



**POLICY DOCUMENT**

**ON QUALITY YOUTH**

**PARTICIPATION AND**

**REPRESENTATION IN INSTITUTIONS**

ONLINE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
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## Explanatory note

Youth participation and representation has been at the core of the European Youth Forum's work for years. Within this context, the Youth Forum has developed a number of policy documents specifically linked to youth participation. Those include the "Resolution on the Participation of young people with disabilities" (1998), "Policy paper on youth participation at the global level" (2002), "Position paper on guiding principles on common objectives for participation and information" (2002), "YFJ Position paper on guiding principles on common objectives for participation and information" (2003), "Policy paper on Social Inclusion through Youth Participation" (2006), "Resolution on Promoting Youth Participation in EU Development Policies for Africa" (2008).

Youth related topics are increasingly high on the political agenda at different levels. Moreover, the advocacy efforts of youth civil society have pushed institutions to put in place an increasing number of youth participation mechanisms in policy making processes. Some of them are called Youth Delegate Programmes, such as the UN Youth Delegates Programme and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Youth Delegate Programme.

Other examples include mechanisms like the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe which can be considered a best practice and well-established mechanism for youth participation and representation on European level. The EU Youth Dialogue is another form of youth representation developed within the EU Youth Strategy. Some institutions and intergovernmental bodies involve young people in their work through dedicated conferences, summits, working groups (Eastern Partnership Youth Forum, Africa Europe Youth Summit, Youth Forum for the Mediterranean) as well as using other formats. Others are still looking into their own mechanisms for youth participation and representation.

Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum engage with some youth participation and representation mechanisms that have been mentioned. They have been calling **for increased attention to the way those mechanisms are implemented in terms of the quality of youth participation and representation.** In autumn 2018 at the General Assembly of the European Youth Forum a resolution was put forward by the German National Committee for International Youth Work (DNK) on the United Nations Youth Delegates Programme. In spring 2019 at the Council of Members of the European Youth Forum the Guidelines for being a European youth representative were submitted by the Dutch National Youth Council (DNYC) calling for better youth representation in different spaces where young people engage with policy makers on behalf of other young

people. This also became a reflection on the rights and responsibilities of youth representatives.

## **Development of the policy paper**

This policy paper is based on the knowledge set out in the European Youth Forum's previous policy documents on youth participation together with the input from Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum. Over the course of its development, a Policy Commission was held during the Council of Members in April 2019 to kick off the discussion and gather initial ideas about the scope of the policy paper. The UN Youth Delegates Programme Best Practices meeting in August 2019 in Berlin contributed with a specific experience and expertise when it comes to meaningful youth participation and representation in the UN. An online consultation was held from 03 to 20 January 2020. In total 13 Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum<sup>1</sup> took part in the online consultation process, providing high quality and relevant insights into the topic of participation and representation. The outcomes of these consultations have been incorporated into the final draft of this document.

## **Aims and scope of the policy paper**

The overall objective of this policy paper is to **develop a policy framework to advocate for quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions**. It comes from the consideration of the importance of the topic of youth participation and representation to the Platform and answers the need to ensure that young people and their representative organisations are not only present in institutions, but also are enabled to contribute to the decision-making process in a meaningful way. By developing this policy paper we also intend to support the work of Member Organisations of the Youth Forum when engaging with existing youth participation and representation mechanisms and support their advocacy efforts to improve them.

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<sup>1</sup> Member Organisations consulted: **IFMSA** (International Federation of Medical Students' Associations), **WOSM** (World Organization of the Scout Movement (European Scout Region)), **Allianssi** (NYC Finland), **KNZ** (NYC Malta), **CTR** (NYC Romania), **LNU** (NYC Norway), **ALLIANCE** (Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations), **ATD-Quart Monde** (International Movement ATD Fourth World), **MSS** (NYC Slovenia), **WAGGGS** (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts ), **FIMCAP** (International Federation of Catholic Parochial Youth Movements), **CJ** (NYC Belgium (FR)), **CYC** (NYC Cyprus).

# Executive Summary

This policy paper proposes a policy framework to advocate for **quality youth participation and representation mechanisms** in institutions.

Built upon a **rights-based approach and sustainable development as the overarching principles**, the paper provides guiding principles for institutions and policy makers on how to engage young people in decision-making processes making this engagement a quality one.

Quality youth participation and representation mechanisms create an **opportunity for a partnership between policy makers, young people and youth organisations to shape together decisions that impact young people's lives**. It is important to take this opportunity to also ensure stability and resilience of our democracies as participation of all groups of society in decision-making processes is a prerequisite for it<sup>2</sup>.

It should be noted that youth organisations represent the interests of millions of young people in Europe and globally through their wide networks. They are key actors in ensuring that young people are not only present in institutions, but are also enabled to contribute to the decision-making process in a meaningful way<sup>3</sup>.

The paper gives following recommendations to governments and institutions:

## **Rights based approach and sustainable development as the overarching principles**

- Ensure adequate investment in quality citizenship education providing young people with necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to become active members of their society.
- Mainstream economic, environmental, social and political sustainability in their actions and especially the ones linked to youth participation and representation.

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<sup>2</sup> European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion, Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process, 2020.  
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-structured-youth-engagement-climate-and-sustainability-eu-decision-making-process-own-initiative-opinion>

<sup>3</sup> European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion, Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process, 2020.  
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-structured-youth-engagement-climate-and-sustainability-eu-decision-making-process-own-initiative-opinion>

- Respect, protect, and fulfil young people's right to participate by establishing new and improving existing quality youth participation and representation mechanisms.
- Ensure that youth participation and representation mechanisms are sustainable and that their development, implementation and evaluation are founded on a rights-based approach.

### **Democracy and representativeness**

- Ensure that every young person has a chance to participate in youth organisations and their activities by providing adequate political and financial support to youth civil society.
- Provide political and financial support to young people who are taking part in youth participation and representation mechanisms to reach out and gather inputs from other young people on local, national, European or even global levels.
- Entrust to youth organisations at all levels with the selection process of young people who will take part in youth participation and representation mechanisms.
- Put in place and implement specific strategies to ensure broader youth representation in institutional processes with the strong involvement of youth organisations.
- Ensure that marginalised youth is equally recognised, included and represented in youth participation and representation mechanisms as well as in institutional processes.
- Ensure young people's access to formal decision-making by lowering the age of voting to 16 in all elections, while ensuring all youth have the opportunity to gain sufficient skills and motivation to participate without any barriers.

### **Diversity and Inclusiveness**

- Involve youth organisations from the beginning into the development (review) of youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions.
- Together with youth organisations identify obstacles to young people's participation, developing cross-sectorial plans and actions to address them and providing sufficient social, cultural, educational and economic conditions to facilitate participation<sup>4</sup>, including the reviewal and removal of any legal or administrative barriers to participation.
- Ensure that information regarding youth participation and representation mechanisms is available in accessible and user-friendly formats, free of

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<sup>4</sup> European Youth Forum, Implementing common objectives to enhance the participation of young people and improve information for young people, 2003.  
[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03\\_COS\\_1-2\\_FN.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03_COS_1-2_FN.pdf)

charge and specifically considers the needs of marginalised groups of young people.

- Financially support youth organisations that are trying to be more diverse and inclusive and make it possible to remove any kind of socio-economic barriers for young people's participation.
- Ensure that the most vulnerable young people and their representative organisations are directly involved in developing strategies and tools to facilitate their participation.
- Support the development of intercultural awareness and competences for young people that are taking part in institutional processes.
- Develop a code of conduct that explicitly states underlying values for diverse and inclusive participation in institutions that should be followed by all parties involved.
- Involve youth organisations when developing specific strategies to present and distribute information to young people about participation opportunities.

### **Transparency and accountability**

- Make all the information and eligibility criteria related to the youth participation mechanisms including budgetary matters available and easily accessible to the public.
- Ensure quality youth participation and representation mechanisms that provide a feedback loop between youth representatives and those that they are representing as a part of the follow-up process.
- Ensure quality youth participation and representation mechanisms that clearly define rights and responsibilities of youth representatives, youth organisations and institutions.
- Proactively reach out to youth organisations and advertise clearly in youth spaces about all participation opportunities, with clear and inclusive language that is accessible and relevant to target groups.
- Guarantee open, transparent and comprehensive feedback to all young people involved in the respective participation and representation mechanisms in case the expected outcomes could not be reached.

### **Effective and meaningful participation**

- Include young people throughout the entire institutional process: preparatory phases, implementation and the follow-up of the initiatives and policy processes also providing support to build the necessary knowledge and skills for a meaningful participation.
- Ensure that young people can have a say in all topics that affect them and are able to do that independently from an institutional (governmental) position.

- Provide sufficient, structural, reliable and sustainable resources and necessary political support for youth organisations to engage in youth participation and representation mechanisms<sup>5</sup>.
- Clearly define the role and mandate of young people within the institutional process putting in place tools to guarantee appropriate implementation.
- Set clear and understandable targets to measure the impact of youth participation in institutional processes and provide feedback to young people on the impact their participation has had in shaping policies.

### **Sustainability and continuity**

- Make sure that youth participation and representation mechanisms are a part of long-term institutional strategies, work plans and programmes with set goals and subgoals formulated, checked and updated, if necessary.
- Allocate sufficient budget to develop, run and follow-up on youth participation and representation mechanisms.
- Provide political and financial support for the engagement of youth organisations in youth participation and representation mechanisms in all stages (development, implementation, follow-up and feedback), but at the same time respect their autonomy and independence<sup>6</sup>.
- Create space for an exchange involving institutions, youth organisations, young people and other relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>5</sup> European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion, Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process, 2020.  
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-structured-youth-engagement-climate-and-sustainability-eu-decision-making-process-own-initiative-opinion>

<sup>6</sup> European Youth Forum, Implementing common objectives to enhance the participation of young people and improve information for young people, 2003.  
[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03\\_COS\\_1-2\\_FN.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03_COS_1-2_FN.pdf)

# Introduction

An increasing number of policy makers and institutions are more and more aware of existing needs for participation of young people and youth organisations in democratic decision-making processes, especially in the ones linked to the topics that inherently affect future generations and where youth voices have been heard the loudest, such as the climate crisis. The European Youth Goals, which were decided on by 50,000 young people from all over Europe as a guiding framework for a youth-friendly Europe, show that essential topics and priorities have been made clear by our generation and now need to be taken into consideration. However, the value of youth participation for sustaining and strengthening democracy is, despite being regularly acknowledged, very often not fully recognised and put into practice. We often see the willingness of institutions to engage with young people more as a tokenistic exercise. Existing youth participation and representation mechanisms are not necessarily fully reflecting the way young people prefer to engage and often also fail to be truly inclusive of diverse groups of young people. This is very often due to the lack of knowledge on what quality youth participation and representation means and how to achieve it.

Participation is key to building healthy and sustainable democracies. Participation is a right enshrined in International human rights law, underpinned by Sustainable Development Goal 16 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' of the United Nations. As such, participation must be enjoyed and exercised by everyone and all societal groups. For the right to participation to be fully implemented, all groups of society need to be present in decision-making processes in institutions. This makes governments more accountable to their citizens, empowers citizens to influence decisions bringing innovative proposals at the table and ensures that the policy-making is evidence-based, corresponds to citizens' needs and respects, protects and fulfils their rights<sup>7</sup>. Remarkably, young people are one of the least represented groups in decision-making processes, although constituting one third of the EU population<sup>8</sup> and more than half of the global one<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, 14 December 2017.

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/Recommendation-Open-Government-Approved-Council-141217.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Eurostat, Being young in Europe today - demographic trends, 2017.

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being\\_young\\_in\\_Europe\\_today\\_-\\_demographic\\_trends](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_demographic_trends)

<sup>9</sup> Euromonitor International, "Special Report: The World's Youngest Populations, 2012.

<https://blog.euromonitor.com/special-report-the-worlds-youngest-populations/>; also

UNESCO, Statistics on Youth, 2017. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-radio-day-2013/statistics-on-youth/>

Identifying and further developing effective mechanisms for quality participation and representation of young people from all walks of life and in all levels of governance is a key thing to work on to build strong and resilient democracies. Making young people's voices heard helps to build trust in democratic institutions among young people. Quality youth participation and representation also forms the basis of active citizenship that will last through life because having a positive experience about their engagement, youth will be more willing to be actively involved in society in the future as well<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, young people taking part in democratic processes and not feeling heard can not only lead to political disengagement but to a danger to peaceful societies: the rise of radical populist parties all across Europe and beyond, and outbreaks of violent extremism are also a result of people and especially young people, feeling that they cannot influence decisions in any other way<sup>11</sup>.

The European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations, being built upon democratic values and principles themselves, consider democracy and democratic participation as a key aspect of their work, thus, emphasise the need for policy-makers and institutions to walk the talk and provide the space and means for quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions. Through them, institutions need to foster the inclusion of the youth perspective in political agendas on different governance levels. Policy-makers should also not forget that through their expertise and wide-ranging networks, youth organisations have a great role to play supporting and ensuring quality youth participation and representation in institutions. Thus, youth organisations should be empowered politically and financially by institutions to fulfil this role.

Quality youth participation and representation has to be ensured in different levels: one at which young people are only being informed about processes and decisions taking place, one at which they are consulted but have no control, one at which young people share the decision-making power with policy-makers, where young people lead the participation process with support and where young people are completely independent<sup>12</sup>. It should be ensured no matter if participation is happening online or offline or as a mix of both ways.

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<sup>10</sup> European Youth Forum, Young people and democratic life in Europe: what next after the 2014 European elections?, 2015.

[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/YFJ\\_YoungPeopleAndDemocraticLifeInEurope\\_B1\\_web-9e4bd8be22.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/YFJ_YoungPeopleAndDemocraticLifeInEurope_B1_web-9e4bd8be22.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Ødegård, G., Discouraged youth? New forms of engagement in an old democracy, 2010. Oslo: Akademisk Publiserings.

<sup>12</sup>E. Andersson, *The pedagogical political participation model (the 3P-M) for exploring, explaining and affecting young people's political participation*, Journal of Youth Studies, 20 (10), pp. 1346-1361, 2017. 10.1080/13676261.2017.1333583

Quality youth participation and representation is also essential for Europe to fully recover from the COVID-19 health crisis. We want to engage and play our part in building back a better society. We also have a right to do so: we might not be the most hit by the COVID-19 health crisis, but its consequences will form our disadvantage for decades to come, if no or inappropriate measures are taken<sup>13</sup>.

A number of guiding principles should therefore be observed in all quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions, namely: rights-based approach and sustainable development, democracy and representation, diversity and inclusiveness, transparency and accountability, effective and meaningful participation and continuity.

In the following sections, we go through these guiding principles associating them with recommendations to institutions and governments at local, national, European and global levels of governance. These guiding principles should also be at the heart of major democratic reform processes such as the Conference on the Future of Europe.

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<sup>13</sup> European Youth Forum, The European Youth Blueprint to Recovery, 2020, <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/blueprint.pdf>

## **1. Rights-based approach and sustainable development as the overarching principles**

Participation is a fundamental human right. When it comes to young people, having access to and enjoying our right to participate not only helps us to develop as individuals, but allows us to contribute to the development of the society we live in. From the right to education and freedom of opinion and expression, to freedom of assembly and the right to vote, participation encompasses and is inherently linked to several other human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are recognised and upheld in key human rights instruments at international level, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>14</sup> to international human rights conventions (e.g. the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>15</sup> and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>16</sup>).

As human rights are universal and inalienable, they apply to everyone and every group, including youth. However, institutions and policy-makers do not always see young people as legitimate rights holders. When it comes to young people's right to political participation and representation, aside from structural barriers and age-based discrimination at legislative level, preconceptions and prejudices often play a key role, as younger generations are sometimes perceived as apathetic and immature to be able to participate in democratic processes and decisions that affect their lives. This may result in institutions and policy-makers underestimating the importance of a meaningful youth participation.

Young people do not only need to be heard: it is our right to participate in decision-making processes. Therefore a rights-based approach to youth participation is essential. To this end, institutions and policy-makers should see young people as active rights holders who must be enabled and empowered to access and enjoy all of their rights, including their right to participate.

A rights-based approach should also be adopted when developing, implementing and evaluating youth participation and representation mechanisms. Aside from their right to participate, these mechanisms should ensure that young people's rights are upheld throughout the process. Indeed, quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions should provide an enabling environment which encourages youth participation and

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 21, 1948.

[https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr\\_translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr_translations/eng.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 12, 1989.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> UN General Assembly, International Covenant on Civil and Political Right, art. 25, 1976

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

provides the necessary tools for all young people, including the most vulnerable, to be fully aware of their rights. Furthermore, policy-makers should, on the one hand, invest in quality citizenship education, and on the other hand, provide young people with the necessary support and opportunities in order to empower them to participate. One of the key elements in this process is ensuring that there is transparency and access to information.

Quality youth participation and representation mechanisms should also integrate sustainability principles. This incorporation can be achieved by applying sustainable practices to the operational side of youth participation and representation (travel arrangements, catering, accommodation etc.). Within a framework of policy coherence, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations as well as the European Youth Goals can serve as a tool to help raise awareness in this process.

However, there is a need to look beyond a "sustainability approach" and more critically engage with the systems underlying the lack of participation of young people in decision-making processes. Limited forms of participation in representative democracies and dissatisfaction with how democracies function have contributed to populism and social unrest in recent years threatening the stability of our societies and democracy as we know it<sup>17</sup>. Quality youth participation and representation mechanisms should be seen as a way to address this issue and as part of a broader systemic change in terms of how young people are engaged in decision-making processes and building a culture of quality participation. They should be challenging systemic structures and the deeply held beliefs, assumptions, traditions and values that support these structures and prevent quality youth participation.

Conversely, democratic participation of young people is a crucial leverage point for sustainable development. Young people have demonstrated the ability to think outside the box and develop innovative solutions for society as a whole. It is no surprise that youth is at the forefront of movements demanding social change such as the climate strikes. Young people have the potential to lead to a long-term perspective, an equitable intergenerational distribution of resources, and the impetus for change needed for sustainable development<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> European Youth Forum, Policy Paper on Sustainable Development, 2018. [https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0047-18\\_COMEMI-18\\_PP\\_SustainableDevelopment\\_FINAL.docx.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0047-18_COMEMI-18_PP_SustainableDevelopment_FINAL.docx.pdf); Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser and Steven M. Van Hauwaert, The populist citizen: Empirical evidence from Europe and Latin America, 12(1), 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-political-science-review/article/populist-citizen-empirical-evidence-from-europe-and-latin-america/9FF0B5D6FD6815376E0178D54DF79CAD>

<sup>18</sup> European Youth Forum, Policy Paper on Sustainable Development, 2018. [https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0047-18\\_COMEMI-18\\_PP\\_SustainableDevelopment\\_FINAL.docx.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0047-18_COMEMI-18_PP_SustainableDevelopment_FINAL.docx.pdf)

However, young people often do not find a level playing field to influence policy-making. In order for youth participation to be meaningful, young people need to be on an equal basis with policy-makers, to engage with them and to set the agenda together.

**Governments and institutions should therefore:**

- Ensure adequate investment in quality citizenship education providing young people with necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to become active members of their society.
- Mainstream economic, environmental, social and political sustainability in their actions and especially the ones linked to youth participation and representation.
- Respect, protect, and fulfil young people's right to participate by establishing new and improving existing quality youth participation and representation mechanisms.
- Ensure that youth participation and representation mechanisms are sustainable and that their development, implementation and evaluation are founded on the rights-based approach.

## 2. Democracy and representativeness

Youth participation and representation mechanisms are a great opportunity to bring voices of young people and youth organisations into decision-making processes and build partnerships between them and policy-makers. However, such mechanisms have limitations and can only provide direct opportunities to participate for a limited number of young people. Thus, it is important that these young people are there to represent a collective opinion of different groups of all young people. This gives legitimacy to decisions and actions that are taken by institutions and affect all youth. However, very often institutions appoint or invite young people to participate through processes that are non-democratic, leading to doubts on how representative these young people are. Therefore, young people participating in institutional processes do not always provide a diverse picture of youth that exists.

Youth organisations reach wide and diverse groups of young people as they work the closest to young Europeans through their big networks. Many youth organisations seek to engage young people beyond their own structures and facilitate young people's political participation and engagement on local, national and international levels while at the same time trying to reach out to those with fewer opportunities, such as ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities<sup>19</sup>, as well as young refugees. Every day, youth organisations help to build our societies and make them stronger and they do this with limited human and financial resources available to them. They could do significantly more if being more supported by governments and institutions, for example by supporting the removal of institutional and legal barriers to the participation and inclusion of young people in particularly challenging situations such as refugees, asylum seekers and homeless youth.

Youth organisations are indispensable partners in making youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions more representative by facilitating democratic selection processes of young people to be involved in them. In some European countries, this is how the United Nations Youth Delegates programmes are run: involving National Youth Councils in the selection process of Youth Delegates and in some cases National Youth Councils are leading the selection process entirely. This guarantees legitimacy among young people that are either members of youth organisations or take part in their activities.

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<sup>19</sup> European Youth Forum, Study on the Social Value of Youth Organisations, 2016.  
[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/YEJ\\_StudyOnTheSocialValueOfYouthOrganisations\\_1P1.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/YEJ_StudyOnTheSocialValueOfYouthOrganisations_1P1.pdf)

It is important to note that the youth civil society sector is growing and that more and more young people are affiliated to youth organisations<sup>20</sup>. Those are important spaces to practice democracy. Youth organisations are also important structures to represent young people's interests and speak on their behalf, taking into consideration the diversity of young people in need of representation, since individual young people cannot participate directly everywhere. It is essential to nurture a diverse public space and enable a wide range of youth organisations, with differing opinions and priorities, to represent varied philosophies within the respect of democratic values and human rights. Strong youth organisations that can fulfil this role are thus important to ensure democratic legitimacy and relevance of decisions to young people's needs.

It is also important to be strategic about the outreach to young people to ensure broad representation, e.g. considering dissemination of information about opportunities to participate. Institutions and policy-makers, and other stakeholders should also proactively reflect on the situation of youth representation in different institutional processes and when needed take corrective measures to improve the situation. It can be done by identifying gaps in youth representation in terms of gender, age, regional, socio-economic background and other characteristics. Truly democratic processes require broad representation and it is up to people in power positions to ensure that it is in place.

Part of ensuring a truly democratic and representative society for young people is also to ensure higher youth involvement in electoral processes, which currently disproportionately exclude young people as citizens, voters and elected representatives.

Whilst the 2019 European Parliament elections saw a sharp increase in young voters' turnout, young people continue to vote less than other age groups<sup>21</sup>. This is a ground for stereotyping as a non-interested demographic group, which leads

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<sup>20</sup> European Commission, Study on the landscape of youth representation in the EU, final report, 2020,

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/57e87ca0-900d-11ea-812f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-128434002>

<sup>21</sup> The 2019 post-electoral survey: Have European Elections Entered a New Dimension? 2019,

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>

to less youth-friendly policies<sup>22</sup>. The reality is, however, that young people are prevented from full participation in electoral democracy by a multitude of legal and cultural barriers such as a restrictive voting age, less youth-friendly policies and a lack of quality citizenship education. Furthermore, some groups of young people are hit harder by these barriers than others. Youth participation in the electoral process is dependent on education level<sup>23</sup>, and the unemployed are even less likely to vote than other groups across the board<sup>24</sup>. This indicates that the young people who are marginalised the most are the ones who are the most frequently prevented from wielding political influence.

Therefore, we continue to advocate for lowering the voting age to 16 for local, regional, national and European elections<sup>25</sup>, which was also one of the political demands as a specific outcome of the EU Youth Conference in Berlin 2020 on Youth Goal #9. Lowering the voting age should be complemented by more and better quality citizenship education as it stimulates political interest and has the potential to increase voter turnout.

These solutions will, however, only be effective if we change that young people often do not feel represented by members of parliaments and political parties, which fail to address their concerns and opinions. Therefore it is important to recognize that electoral democracy cannot replace quality youth participation and representation mechanisms.

Finally, as in any form of representation, young people, when taking part in youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions, must be enabled to hear as many youth voices as possible, including the voices of young people that are not members of a youth organisation. Quality representation requires understanding young people's realities in their diversity, what are the different issues that matter to us, our opinions and situation. It is a crucial element to

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<sup>22</sup> Kohli, M. (2010). "Age groups and generations: lines of conflict and potentials for integration." In J. Tremmel (ed.), *A Young Generation Under Pressure: The Financial Situation and the 'Rush Hour' of the Cohorts 1970–1985 In A Generational Comparison*. London, New York: Springer Verlag; Macedo, S., Alex-Assensoh, Y., Berry, J. M., Brintnall, M., Campbell, D. E., Fraga, L. R., Fung, A. Galston, W. A., Karpowitz, C. F., Levi, M., Levinson, M., Lipsitz, K., Niemi, R. G., Putnam, R. D., Rahn, W. M., Reich, R., Rodgers, R. R., Swanstrom, T., and Cramer Walsh, K. (2005). *Democracy at risk: How political choices undermine citizen participation and what we can do about it*; Martin, A.J. (2012). *Young people and politics: comparing Anglo American democracies*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

<sup>23</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 375: European Youth: Participation in Democratic Life, 2013, [https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl\\_375\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_375_en.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Hve European Elections Entered a New Dimension? 2019 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> European Youth Forum, Resolution on lowering the electoral age to the age of 16, 2006, [https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0367-06\\_Resolution\\_vote\\_at\\_16.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0367-06_Resolution_vote_at_16.pdf)

increase legitimacy of the outcomes of youth representatives' participation in institutional processes and have youth perspectives clearly present.

Youth representatives should be able to engage with young people in spaces where youth are present, notably through youth organisations representing specific groups of young people, often the ones that are marginalised. To this end, youth organisations should be empowered politically and financially by institutions to provide this support to youth representatives.

Significant consideration should be taken to ensuring the specific barriers to participation of marginalised groups such as refugees, asylum seekers and homeless youth may face can be overcome.

Youth representatives should also be given access to information and research on youth, in order to facilitate quality contributions to youth participation and representation mechanisms. This complements the efforts of youth representatives to gather young people's perspectives using different means.

### **Governments and institutions should therefore:**

- Ensure that every young person has a chance to participate in youth organisations and their activities by providing adequate political and financial support to youth civil society.
- Provide political and financial support to young people who are taking part in youth participation and representation mechanisms to reach out and gather inputs from other young people on local, national, European or even global levels.
- Entrust youth organisations at all levels with the selection process of young people who will take part in youth participation and representation mechanisms.
- Put in place and implement specific strategies to ensure broader youth representation in institutional processes with the strong involvement of youth organisations.
- Ensure that marginalised youth is equally recognised, included and represented in youth participation and representation mechanisms as well as in institutional processes.
- Ensure young people's access to formal decision-making by lowering the age of voting to 16 in all elections, while ensuring all youth have the opportunity to gain sufficient skills and motivation to participate without any barriers.

### 3. Diversity and Inclusiveness

Research has demonstrated that young people are particularly affected by social and economic inequality, and that lacking opportunities at an early stage in life has detrimental effects for their life trajectory<sup>26</sup>. The COVID-19 health crisis gives a good illustration of that: young people constitute major victims of social and economic consequences of the pandemic and there is a risk that they will be scarred throughout their whole working lives – leading to the emergence of a “lockdown generation”<sup>27</sup>. Many young people face obstacles to accessing and exercising their right to participation and more needs to be done to ensure that equal opportunities are guaranteed for young people to take part in institutional decision-making processes.

In order to have diverse and inclusive youth participation and representation mechanisms one must consider that young people are not a single, homogeneous group defined exclusively by age.<sup>28</sup> Young people's identity depends on various factors, such as their social and economic background, ethnicity, religion, etc. These factors are interlinked and often result in young people suffering multiple forms of discrimination, and therefore being in a disadvantaged position not only because of their age, but also due to personal characteristics.

A black young woman, for instance, may experience intersectional discrimination on the grounds of her age, race and gender. It is therefore important to take into account these differences, and consider all political, economic, cultural, religious, societal variables that might affect young people's activism, to ensure youth participation and representation mechanisms, that are truly inclusive of young people. For example, the most vulnerable young people, like young people with disabilities, could benefit from additional funding dedicated to facilitate their involvement and ensuring that physical meetings are held in inclusive facilities. Such as the needs of people with disabilities, it is necessary to give access to these meetings to their assistant people who shouldn't get counted as delegates. Young parents could be encouraged to participate through providing a care person. Young people in employment, education or professional training could be provided with necessary adjustments to fit their obligations. Another

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<sup>26</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Engaging young people in open government: a communication guide, 2019.

<https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> International Labour Organisation, ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fourth edition, 2020.

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_745963.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_745963.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> European Youth Forum, Policy Paper on Equality and Non-Discrimination, 2016.

[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0099-16\\_Policy\\_Paper\\_Equality\\_Non-discrimination\\_FINAL2.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0099-16_Policy_Paper_Equality_Non-discrimination_FINAL2.pdf)

underrepresented group of young people are those facing barriers around their freedom of movement or access to travel such as refugees, asylum seekers and homeless youth. These groups are often excluded from basic rights, and have little access to support networks. Due to this, participation and representation mechanisms should be designed to ensure these groups are not excluded, but are instead actively engaged in the process. An example would be to take the platform to them instead of requiring them to travel to the platform. To overcome language barriers, translation services should be ensured. Such a holistic approach to youth participation will ensure that no one is left out of the conversation, not without proactively trying to include all young people first.

Information regarding youth participation and representation mechanisms should be written in a youth-friendly way (accessible, understandable, paying attention to the language and medium used). Regarding its diffusion, providing information through social media can be exclusive for those who do not have or have only limited access to online tools and networks, especially in rural areas with often poor internet provision. It is crucial not to forget these existing differences considering that access to information and communications is directly linked to greater opportunities<sup>29</sup>. Youth also has to be approached as a diverse group avoiding stereotypes that every young person is on social media, has a smartphone etc. For instance, many youth organisations adopt a so-called “blended” approach using both digital technology but also offline outreach and “on the ground” engagement with schools, youth centres etc<sup>30</sup>. Thereby, online participation processes can only complement but not replace offline activities.

The measures that are taken and policies adopted should also be evidence-based, to reflect true needs of the most vulnerable young people. Institutions and policy-makers should be cooperating with youth organisations representing or working with the most vulnerable groups of young people. Youth organisations are involving millions of young people in their activities and are trying to make them as accessible as possible to all. They could do even better and reach more young people, especially the most vulnerable youth, if structural support from institutions and policy-makers for youth organisations was increased. Without increased support from institutions, youth organisations, especially the smaller ones and volunteer-led, do not always have means to make all their activities accessible to all.

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<sup>29</sup> European Youth Forum, Youth Progress Index, 2017.  
<https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/page-pdfs/Youth%20Progress%20Index%20EU%20REPORT.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, Study on the landscape of youth representation in the EU, final report, 2020.  
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/57e87ca0-900d-11ea-812f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-128434002>

Finally, the culture of tolerance and acceptance, non-discrimination and anti-racism should be promoted in all youth participation and representation mechanisms. In this framework, combating prejudice is pivotal. Participating in a youth organisation increases the intercultural competences of young people and helps to appreciate diversity. A number of youth organisations specifically focus their activities on intercultural learning and can be a great resource to create a safe space for all young people in institutions.

### **Governments and institutions should therefore:**

- Involve youth organisations from the beginning into the development (review) of youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions.
- Together with youth organisations identify obstacles to young people's participation, developing cross-sectorial plans and actions to address them and providing sufficient social, cultural, educational and economic conditions to facilitate participation<sup>31</sup>, including the reviewal and removal of any legal or administrative barriers to participation.
- Ensure that information regarding youth participation and representation mechanisms is available in accessible and user-friendly formats, free of charge and specifically considers the needs of marginalised groups of young people.
- Financially support youth organisations that are trying to be more inclusive and make it possible to remove any kind of socio-economic barriers for young people's participation.
- Ensure that the most vulnerable young people and their representative organisations are directly involved in developing strategies and tools to facilitate their participation.
- Support the development of intercultural awareness and competences for young people that are taking part in institutional processes.
- Develop a code of conduct that explicitly states underlying values for inclusive participation in institutions that should be followed by all parties involved.
- Involve youth organisations when developing specific strategies to present and distribute information to young people about participation opportunities.

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<sup>31</sup> European Youth Forum, Implementing common objectives to enhance the participation of young people and improve information for young people, 2003.  
[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03\\_COS\\_1-2\\_EN.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03_COS_1-2_EN.pdf)

## 4. Transparency and accountability

Transparency is the corner stone of democracy. Knowing exactly what the governments are doing helps the public to keep them accountable and ensure that they serve public interest. When putting in place quality youth participation and representation mechanisms, transparency and accountability are also key principles to uphold in order to increase young people's trust in democratic institutions.

Transparency helps young people to better understand the purpose and functioning of youth participation and representation mechanisms and also to see how young people's interests are being represented. It is about providing access to quality and user-friendly information detailing all the stages related to the involvement of young people in institutional processes: selection (criteria), who is making the selection, young people's activities, topics that are being discussed, outcome of young people's contribution and the follow-up. By being more open and transparent, institutions can encourage more young people to get involved.

Transparency is closely linked to accountability towards those that give one a mandate to speak and act on their behalf. It is also important to understand who you do and do not represent as a young person taking part in institutional processes; and to understand that exercising the right to participate also comes with responsibilities towards those whom you represent.

### **Governments and institutions should therefore:**

- Make all the information and eligibility criteria related to the youth participation mechanisms including budgetary matters available and easily accessible to the public.
- Ensure quality youth participation and representation mechanisms that provide feedback between youth representatives and those that they are representing as a part of the follow-up process.
- Ensure quality youth participation and representation mechanisms that clearly define rights and responsibilities of youth representatives, youth organisations and institutions.
- Proactively reach out to youth organisations and advertise clearly in youth spaces about all participation opportunities, with clear and inclusive language that is accessible and relevant to target groups.
- Guarantee open, transparent and comprehensive feedback to all young people involved in the respective participation and representation mechanisms in case the expected outcomes could not be reached.

## 5. Effective and meaningful participation

Having young people present at the decision-making table is a positive step forward in advancing youth participation and representation in institutions. However, when we dedicate our time to participate in certain processes we want to see the outcome of our contribution, the impact that it made beyond the mere fact of participation. In the situation where so many young people do not see democratic institutions listening to youth voices, mechanisms for youth participation and representation have to challenge that notion and show the difference. Young people's views must be valued and we must have a real say in decisions and actions that are important to us: it has to be clear that youth participation is not an end in itself but a way for young people to bring their views into decision-making processes and influence them.

Young people have to be empowered to contribute to decision-making processes through skills and knowledge building<sup>32</sup>. In addition, young people and youth organisations should be provided with all the relevant information to the participation process, making it accessible and shared in advance.

Considering the impact, it should always be clear what participation in institutional processes will actually mean for a young person taking part, and what will be the mandate that a person will be given. Ideally, quality youth participation and representation mechanisms should aim at co-creation, cooperation and joint decision-making as the highest level of youth involvement. This should be supported by specific and realistic targets that are set to be able to monitor the impact.

Finally, youth organisations should be there to support the delivery of effective and meaningful youth participation.

### **Governments and institutions should therefore:**

- Include young people and youth organisations throughout the entire institutional process: preparatory phases, implementation and the follow up of the initiatives and policy processes also providing support to build necessary knowledge and skills for meaningful participation.

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<sup>32</sup> European Youth Forum, Guiding Principles on Common Objectives for Participation and Information, 2002.

<https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0809-02-e-FINAL.pdf>

- Ensure that young people can have a say in all topics that affect them and are able to do that independently from an institutional (governmental) position.
- Provide sufficient, structural, reliable and sustainable resources and necessary political support for youth organisations to engage in youth participation and representation mechanisms<sup>33</sup>.
- Clearly define the role and mandate of young people within the institutional process by putting in place tools to guarantee appropriate implementation.
- Set clear and understandable targets to measure the impact of youth participation in institutional processes and provide feedback to young people on the impact their participation has had in shaping policies.

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<sup>33</sup> European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion, Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process, 2020.  
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-structured-youth-engagement-climate-and-sustainability-eu-decision-making-process-own-initiative-opinion>

## **6. Sustainability and continuity**

It is important to make sure that youth participation and representation in institutions is a continuing process, not a one-off initiative.

The political and economic sustainability of youth participation and representation mechanisms should be ensured to avoid dependence on political cycles and linkages to any particular political power. This can be ensured by the institutionalisation of youth participation and representation mechanisms. For example: by including them into institutional (development) strategies, long-term work plans and other strategic documents, including budgetary provisions (political commitment to include young people has to be accompanied by actions providing necessary resources). An example in this regard is the EU Youth Dialogue that is embedded in the EU Youth Strategy.

Sufficient financial and human resources must be ensured for the development, implementation and follow-up phases of quality youth participation and representation mechanisms. Having a specific budget secured shows commitment from policy-makers, allows long-term planning and gives confidence to all involved stakeholders, especially young people and youth organisations.

In addition to that, youth organisations play an important role in making youth participation and representation mechanisms sustainable. They support the continuity and further improvement of youth participation and representation mechanisms. They strengthen the voice of young people towards institutions and policy-makers, and they represent young people's opinions and stand as an important stakeholder in holding institutions accountable for their promises towards young people.

To make youth participation in institutional processes long-lasting and sustainable, there is a strong need to build trust and partnership between all involved stakeholders. It means exchanging opinions and learning how to reflect together on the state of youth participation and representation in institutional processes in a constructive way, and it needs to be a continuous and participative process.

### **Governments and institutions should therefore:**

- Make sure that youth participation and representation mechanisms are a part of a legislation or long-term institutional strategies, work plans and programmes with set goals and subgoals formulated, checked and updated, if necessary.

- Allocate sufficient resources to develop, run and follow-up on youth participation and representation mechanisms.
- Provide political and financial support for the engagement of youth organisations in youth participation and representation mechanisms in all stages (development, implementation, follow-up and feedback), but at the same time respect their autonomy and independence<sup>34</sup>.
- Create space for an exchange involving institutions, youth organisations, young people and other relevant stakeholders.

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<sup>34</sup> European Youth Forum, Implementing common objectives to enhance the participation of young people and improve information for young people, 2003.  
[https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03\\_COS\\_1-2\\_EN.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0304-03_COS_1-2_EN.pdf)

## Conclusion

Quality youth participation and representation mechanisms should not only acknowledge that young people have a right to take part in institutional processes but they must be able to access this right through the lens of the rights-based approach. Moreover, sustainable development should be encompassed throughout all the phases of the participation process.

It is important to ensure that every young person has equal access to information and opportunities to participate. Therefore, it is an active responsibility of institutional stakeholders to guarantee that the needs of the most vulnerable young people are considered and addressed for inclusive youth participation and representation mechanisms.

Citizens participation is the backbone of democratic societies ensuring legitimacy of decision-making processes and their outcomes among the public. Young people have a fundamental right to participate in society and the decisions that shape it. Quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions should engage young people in a way that creates opportunities for partnership between policy-makers, young people and youth organisations. It should reach out to and hear other young people that are not directly involved in the participation process through the engagement of empowered youth representatives and youth organisations.

However, having young people at the decision-making table is not enough. We will only participate if we find our contribution taken into consideration and making an impact, ideally providing an opportunity to co-decide together with institutional stakeholders.

Creating quality youth participation and representation mechanisms should be seen as a part of a bigger process of building resilient and strong democratic societies. Independent from political cycles and having sufficient financial and human resources to sustain youth involvement. These mechanisms can be a key to create stronger and better youth participation culture across different institutional levels that is especially relevant in crisis situations like the COVID-19 health crisis; for young people to be able to meaningfully contribute to building back a better society.

Youth organisations must be an essential partner for institutions in the development, implementation and the follow up phases of youth participation and representation mechanisms. Youth organisations provide expertise on how to reach out and ensure an enabling environment for the most vulnerable young

people; they ensure bigger legitimacy to the decision making process representing a wide range of youth voices; they provide capacity building to young people taking part in institutional processes, contributing to hold institutions accountable to their promises. However, youth organisations need to be supported to be able to meaningfully engage and provide their contribution.

Therefore, quality youth participation and representation mechanisms in institutions should follow the following guiding principles: rights based approach and sustainable development, democracy and representation, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability, effective and meaningful participation and continuity.

# Appendix

## Quality Standard for UN Youth Delegate Programmes

As a part of its work with the UN Youth Delegate Programme, the European Youth Forum in the past organized a number of capacity building trainings (meetings) for UN Youth Delegates coming from Europe with an aim to ensure more meaningful and effective youth participation in the UN and support its Member organisations in their efforts to improve quality of UN Youth Delegate Programmes in Europe since in most European countries National Youth Councils have a prominent role in coordination and implementation of the UN Youth Delegate Programme in their countries.

It was identified by Member Organisations that there is no common standard that would help those National Youth Councils that want to advocate their national governments to improve the existing ones or establish a new UN Youth Delegate Programme and that it would be useful to have one developed. Therefore, together with UN Youth Delegates meetings, the European Youth Forum then organised the best practices meetings in 2018 and 2019 to provide space for the Coordinators coming from National Youth Councils to exchange and develop the quality standard for the UN Youth Delegate Programmes. This Quality Standard is a result of those meetings and developed by UN Youth Delegate Programme coordinators that were attending the best practices meetings in 2018 and 2019.

### Introduction

The Youth Delegate Programme is a key piece in the big puzzle of an overarching architecture of youth participation in the United Nations. Youth participation needs to be real and meaningful, and every decision maker and youth organisation who wants to involve in youth participation needs to be aware of the dangers of tokenism or concepts ending up merely as a photo opportunity. When youth participation initiatives are failing to actually include youth to have their say in the processes that the youth themselves are engaged with, the initiatives may in fact do worse than if there would be no initiative at all.

This document is an ideal Standard for the United Nations Youth Delegate Programme based on the best practices from different programmes in Europe that several member organisations of the European Youth Forum are engaged with in their countries. Other details that are not specifically mentioned in the Standard depend on national context, where relations with stakeholders such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UN Associations differ. It is supposed to work as a guideline for already existing and newly established UN Youth

Delegate programmes but also potentially inspire institutions that would like to set up youth delegate programmes as their own youth participation and representation mechanism.

## **Legitimacy and representativeness**

### *Selection or election process*

- National Youth Councils (NYCs) play a leading role in the (s)election process. In case there is no National Youth Council, UN Youth Delegates(YDs) should be (s)elected by an independent youth-led organisation. Any other relevant stakeholders can support the (s)election process, if appropriate. In case an organization other than NYC (such as the United Nations Association) is responsible for the UN YD Programme, we strongly encourage NYC to be a key partner of the Programme and to have a role in the (s)election process.
- Ideally, UN YDs should be elected through a democratic process such as a General Assembly or similar structures. UN YDs should be elected by the ones they will represent in the UN. If an election is impractical, the selection procedure should include representatives from the group which the Youth Delegates will represent, such as youth organizations.
- UN YDs should not be appointed on an arbitrary basis.
- There should be a transparent and established process for (s)electing the UN YDs. By an established process, we mean a process that is agreed upon by all relevant stakeholders, written down and that cannot be reinvented every year.
- The call should be open to all young people in the country. The UN YDs should be of an age that fits within the national definition of youth in their country, but keeping in mind that the UN General Assembly defines youth as people between 15 and 24 years.
- NYC has the responsibility to ensure the widest communication possible about the call for applications to become UN YDs, in collaboration with the relevant ministries and their partners.
- The call for applications to become UN YDs should be open for a sufficient amount of time to submit applications ( at least 2-3 weeks).
- The UN YDs should be (s)elected with a sufficient amount of time to prepare for the first UN meeting of their mandate. Ideally, 3 months is a reasonable amount of time to be included in the preparations.
- The (s)election process should not be solely based on application documents, but also include interviews or other ways to interact with the candidates. The (s)election process should be based on clear and unbiased criteria such as knowledge of the youth sector, the UN.

- The (s)election committee could consist of a representative from the NYC, former UN YDs and members of other relevant youth organisations, or the UN Association.

#### *Accountability and legitimacy*

- UN YDs must represent their peers and be held responsible to them. Youth representatives must be (s)elected by youth and not be handpicked and function as a youth alibi.
- The UN YDs should be accountable to the organisation where their mandate derives from, such as the National Youth Council.
- An agreement between UN YDs and the organisation running the UN YD programme should be created to outline everybody's rights and responsibilities.
- In order to properly represent youth, UN YDs have to consult and/or interact with young people in order to define their priorities and get input before the UN meetings.
- After the UN meeting, the UN YDs should report to young people on what happened during the UN meeting(s).

It is highly recommended having more than one UN YD, and to (s)elect different YDs to different UN meetings, to ensure that the YDs are skilled and resourceful in the different topics discussed.

Below are some good practices illustrating how UN YD programmes are run in Belgium and Norway.

#### *Belgium - French-speaking Community*

*The National Youth Council selects 3 Youth delegates in charge of Sustainable Development, Youth policies and Climate. The conferences attended are the COP, HLPF, CSocD and the GA.*

*The selection procedure (french-speaking side only) usually happens during the month of February each year. Candidates have to send their resumes and answer questions on an online google form. Questions are defined to easily understand the candidates' motivation and skills.*

*A jury is composed of one member of the staff of the Youth council, one coordinator of the international commission from the youth council in charge of all the extra-national projects, one expert-NGO member and the youth delegate senior. The application process is closed one month and a half after the opening. The first screening is executed by the jury based on a selection grid. Selected candidates are then invited for the second round of the selection process.*

*The second step consists of one written test to evaluate knowledge about the UN, knowledge about national and international political situation regarding climate change, english and dutch writing skills.*

*A 20 minutes oral interview is then organised to explore diverse perspective such as the role as youth representative, how to represent youth in a large spectrum, what are the motivation of the candidate, what is his/her knowledge about climate change and the UNFCCC, oral expression in English and oral expression in Dutch, what is the availability of the candidate.*

### Norway

*Norway sends UN YDs to several UN meetings. The two YDs for the General Assembly are selected by the Norwegian Children and Youth Council's (LNU) Annual Assembly. LNU's Board appoints an Election Committee consisting of one representative from the Board that leads the committee, three representatives from member organizations and one previous YD. LNU's Political Advisor on International Affairs functions as the committee's secretary. The committee interviews candidates, and gives their written recommendation to LNU's Annual Assembly, where the delegates are elected. The candidates that are not recommended by the election committee can challenge the recommended candidates at the Annual Assembly. Due to the different timing of UN meetings, it is not possible to elect all YDs at the Annual Assembly. The YDs on climate change and the environment, education, global health, and gender equality are selected by an election committee put down by the Board of the Norwegian Children and Youth Council.*

### **Recognition of the UN Youth Delegate's role**

The role of the UN YDs and the UN YD programme is to provide legitimate representation of youth and youth organisations of Member States in the UN. The UN YDs have been (s)elected with a mandate to include youth in decision making processes in the UN. In order for the UN YDs to fully exercise their role, there must be a full and unquestioned recognition of the role by involved stakeholders and partners, which is achieved in the following ways:

- The UN YDs must be recognized as important stakeholders in the National delegations. The UN YDs must have equal access to information, and the same recognition as the other delegates.
- The UN YDs expertise and knowledge should be recognized, and they should be able to work with all topics they find interesting, and not just social issues that are typically considered "youth-oriented".
- Youth must take part in the whole political process; from initial planning, negotiations and decision-making, to implementation and evaluation.
- The YDs must be given sufficient information in order to be able to participate fully in political processes.

- National ministries must send meeting invitations to the UN YDs and the NYC where it is relevant to include a youth perspective and whenever UN agencies, stakeholders and other Member States request a youth representative in the governmental delegation.
- The UN YDs should be given the right to speak and negotiate on behalf of their country.
- The UN YDs should write their own statements to be approved by the MFA when they speak on behalf of their country. Any changes should be made in collaboration with and with the consent of the UN YDs.
- (For EU Member States): The UN YDs should be informed of priorities that their countries created with other EU countries, and when possible, be included in the development process of these EU priorities.

### **Funding and support**

- Each UN YD programme should have a guaranteed long-term funding. This should at least cover the UN YDs travel expenses, accommodation and daily allowance for the UN meetings, and funding for initiatives that UN YDs do to reach out to other young people in their countries.
- In order for the UN YD programme to be successful, it needs strong coordination. Therefore, the position of the UN YDs coordinator should be financially supported.
- The budgeting and administrative processes linked to the UN YD programme should be transparent and easy to navigate.
- Each Member State should have, in the preparation time and during the official visit of the UN YDs at the United Nations, a staff member of the Permanent Mission responsible for the UN YD programme.

### **Events and political processes**

Member States are encouraged to include UN YDs in national delegations to UN meetings where official negotiations take place, and to recognize the UN YDs as experts on different thematic areas. It is recommended to prioritize the inclusion of YDs in the thematic areas on which Member States are focusing on, and that correspond to their priorities.

The three pillars of the UN open for several relevant meetings where UN YDs can be included:

- Human Rights
- Sustainable Development
- Peace and Security

Thematic areas with relevant UN meetings:

- Gender equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)  
Commission of the Status of Women (CSW)
- Disability  
Commission for Social Development (CSocD)
- Agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals)  
High-level Political Forum (HLPF), especially in the review years  
ECOSOC Youth Forum
- Global Health  
World Health Assembly (WHA)
- Climate Change and the Environment  
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)  
Convention of Biological Diversity
- Human Rights  
The UN General Assembly's Third Committee  
The Human Right Council (HRC)
- Education and culture  
UNESCO General Conference

### **Role of NYCs**

- Provide training:

NYC should provide training for UN YDs in order to introduce them to the aims and practical implementation of the UN YD Programme, and the role and responsibilities of the UN YDs, the relevant Ministries and the Permanent Mission. Part of the training is meeting relevant stakeholders, such as, but not limited to, ministries, youth organizations, NGOs and previous UN YDs.

NYC should respond to the needs of the UN YDs and provide further training if needed.

- Assigned coordinators/contact person:

NYC should assign a long term coordinator to work with the UN YD programme. Ideally, this person should be independent of frequent changes in the organization, for instance the Board of the NYC.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the UN YD programme, the work of the coordinator should not be conducted on a voluntary basis but be properly remunerated.

- Logistical support:

NYC should provide a place to work, and space for the UN YDs to do consultations) with youth.

NYC should ensure that there is sufficient funding for the running of the UN YD programme.

- Policy and advocacy support:

NYC should be responsible for the policy and advocacy support for the UN YDs.

- Key role in the UN YDs (s)election process:

NYC should play a leading role in the (s)election process. Further information can be found in the chapter on Legitimacy and Representativeness.

- Wide, representative and inclusive consultation on priorities:

The UN YDs mandate should reflect the views of the group they are representing, either through a General Assembly or consultations. The YDs are responsible for conducting the consultations with young people, nevertheless, the NYC should provide support.

NYC should ensure that the consultation process is inclusive and representative, also regarding youth with special needs and other marginalised groups of young people. .

- Handover:

There has to be an appropriate handover process from the former UN YDs to the newly (s)elected one, coordinated by the NYC and the coordinator, that includes contact details, reports and review of the previous delegates' activities.

- Long-run advocacy and compliance:

NYC should be responsible for the advocacy to continue and improve the programme, long-run planning of the shape of the UN Youth Delegate programme in the future.

- Partnership with involved stakeholders:

NYC should be responsible for building and sustaining partnerships with MFA and other involved stakeholders, such as the UNA if relevant, in relation to the UN YD programme.

It is advisable for the UN Youth Delegate Programme to have different partners in relation to youth policy - both NGOs and institutions.

NYC should cooperate on an international level, with the European Youth Forum and other UN YDs coordinators.

NYC should provide opportunities to attend capacity building for both UN YDs and UN YD programme coordinators.