A young man and woman are standing outdoors in front of a blurred background of trees. The man on the left is wearing a black beanie, a black bomber jacket, and a chain necklace. The woman on the right is wearing a black leather jacket over a black sweater with a white graphic, and a cross necklace. A large pink rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing the title and subtitle text.

Engaging, Consulting, and Informing Youth

A Brief Guide for Youth
Delegates

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Introduction

This booklet is meant for youth delegates, youth representatives and anyone who wants to increase youth participation to amplify youth voices on global agendas. It is meant to support youth delegates in meaningfully interacting with other young people.

The booklet includes practical examples of ways to *engage*, *consult*, and *inform* young people on what is happening in international forums of decision-making. You can use it as best fits your needs – choosing to try the parts that work for you. The booklet was written in a European setting, but you can of course adapt whatever is relevant for other contexts as well.

The examples are based on interviews with eight European youth delegate programmes (UN & EU). The interviews and the publication of this booklet are part of the Representing Youth project that is co-funded by the EU and managed by the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector (FYCS), Austrian National Youth Council (BJV) and Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd (DUF).

The information and examples in this booklet have also been supplemented by informal discussions, anecdotes, and research into youth delegate programmes from the EU-funded Future Agents NOW project.

For further information, please contact Laura Lamberg (FYCS) or any of the three managing organisations.

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Inform, Engage, or Consult?

So you were selected as a youth delegate. Youth delegate roles can differ in many respects, but for any youth delegate your mandate should involve a goal to increase the representation and participation of young people. Hence it's a good idea to take a moment to clarify your goals for how you aim to involve other young people during your youth delegate mandate.

This booklet makes a distinction between three types of interactions with youth: informing, engaging, and consulting.

Informing refers to raising awareness among young people or providing them with knowledge on certain aspects of decision-making. It is a primarily top-down process of imparting information.

When talking of **engaging**, we mean encouraging democratic participation and fostering interest in decision-making among young people. These activities often focus on those with fewer opportunities for participation. Engaging involves inviting youth to come together on the same level, each with an equal right to participate.

Finally, **consulting** requires listening to young people. It is a mainly bottom-up approach, meant to collect inputs and opinions from other young people to support the youth delegate.

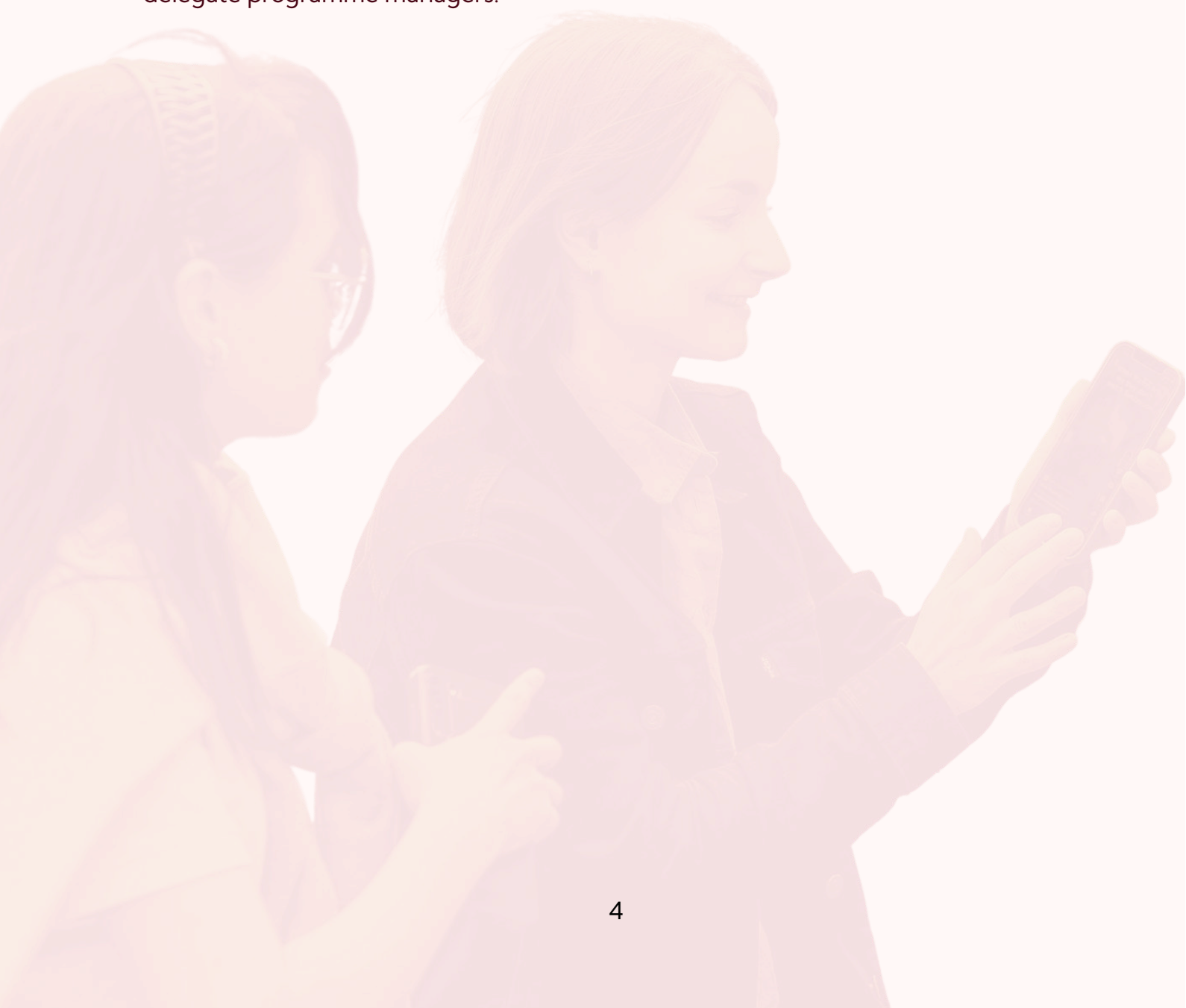
Often these three goals are interlinked, but it's helpful to identify which focuses you have before you execute activities with young people in your community. It's often possible to conduct activities that combine elements of more than one type of youth participation action, but sometimes it's good to focus on just one.

Youth delegates often feel a pressure to focus on consultations and to collect tangible inputs from young people to share in speeches or advocacy efforts. However, there's a value to all three types of youth interactions. Consultations give direct value to you as a youth delegate and strengthen the legitimacy of your role as a youth representative. On the other hand, informing and engaging

shift the focus from your needs towards the youth participants, who receive inspiration and information.

That said, some youth delegate programmes come with clear expectations – like a requirement for organising certain types of activities or prioritising consultations – while others give you more freedom. If things aren't spelled out, don't be afraid to ask for more guidance. Talk to whoever supports your youth delegate programme.

In the following chapters, this booklet provides some examples and tips for how you can engage, inform, and consult other young people. The examples here are by no means exhaustive, objectively best, or the only recommended options. They have been chosen to reflect some different ways to interact with young people, based on discussions and interviews with youth delegates and youth delegate programme managers.



Checklist

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL?

Informing

– providing quality information for young people

Engaging

– inspiring young people to reflect or take part

Consulting

– collecting opinions or other inputs from young people

Consider...

methods that reach large numbers of young people, such as social media or school visits.

Consider...

methods that help create a safe space for asking and learning, such as youth organisation visits and collaborating with disadvantaged youth groups

Consider...

methods that encourage participants to state their opinion such as input collection meetings, visits to youth organisations or social media polls.



Five Models for Activities

School Visits

School visits are a great way to engage groups of non-organised young people. Consider using school visits especially to engage young people outside of larger cities.

Why do school visits?

School visits are the most common form of engaging young people in youth delegate programmes. Some programmes explicitly require them from youth delegates. If yours doesn't, there are still plenty of good reasons to try them.

Pros and cons

- + Guaranteed participants
- + Schools reach almost all young people, not just the active ones
- + Easy to target different regions and rural areas to increase their representation
- + You can target education institutions attended by less represented groups of young people
- + Can be used to gain a general understanding of what issues are important to young people
- Less suited to consultations that require detailed inputs and specialised knowledge

- Sometimes students may not engage much, which can feel discouraging

Where to start?

Think about your target groups and what you need. Are you looking to increase representation by reaching young people in rural areas? Pre-teens, teenagers or young adults? Is your focus more on consulting, informing, or engaging into dialogue? Set realistic expectations: one school lesson is a short time and in many cases the students don't have much prior knowledge on the specialised subjects you might work with.

Budgeting

School visits are mostly very cost-effective, but consider potential costs for transportation. If distances are big, you can try to combine several visits to the same area.

Tips for contacting schools

Take some time to formulate your request. Be clear on what students will gain from the visit and what will be required from teachers.

Briefly explain who you are and what your role is as a youth delegate. You can also link to your social media, send a video introduction ([example from Denmark](#)) etc. Offer flexibility in scheduling and formats.

You can find potential schools e.g. by using the UNESCO Associated Schools Network or just by searching schools in a desired area. You can also work with youth organisations or other civil society organisations that do school visits (e.g. UN associations or information services, EU focused civil society organisations etc.).

Consider who to contact: teachers of civic education or social studies are a good option.

How to structure the visit

Be sure to coordinate with the school and consider their perspective. Here are some questions to consider:

What length is one lesson? Will there be a teacher present, or is it just you facilitating the class? Do you and the teacher have the same expectations? Have they set times for breaks, or can you plan breaks as they fit into your workshop? Does the school provide everything you need in terms of technical equipment or materials for the workshop?

For the content and form of your school visit, you can use a variety of different methods. Some like to use futures tools or games to spark participation. You can also consult [guidebooks on dialogue and workshop methods](#).

As one example, you can also use virtual task management tools, such as a Trello or Asana board with different "modules" for a workshop. That way you can easily customize and put together lesson structures, once you've figured out the basic elements of your school visits.

Remember to make it interactive

Your school visit will be much more interesting for both you and the students if you make it interactive. Consider using an energizer at the start. Here's a concrete example used by a youth delegate:

Ask the group to stand up. Ask them to position themselves in the room based on how much they know about the United Nations. If you know everything: go to one side, if nothing: to the other. Then ask them to move based on how much they would want to know about the United Nations. Observe and open the discussion.

Youth Organisation Visits

There are many types of youth organisations and young people active within them - from scouts to student associations and environmental movements. Consider visiting youth organisations to bring together young people active and interested in specific topics or activities.

Why visit youth organisations?

Youth organisations already gather young people who are passionate about various issues, making them valuable for consultations. Youth organisations also have specialised knowledge on certain youth issues and youth groups. Engaging with them can allow for deeper discussions and feedback.

Pros and cons

- + Access to motivated, active young people
- + Potential in-depth discussions due to prior knowledge of topics
- + Suitable for engaging, informing, and consulting
- Fail to reach those who are not already active in youth spaces

Where to start?

Think about what you're looking for and what you have to give to the youth participants. There are at least two reasons to work with youth organisations:

1. You want to reach a lot of young people, but don't have the platform yourself
2. You want to reach young people who are active and knowledgeable on a specific topic

If number 1: Look for youth organisations that gather large groups of young people – student unions, hobby organisations etc. You can also target organisations that give you access to more specific youth groups: ethnic or religious minorities, people with disabilities etc. Find out if they have existing events coming up that you could attend with a workshop or info stand, or ask for a social media collaboration

or takeover during your visit to an international meeting, as some examples.

If number 2: Look for youth organisations specialised in your topic – environmental groups, human rights organisations, etc. Contact them and ask for a meeting. You can try to attend an existing event or meeting or arrange something separately for the active young people in the youth organisation. You can also invite several youth organisations to attend a joint event at once.

Budgeting

There are ways to do these collaborations with less or more money. If your budget is tight, try to get involved in existing events, so you don't have to use money on venues etc. Even so, consider travel costs.

If you have a bigger budget to use and you're organising an event yourself, you can also consider sponsoring travel costs for the young participants.

Many youth organisations work with limited resources and covering their travel expenses can lower the barriers for participation.

Consider this

Think about whether you want to meet the organisations at a national or a local level. The input you get from participants in a bigger national event might differ from what you would get from a smaller local event.

Just as board members and other leadership figures might view things differently than "regular" members.



Tips for finding relevant youth organisations

Consult the membership base of umbrella organisations, such as your country's National Youth Council. Use social media to identify active organisations. Ask other youth delegates, youth organisations, or stakeholders for recommendations.

It's also a good idea to think about who you're not reaching with other activities. Are there certain underrepresented youth demographics you'd like to reach out to? Would it be possible to reach out to them through a specialised youth organisation?

Input Collection Meetings

Input collection meetings are mainly a form of consultation. An input collection meeting is meant to do just that - gather inputs - from young people on a defined issue, to be delivered to an international conference or decision-making process. At the same time, it's an opportunity to raise young people's awareness on international organisations and processes.

Why arrange input meetings?

As a youth delegate participating in meetings of international organisations such as the UN or the EU, you have the opportunity to give a voice to youth issues. When speaking on behalf of young people, it's important to base your stances on something more than your own experience: be it research, messages from youth organisations and/or direct inputs from other young people. Input meetings can be a good way to focus specifically on the agenda of an upcoming conference or meeting, such as the UN General Assembly, Climate Conference, or EU Youth Conference.

Tips

Use virtual participatory tools, such as Menti or Padlet, to get a quick overview on which topics are most relevant to people with regards to the international conference. Be clear on how you're going to use the inputs you're collecting.

After your international conference or meeting, it is important to follow up with participants to let them know what happened at the conference and why their participation and inputs were relevant.

Pros and cons

- + Focus on inputs with a direct policy-link
- + Young people get a sense of what is really going on in the decision-making process in question
- + Allows for in-depth discussions with relevant stakeholders and young people with prior knowledge on the topics
- + Can facilitate direct contact between decision-makers and young people, for instance by inviting government negotiators as speakers to the event
- Often more difficult to attract participants than more general activities
- Often difficult to attract participants from disadvantaged youth groups

Where to start?

Set a date for the input meeting that is relatively close to the international conference or makes sense in the ongoing decision making process. Look for partners who could support you (e.g. NGO representatives, policy-makers or other stakeholders who attend the conference or have expertise on the process). Consider your target audience when deciding on the event logistics – find a time and place that are convenient for young people and publish the event information at least a couple of weeks in advance. Consider also whether you want to hold the event online or if your target audience is more likely to attend an in-person or hybrid event.

Budgeting

If you don't have the budget to host an input meeting in person, it's a good format to host online. In some cases, it might even open the meeting up for a broader target group.

Then again, if you do have more budget to spend, you can also use money on catering and offer reimbursements for travel costs of participants. This might make attending the event more attractive to young people living further away.

Some things to consider

An input meeting might not attract a very diverse group of young people. However, even if it is a small group who is familiar with the topic, its input might be very relevant for you. Sometimes quality trumps quantity.

It's a good idea to keep your event focused on issues, rather than on the conference itself. E.g. ECOSOC Youth Forum might not be familiar to most young people, but topics like employment, wellbeing, or education probably feel a lot more interesting and relevant to many young people.



Collaborations with Associations

Working with Disadvantaged Youth

Diversity and inclusion in youth representation is crucial, as youth are not a uniform group of people and many groups of young people encounter even higher barriers to participate in decision-making processes. Collaborating with associations engaging with disadvantaged youth groups is a great way of reaching young people who are not usually reached through other activities.

Why focus on disadvantaged groups?

Many groups of young people encounter even higher barriers to participate in decision-making processes. Diversity and inclusion in youth representation is therefore crucial in order to ensure that all youth voices are heard, independent of their background.

Therefore, youth delegates are responsible for doing their share to ensure that the voices of young people belonging to these groups are amplified and listened to.

Pros and cons

- + A concrete way to reach selected underrepresented youth groups
- + Uses the youth delegate platform to engage and raise the voices of youth with less opportunities to participate
- Can require justification as to why one group of youth is focused on more than others
- Can require good contacts and some knowledge about the specific communities

Where to start?

Consider which groups of young people have been underrepresented in the youth delegate programme or in the topics you're working with. You can also start by reversing the question: who is it that you ARE reaching? Then try to identify youth groups with less representation.

You can also start from the issues at hand. Who are the young people that are most directly affected by decision-making related to your theme? Do they have civil society actors speaking on their behalf and platforms to speak? Are there youth actors actively looking for a platform to speak?

Establishing collaboration

Reach out to associations working with disadvantaged youth groups. Give them information on what you could offer in terms of a platform and ask for their interest in collaborating. Here are some examples of what you could offer:

- Co-organising a panel discussion focused on the experiences of the selected youth group under a relevant theme
- Organising a joint side event at an international meeting or conference
- Asking the association to provide inputs to a speech you will deliver at an international meeting
- Co-authoring an opinion piece

...and many more possibilities.

It's a good idea not to set too detailed expectations on the needs your collaboration partner may have. Be open to new types of activities and plans. However, it's important to be clear about the boundaries of your own mandate and resources and to have some ideas for what you could do together to increase the representation of young people in international decision-making.



Case example: UN youth delegate collaboration with deaf association in Bulgaria

The UN youth delegate programme in Bulgaria collaborated with Deaf.bg, an association advocating for the rights of deaf people in Bulgaria, to put focus on deaf youth in 2024.

The Bulgarian youth delegate programme has a tradition to implement a survey among young people at the beginning of each new youth delegate's mandate. The purpose of the survey is to consult young people to support the youth delegate in selecting themes and gathering inputs for UN meetings. This time, a sign language version was also made, together with a Bulgarian civil society organisation for deaf people. The sign language version catered to those young people preferring sign language over text, further improving accessibility and lowering the barrier for deaf young persons to participate. The survey was also shared in the association's channels.

Later on, the youth delegates also organised a side event at the UN general assembly, which they used to amplify messages of the deaf association – the event focused on the importance of bilingual education for deaf people. All speakers at the event were deaf. The collaboration also extended to more informal spaces of advocacy: youth delegates brought along the deaf association to some meetings with government officials at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, helping the association reach important audiences for their messages.

Social Media Content

Social media is a low-hanging fruit when it comes to reaching young people. Social media can do many things: it can be used to inform, consult, or engage, depending on how interactive you can make your content.

Why do social media?

Most young people spend time daily or at least weekly on social media. Using the same platforms allows you to reach them in their comfort zone, rather than expecting them to come to an event or answer a formal survey. Memes and short videos can help explain even complex issues in simple, relatable language. Story polls or question boxes can give you an idea of what other young people consider important or what they'd want to know more about.

Pros and cons

- + Instant communications to large masses, not tied to geographical location or set schedules
- + Low costs
- + At its best, social media allows you to break down global issues into bite-sized, visual, and relatable content

- + Opportunity to collaborate with others, such as other youth delegates, youth organisations or also official accounts of international organizations
- + You can provide more visibility to youth/youth organizations you have engaged with
- Hard to do in-depth discussions or engagement
- Algorithms can steer towards polarisation
- Online harassment is an unfortunate possibility

Where to start?

Choose a platform you feel comfortable with and that fits your target audience. You can use your own account, an account by your background organisation, or both.

You can create a social media plan, taking into account your timetables, potential theme days, and events.

Think of boundaries and safety management for what you share and how to respond to comments.

Be inclusive: think of barriers that you can avoid on your account – for example, provide subtitles for your videos and stories, use simple language, etc. Use colours with enough contrast to make it more accessible.

Think of the language you want your content to be in: your national language(s)? English to reach an international audience too? English to reach youth that lives in your own country but does not speak the national language?

Budgeting

Even if there is no budget, it is possible to reach a wide audience. If there is some money to be used, you can invest in a video editing app to help you with cutting videos and subtitles or a design/image editing app (like Canva). This will reduce your workload immensely.

Tips

Here are some tips for planning and executing your content:

- Consider using videos
- Interviews with recognisable politicians usually spark an interest
- Keep it authentic – you don't have to become a social media persona if that's not you
- Use Instagram stories to ask quick yes/no questions
- Use question stickers or polls
- Use personal stories or behind-the-scenes content to make it relatable
- Use social media trends to your advantage – hop on familiar formats to make your topic more easily approachable
- Use subtitles and image descriptions

Concepts for content

Translate complex terms (such as sustainable development goals or EU policy) into simple, relatable language. Make it as easily understandable as you possibly can and don't use any abbreviations. Don't be afraid of simplicity or repetition.

Post before, during, and after important conferences or activities. For example, you could do explanation series before important events, especially impactful if in collaboration with other youth delegates. For an example from Austrian UN youth delegates, [see this link](#).



Additional Resources

Here are some links to additional resources you can use in your youth delegate mandate aside from this guidebook.

Support for Youth Delegates

[Practical Guide for Youth Delegates to the United Nations: Tips from Fellow Youth Delegates](#). 2024. Publication by *Future Agents NOW*.

[The Dialogue Handbook: the art of conducting a dialogue and facilitating dialogue workshops](#). 2020. *Mette Lindgren Helde*, DUF.

[Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-Making Processes: Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 5](#). 2023. United Nations.

[Editing Guidelines for United Nations Resolutions](#). 2017. United Nations General Assembly, Second Committee.

[Glossary of Terms Used at the United Nations](#). 2005. United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

Also look up local and national youth studies and youth reports!

Support for Youth Delegate Programmes

[Global Youth Voices: A mapping report of youth delegate programmes to the UN](#). 2023. Publication by *Future Agents NOW*.

[Minimum Standards for European Youth Delegate Programmes to the United Nations](#). 2024. Publication by *Future Agents NOW*.

[Virtual training model for youth delegate programme coordinators](#). 2024. Material by *Future Agents NOW*.

[The United Nations Guide to the Youth Delegate Programme](#). 2020. *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*.