

Motion

# Expressing support for the safeguarding and expansion of united nations youth delegate programmes globally

signed by: British Youth Council (BYC), National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations(LSU)

co-signed by: Slovak Youth Council (RMS), The Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU), Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT), National Youth Council of Slovenia (MSS), Polish Council of Youth Organizations(PROM)

The European Youth Forum membership is troubled by recent developments surrounding the withdrawal of funds for United Nations Youth Delegate programmes across various European countries. Most recently, **the European Youth Forum deplors the Swedish Government's decision to remove funding for Sweden's United Nations Youth Delegate programme**, which has been in operation for over thirty years.

As a youth platform committed to the values underpinned by the United Nations Charter and its broader commitment to multilateral cooperation, we recognise the UN's important role in fostering a framework for international dialogue, peace and cross-continental diplomacy. Beyond this, it also plays a significant public-facing role for young people who, as recent years have shown, have grown to be very vocal over the last few years in international advocacy efforts.

Unwavering in its efforts to amplify youth voice structures, the European Youth Forum believes that **United Nations Youth Delegates (commonly referred to as 'UN Youth Delegates' or 'UNYDs') are essential pillars in the international youth representation scene**. Those fortunate to be UN Youth Delegates serve as direct ports of contact between young people and their national diplomatic missions. On top of this, they serve as a valuable addition to a mission's team, adding their youth perspectives to a range of high-level gatherings, including the UN General Assembly, the High-Level Political Forum and other landmark UN events.

As the primary agent representing young people's voices, UN Youth Delegates also play a key role in holding governments to account and democratising a nation's diplomatic dealings. Amid poll after poll revealing that young people are increasingly becoming disillusioned with politics and their politicians,<sup>1</sup> **it is imperative that governments do more to engage youth**. Nowhere is this more accurate

than in the foreign policy sphere, which has traditionally been closed off from young people.

On the 21st of September 2023, the National Youth Council of Sweden announced that, due to budget cuts, Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs would withdraw funding previously allocated to run Sweden's UN Youth programmes.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, Sweden has had six UN Youth Delegates spread across three thematic tracks - (1) *Human Rights*, (2) *Sustainable Development* and (3) *Climate*. Given that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs funds the operational costs of Sweden's Human Rights and Sustainable Development delegate tracks, the recent withdrawal of funding makes attendance at the annual September UN General Assembly and the June High-Level Political Forum extremely difficult. In fact, for the most recent UN General Assembly, due to a lack of financial support, the Swedish Youth Council was forced to use their savings to cover the cost of travel and accommodation. Unfortunately, the sheer costs associated with travelling to New York City mean that it will no longer be affordable for them to continue this practice in the future. In other words, **in the absence of governmental assistance, Sweden's youth face being left behind**.

Sweden is not the lone case study. **The United Kingdom represents another prominent example of a country that, despite having instituted a UN Youth Delegate programme in 2005, has lacked one since 2016**. Meanwhile, France, Cyprus and Spain represent examples where the government has never funded or instituted such programmes. Unless challenged, these trends threaten to weaken Europe's collective recognition that young people deserve representation at the United Nations.<sup>3</sup> **Research shows that 72 per cent of Council of Europe Member States have some form of UN Youth Delegate structure**.<sup>4</sup> If we want this percentage to improve, we must unite behind the youth advocates fighting for their right to be heard at the UN level, whether they may be in Stockholm, London, Paris, Nicosia or Madrid.

1 World Economic Forum (2021): Youth disillusionment is a global risk, but it can be mitigated. This study on Gen Z shows why. Online: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/youth-disillusionment-global-risk-gen-z-resilience/> [Accessed 29 Sep. 2023]

2 LSU (2023): Now we are sending Sweden's last youth representative to the UN. Online: <https://lsu.se/nyhet/nu-skickar-vi-sveriges-sista-ungdomsrepresentant-till-fn/> [Accessed 29 Sep. 2023]

3 Chatham House (2022): Youth representatives: The answer to meaningful engagement?. Online: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/events/all/research-event/youth-representatives-answer-meaningful-engagement> [Accessed 2 Oct. 2023]

4 Chatham House (2023): Why the UK should bring back UN youth delegates. Online: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/09/why-uk-should-bring-back-un-youth-delegates> [Accessed 29 Sep. 2023]

Beyond the funding difficulties, several **UN Youth Delegate programmes around Europe now also face a challenge to their legitimacy**. In certain countries, the government is finding ways to work around the National Youth Councils and operate programmes through alternative organisations. Moreover, there have been instances, notably in Poland, where the government has considered establishing new youth council structures, potentially sidelining the existing ones. These parallel structures and programmes are often designed to curtail the voice and independence of National Youth Councils as a youth civic platform. This change in direction has contributed to making the UN Youth Delegates Programme unstable, discouraging the indispensable communication and cooperation among the various organisations and government bodies managing it.

As a platform built in part by the collective strength of National Youth Councils, **the European Youth Forum denounces this effort and calls on governments to integrate National Youth Councils and not sideline them into irrelevance**.

We conclude that while UN Youth Delegate structures are essential, we believe it is not enough for countries to simply have UN Youth Delegates. Rather, it is our view that in order to facilitate a truly intergenerational and meaningful dialogue: one capable of living up to the values of the UN, **countries must work to ensure that youth are not just listened to but actively consulted** on to ensure the most representative outcome.

We recall the existing national obligations that many UN Member States from Europe and worldwide have adopted under the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth Peace and Security. We also recall the international community's recent commitment to furthering youth structures with the recent General Assembly vote approving the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office. Combined, **we express alarm at various government's efforts to undermine youth participation by imposing further barriers on youth delegations**. Noting that since 1981, the UN General Assembly has actively called for the creation of UN Youth Delegate programmes and meaningful facil-

itation for youth voices within UN institutions,<sup>5</sup> we urge governments to recommit to implementing this long-standing, universal vision.

At a time of increased global challenges, young people across Europe deserve a meaningful voice at the table. With the United Nations being at the core of international discussions and negotiations around climate justice, trade, female empowerment and even peace and security, we are resolute in our belief that **governments must focus on ensuring access to well-financed, well-connected and well-resourced Youth Delegate streams for young people** to be involved in these discussions directly. Ensuring youth participation is dependent on this.

Therefore, we call on national governments across Europe and beyond to:

1. Codify legislation transposed into national law so as to facilitate funding availability and ensure that the budget for the UN Youth Delegate Programme is earmarked and guaranteed on a yearly basis;
2. Recognise the importance of having independent and youth-led National Youth Councils involved in the process of selecting UN Youth Delegates;
3. Commit to co-creating or improving existing UN Youth Delegate programmes to allow for a sustainable structure, which while independent from the government, has close ties with the relevant Ministry;
4. Liaise with the European Youth Forum to facilitate the necessary structured dialogue for European UN Youth Delegates to meet, engage and strategise together ahead of major events;
5. Work with the new UN Youth Office and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) to pressure other European and non-European countries to implement sustainable and empowering youth structures within their UN Missions.

5 UN General Assembly (1981): Res. A/36/17: Channels of communication between the United Nations and youth and youth organisations. Online: <http://www.worldlii.org/int/other/UNGA/1981/24.pdf> [Accessed 2 Oct. 2023]

Adding to this, we also call on the European Youth Forum to:

6. Expand the mandate of its UN-related portfolio work to include a greater focus on pressuring governments to establish well-run and sustainably financed UN Youth Delegate programmes;
7. Commit to providing more support to current and future EU UN Youth Delegates in their efforts to establish more accessible and youth-led UN Delegate programmes;
8. Reestablish a structured network for Europe's various UN Youth Delegates to meet, exchange and strategise ahead of major UN events;
9. Work with national governments, the EU's delegation to the UN and the new UN Youth Office to develop a UN requirement for all UN Missions to include a guaranteed delegation youth quota.





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



The European Youth Forum is funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the Council of Europe or the European Youth Foundation. Neither the European Union nor any other granting authority can be held responsible for them.

