capable of entering into dialogue, of asserting their rights, and realising their personal projects.

For example, through the PAIR project, GRET is working to strengthen young people's civic participation in Haiti in order to favour collaboration between local stakeholders (from civil society, young people's groups and schools) by setting up support funds. The project aims to support young people in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area so that they can become peacefully integrated in their territory's economic and social activities while strengthening their interaction with stakeholders in their areas on the construction of inclusive socio-economic development.

Enabling young people to express themselves favours intergenerational meetings and mutual acknowledgement⁴³. To do this, various practices can be put in place:

- take an "open to others" approach, know how to communicate with others on subjects that interest them, learning to use their tools and channels of communication⁴⁴;
- favour civic participation by including young people in local governance, young people's parliaments, and the associative media, and setting up sports infrastructure and leisure centres.

Preventing risks of social breakdown and crises also contributes to equipping young people with technical and life skills, investing in the socio-economic reintegration of former combatants and people forced to return to their country⁴⁵, and ensuring school enrolment of children⁴⁶ who are refugees in camps; while taking into account potential security risks related to tensions that exist between local young people and young people who are displaced/refugees. Massive returns in difficult conditions can be a factor of food insecurity and additional tensions in densely populated areas. Looking after veterans and forced returnees can be done by supporting installation of households, promoting social and economic opportunities (provision of agricultural machinery, distribution of food and seeds, cash transfers), and creating the conditions necessary to ensure food security⁴⁷. Decent work is also essential in reducing precarity. Creating employment opportunities must contribute to meeting the needs of young people who are searching for more in a job than simply an activity that generates income, aspiring to social status⁴⁸. Once these needs are met, other aspects of overall integration can be consid-

- 35. Ibid.
- 36. Ibid., p. 69, reference to McLean L., Fraser E. (2009).
- 37. Ibid., p. 69, reference to Cramer C. (2011).
- 38. https://press.un.org/fr/2018/cs13312.doc.htm
- Participative mapping by young people in neighbourhoods in the suburbs of Dakar (Sunu Gox Project, GRET, Y en a marre, OSM Sénégal).
- 40. Plan international, Tamkeen project.
- 41. MédiaSahel project, 2019.
- 42. DUHAUT Sébastien (Altai Consulting), Les dynamiques d'inclusion/exclusion de la jeunesse en zone Méditerranée, Notes techniques n° 28, AFD, 2017, p. 94.
- 43. Jades project, conducted by Équilibres et Populations and Solthis, in Niger and Mali, phase 1 (2016-2019).
- 44. Groupe initiative Afrique, "Jeunesses africaine: 'bombe à retardement' ou opportunité historique?", third international conference, October 2014.
- 45. ILO, ILO in fragile situations: an overview, 2014, p. 3.
- 46. Niger and Mali project, Programme for the integration of young people in border areas weakened by the Malian conflict, donor SIDA/IRC.
- 47. Strategy for development and security in Sahel-Saharan areas in Niger SDS, funded by the State/EU/other technical and financial partners (Denmark, UN).
- 48. ARNAUD Clara, Jeunesses sahéliennes: dynamiques d'exclusion, moyens d'insertion, Notes techniques, AFD and Urgence Réhabilitation Développement, March 2016, p. 40.



ered. For example, as part of its project in Myanmar to improve access to renewable electricity, GRET is exploring innovative methods to support young people's professional integration into the green economy. Through this project, GRET is further developing its approach to overall integration in a context where young people are increasingly participating in civic mobilisations and demonstrations.

Rectifying the fragility of a context **strengthens the resilience of States and societies**, partly thanks to public structures' aptitude to manage tensions⁴⁹. Promoting responsible, transparent, inclusive governance within institutions is crucial in the development of States' and societies' resilience. It is a question of ensuring these institutions' legitimacy and capacity to manage resources, particularly natural resources⁵⁰.

In addition, conducting development activities in multiple fragile contexts requires the **adoption of** "transition programming" and an approach that is appropriate to the changing, unpredictable context:

- a solid, continuous contextual analysis taking the underlying causes of fragility into account;
- harmonisation of interventions with those by other actors:
- regular analysis of risks, frequent monitoring and evaluation of activities;
- financial flexibility to adjust programming, taking the volatility of the context into account⁵¹.

However, conducting training and professional integration projects in fragile political contexts poses several challenges, notably the choice of activities, and the conditions in which they are implemented and maintained, in unstable and uncertain contexts. This is one of GRET's preoccupations when rolling out its training and professional integration projects.

This is the case for example with the Imyeta project in Mali, which — due to the evolution of the international context — did not continue into a second phase, despite promising results. The objective of this project, which was innovative in terms of employability through tutorial apprenticeship, was to train and support around 2,600 young Malians from rural areas. Sometimes, through no fault of their own, NGOs and development projects find themselves at the centre of geopolitical issues, having to deal with limits and assess possible adaptability in a fragile and unstable context.

^{49.} African Development Bank Group, "Strategy for addressing fragility and building resilience", Department of support for transition, 2019.

^{50.} F3E, "Renforcer le pouvoir d'agir des jeunesses", Pierre Tainturier, *Revue transversale - Les collectes du F3E*, p. 54.

^{51.} OECD (2011), International engagement in fragile States: Can't we do better?, OECD publications, p. 20-26.

CONCLUSION

Fragility factors feed into a vicious circle, via which tensions and conflicts generate failure by the State to ensure security, equal access to rights and services, and vice versa. The impacts and manifestations of this fragility affect young people in different ways: civic and social mobilisations, interregional and international mobility, and — in the most extreme cases — enrolment in criminal networks. However, it is worth remembering that the majority of young people do not participate in conflicts, or run the risk of participating in them⁵². Examining the situation of young people in fragile contexts shows that idleness does not systematically lead to their participation in criminality or migration. Above all, it is political exclusion and disillusionment regarding the lack of concrete change that drive young people to seek other forms of assertion and prospects, which are sometimes "quasi-suicidal".

Improved work on the inclusion of young people in multidimensional fragile contexts should start by demystifying the trend whereby young people are considered as a problem. Defining a project's results while taking account of the specific context of intervention through a targeted diagnosis, focusing on social cohesion and the search for peace, would be preferable to simply targeting the reduction of a negative factor that concerns only a small number of young people participating in conflicts. Forming young proactive citizens would respond to young people's need for inclusion, recognition, trust and support. Young people are a source of enormous potential due to their demographic weight and their capacity to contribute. They are drivers for change and innovative sources of peace.



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52. United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Peace-building Support Office (2018), *The missing peace - Independent progress study on youth and peace and security.*

FURTHER READING



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 Revue transversale Les collectes du F3E, 2021.
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PROJECTS MENTIONED

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 Sunu Gox, GRET, Y'en A Marre, OSM Sénégal.
- > Programme to support inclusive socio-economic integration of young people, Tamkeen, Plan International.
- > Programme for youth integration in border areas weakened by the Malian conflict, SIDA/IRC.
- Project for the promotion of adolescent sexual health in Mali and Niger, Solthis.