

EUROPEAN UNESCO YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

We, the European Youth Delegates, gathered in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on October 12-13 2017, having deliberated on UNESCO's Youth engagement, recognize the steps that UNESCO and its Member States have taken in improving youth engagement. That said, moving forward we want to propose a number of principles and initiatives to develop the youth engagement from based on our own national experiences and UNESCO's global work.

Guiding principles

Considering the current UNESCO structure and the young generation's willingness to equally participate in coping with the myriad of today's challenges, the European UNESCO Youth representatives hereby draw the attention to the following guiding principles in order to mainstream active and meaningful participation across all UNESCO programmes and levels of governance.

We believe that all forms of youth engagement within UNESCO should be based on the principle of representation and impactful participation in the decision-making process which needs to be made in a timely and meaningful manner.

Youth empowerment is crucial for development and needs to be given greater importance in all relevant global contexts, especially through UNESCO's youth engagement mechanisms. In this regard, young people, as essential actors in the work towards social development, seek support in achieving its goals at national, regional, and global scales.

Having noticed a need to share best practices among UNESCO Youth representatives, we resolve to form a European UNESCO Youth Network. In addition, the network aims to communicate on an international level with UNESCO and other regional youth organisations dedicated to UNESCO's mission.

National commissions

National Commissions should be the link between UNESCO at global level and local activities. Fulfilling this vision requires the National Commission to work as a platform for youth to collect national priorities, and implement global policies nationally. To this end, we encourage the Members States and National Commissions to:

- Establish or work with existing youth platforms in order to anchor the youth engagement in a representative youth platform. Organisations not only bolster representation, but also work to ensure that knowledge is passed on and continuity ensured.
- Create a national UNESCO Youth Framework, detailing how the National Commission envisions supporting youth in promoting UNESCO, organising and executing activities, and include youth representation across the National Commission's functions (meetings, conferences, policy recommendations etc.).
- Give voice and space to youth in the National Commissions. Youth involvement only becomes meaningful once youth is empowered to claim their voice and represent their constituency in the National Commission. To that end, youth must be considered as equal stakeholders.
- Work with longer and overlapping mandates. Currently, most youth representatives are only involved for 1 year, causing knowledge gaps to exist. Instead, we propose that National Commissions institutionalise 2-3 year mandates for UNESCO youth delegates, preferably overlapping, in order to ensure continuity from the youth representatives.
- Include youth in the existing regional National Commission cooperation. Youth wish

to participate at the regional National Commission meetings. One model worth considering is that youth are given a space the first half day to meet and deliberate on current youth issues, before participating as equal stakeholders for the rest of the meeting.

- Encourage and seek to support global action and cooperation among UNESCO Youth Delegates.

UNESCO Youth Forum

We recognize UNESCO's initiative to engage youth through the biannual Youth Forum, but in its current format we see several issues, which hamper the legitimacy and usefulness of the forum. To us, the Youth Forum should be an opportunity for youth to influence UNESCO and share best practices. To that end we encourage UNESCO to:

- Ensure genuine national representation. Youth in every country needs to be afforded an opportunity to representation at the Youth Forum, and as such we recommend a larger forum than this year. In selecting the participants, UNESCO and the nominating Member States should ensure that the representatives speak on behalf of a constituency, has a mandate to represent that constituency, and that youth are included in a meaningful fashion. This wish should be balanced against the need to include international youth representatives, such as regional youth councils, student unions, and the World Organization of the Scout Movement.
- Change the format into a consultation. Youth do not only need to have a forum for them to deliberate in, they need a forum to be consulted on UNESCO related issues, engaging with UNESCO secretariat and Member States. Further, youth themselves should be involved in organising the Forum/Consultation. Modalities from the European Structured Dialogue could serve as inspiration for a future format.
- Organise the Youth Forum/Consultation earlier, in order to ensure an opportunity to influence the UNESCO General Conference. In effect this would imply the Forum/Consultation to be organised in the first quarter of the GC year, in order to allow for the youth discussions to be integrated into the draft documents C/4 and C/5, which will be dealt with at the GC the same year.

UNESCO General Conference

While the initiative to discuss youth recommendations in all commissions during the General Conference is a major step in ensuring youth representation, we continue to see a number in ways in which the youth voice could be strengthened. To that end we encourage UNESCO and the Member States to:

- Include youth representatives in the national delegations. Engaging the youth representative when drafting the national mandate note and affording the youth representative an opportunity to intervene on behalf of the country during commission meetings will not only strengthen the youth voice, but also improve the opportunity that national policies get a life beyond the meeting room. An alternative to including youth in the national delegations is to establish a UNESCO Youth Delegation Programme modelled after the UNGA Youth programme.
- Support the national youth representative in carrying out consultations and UNESCO activities before the General Conference and Youth Forum/Consultation, in order to gather inputs and improve the profile of UNESCO.
- Support youth in organising regional prep-meetings or other sorts of preparatory activities before the Youth Forum/Consultation and General Conference, in order for youth to have an opportunity to qualify their input beforehand, benefitting the overall outcome of the General Conference.

Best practices

We recognise the progress UNESCO and its Member States have made since 2014 in improving their engagement with youth and ensuring better representation. Within the European region several national and local initiatives have been pivotal in advancing the youth voice. We wish for these initiatives to serve as inspiration for further advancements:

- Slovenia is leading efforts to enhance youth engagement and integration across UNESCO, such as by attempting to establish a tradition of a youth side event during the UNESCO General Conference, which will provide an intimate space for youth representatives to interact with UNESCO and its Member States.
- In Italy, youth have established a UNESCO Youth Platform with over 300 active members that works actively to realise the vision of UNESCO through concrete projects.
- The Bulgarian UN Youth Representative has carried out several surveys to gain a better picture of the priorities of Bulgarian youth. The survey has further informed the youth mandate, building on consultations and representation of the Bulgarian UN Youth Association.
- The UNESCO Youth programme in the Netherlands is a result of close cooperation between the National Youth Council, who facilitates the programme, the Dutch National Commission, and the Permanent Representation of Netherlands to UNESCO, with funding from the Ministry of Education. Every year a new Dutch UN Youth Representative to UNESCO is elected by the member organizations the National Youth Council for a 2-year mandate, ensuring continuity in the programme.
- In Denmark, the UNESCO Youth Representative is part of the official delegation to the UNESCO General Conference, participating on equal foot with other members of the delegation in drafting the mandate note and intervening on behalf of Denmark.
- The newly established European UNESCO Youth Network serves as a platform for UNESCO Youth Delegates from Europe to learn from each other and work together on a regional scale; to reach decision makers with common objectives; share best practices; and collaborate on projects. Similar initiatives in other regions of the world are strongly encouraged, and we are always open to cooperating.

Signed

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