

**Future
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**Minimum Standards
for European Youth
Delegate Programmes
to the United Nations**

This booklet is produced by Future Agents NOW.

Future Agents NOW is a project, which aims to support the participation of young people in international decision-making processes. The project also strives to strengthen and enhance diversity in youth delegate programmes to the United Nations, as well as building the capacities of delegates.

The project is managed by Allianssi, DUF – Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd, and ENL – Eesti Noorteühenduste Liit, which are the national youth councils of Finland, Denmark, and Estonia respectively.

The content of this booklet takes as its starting point the outcomes of the [Global Youth Voices report](#) produced by Future Agents NOW, which maps the functioning of youth delegate programmes to the UN in 27 different countries, drawing on decades of experience in international youth representation and the management of youth delegate programmes.

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For further information or other matters, please contact any of the three managing organisations.

Foreword

Being a UN Youth Delegate means representing the youth and having the chance to bring the concerns of young people from our countries to the United Nations. It means being properly involved in the UN delegations' work by attending meetings, and briefings, delivering statements, and having the possibility to exchange ideas and best practices.

As EU Youth Delegates to the UN, the European Union has always supported our voice, acknowledging that the UN Youth Delegates work with the UN delegation and not for it. It completely trusted us, allowing us to be at the forefront of our own agenda and involvement in the United Nations, as well as giving us the opportunity to decide on the thematic areas to focus on, as long as these respect the European Union guidelines on foreign policy and priorities.

The role of youth is pivotal in bringing about changes in today's world. That's why we hope that more countries will include young people in their official delegations.

These minimum standards are the foundation of the effective representation and empowerment of young people.

Lukas Svana & Giulia Tariello
EU Youth Delegates to the UN



What are youth delegate programmes to the UN?

A youth delegate is a young person selected to represent their country's youth in intergovernmental meetings, often as part of the country's official delegation. Youth delegate programmes are the organisational structures, which set the framework within which youth delegates operate.

There are different types of youth delegate programmes. The most common type are youth delegate programmes to the United Nations (UN), which engage in decision-making processes within and around the UN.

Youth delegate programmes to the UN are a critical channel for youth participation in intergovernmental processes, by enabling UN Member States to include youth representatives in their official delegations. Through this initiative, youth voices find representation in various UN platforms, such as the UN General Assembly, the Commission for Social Development, or the High-Level Political Forum.

The UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) is tasked with overseeing youth delegate programmes to the UN globally. However, it is up to each UN Member State to independently create their own national programmes, choose their delegate(s), and define their roles. As a result, variations exist across programmes.

If you want to read more about youth delegate programmes to the UN and how they operate, you can read UN DESA's "[United Nations Guide to the Youth Delegate Programme](#)" and Future Agents NOW's "[Global Youth Voices](#)".



Introduction

The creation, development and expansion of youth delegate programmes to the United Nations (UN) has been a growing topic of interest in the European region. These programmes provide an opportunity to include youth voices in multilateral decision-making fora, which in turn contributes to the development of more effective and inclusive policies, the identification of new solutions to global challenges, or building greater trust in public institutions¹.

In our regional context, this growing interest presents an opportunity to define which criteria need to be in place to ensure the successful implementation of these programmes across Europe. This is of key importance, as failure to implement these programmes in a way that ensures quality could result in causing more harm than good, potentially impairing the purpose of meaningfully including youth representatives in global decision-making fora.

This booklet provides a list of five minimum standards for European youth delegate programmes to the UN. These criteria aim to create a regional framework defining what requirements are to be met to ensure quality programmes across Europe.

We hope these standards can be used as a tool to both develop new programmes, as well as evaluate existing ones. Additionally, we hope that they can be used as a source of inspiration for the development and evaluation of programmes in other regions.

While these standards are written in a way, which primarily refers to national programmes, the same principles should be applied to youth delegate programmes coordinated by regional intergovernmental entities, such as the European Union or the Nordic Council of Ministers.

¹ United Nations, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3: Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes*, April 2023



Minimum standards for European Youth Delegate Programmes to the UN

1 Youth delegates must be young.

It is of fundamental importance that youth delegates are young.

The age definition of youth is different from country to country and therefore there can be differences with regards to the age limits set across countries. However, a youth delegate must never be older than 35 years old.

WHY?

The role of youth delegates is to represent the young people of their countries. This role can be best achieved, when it is young people themselves that speak on behalf of their peers. Young people are often best at understanding the points of view of other young people, and can see themselves better reflected on representatives that look like them.

The definition of youth can vary from country to country, however it is still important to set a common standard to define when somebody crosses the threshold of what can be considered a young person. As the definition of youth across countries tends to be in the range between 15 and 35 years old, it is sensible to consider the appointment of youth delegates beyond the age of 35 years old to be inappropriate.

2 Youth delegates must be representative.

Youth delegates' engagement in multilateral fora should take as their starting point the general opinions and perspectives of youth in their countries. This means that youth delegates should not talk exclusively on behalf of themselves or a narrow group of young people, but carry a representative mandate from their countries' diverse youth population.

Youth delegates should never have to fear or be subject to retaliation for representing the voices and expressing the opinions of their peers.

WHY?

The goal of youth delegates is to represent their countries' youth opinions and perspectives in multilateral fora. Therefore, it is important that their engagement in these take as their starting point a representative mandate based on the opinions and perspectives of those they seek to represent. Such mandates can be achieved in different ways, from conducting comprehensive consultations to receiving policy mandates from representative youth organisations. More practices on how to ensure legitimate youth delegate representation can be found in the chapter “how do youth delegate programmes ensure representation” (page 20) from the [Global Youth Voices report](#).

It is important to keep in mind that being young or from a specific background is not in itself a representative mandate. A legitimate mandate comes exclusively from a comprehensive and structured dialogue with large and diverse groups of young people.

Youth delegates must be able to openly share the opinions of their peers. If they are not able to do so for fear of retaliation, they may be forced to hide or provide a misleading account of such perspectives. This would defeat the purpose of having youth representatives as part of national delegations.

3 Youth delegates must be part of a country's official delegation and their tasks should be relevant for their role as representatives.

Youth delegates have to be members of their country's official delegation to the multilateral fora they engage with, as well as being recognised by their country as the legitimate representatives of the youth of their country.

Youth delegates should be treated as equal members of the delegation, which means that they must have access to relevant information and opportunities, as well as being able to influence the work conducted by it. Youth delegates should be given a country badge, as well as access to the same spaces as the rest of the delegation.

As the role of youth delegates is to represent youth, their tasks and engagement should be dedicated to it. Youth delegates should also be able to define for themselves, together with their national delegations, which areas of work they would like to focus on.

WHY?

Being part of a national delegation and being recognised as the legitimate representatives of the youth of their country are key characteristics of youth delegate programmes. If youth delegates do not enjoy this right and recognition, then there is no substantial difference between youth delegate programmes and other forms of youth engagement in multilateral fora, for example through civil society organisations or engagement programmes.

In order to represent their country's youth, youth delegates should be able to effectively influence the work of their countries. This requires access to information, spaces and opportunities, as well as continuous dialogue and exchange of expectations. If youth delegates are not able to effectively influence the work conducted by their national delegation, the purpose of the programme is defeated, as the youth delegates' role becomes redundant.

It is important to remember that it is up to the youth delegates themselves, together with their national delegations, to define what tasks and areas are more meaningful for them to engage with, as well as how they wish to engage with them, as they are themselves experts on how they can achieve the most impact for youth in their countries. While in some cases these areas may have explicit focus on youth, some others may not. This is because youth is a cross-cutting topic, and therefore all areas of work are youth-related, as they all impact the present and future of young people.

Finally, while participation in multilateral fora requires high amounts of practical, administrative and logistical coordination, it is important to not allocate these types of tasks to youth delegates. Youth delegates should be able to dedicate all their time to work for the interest of youth in their countries, and administrative tasks better suited for staff-members, such as note-taking, can take time away from their primary purpose.

4 Youth delegate mandates must have an appropriate length.

The length of a mandate for a youth delegate must be well-defined, of appropriate duration, and not limited to participating in a specific international meeting.

In other words, youth delegates should not be appointed ad-hoc to participate in a particular UN meeting, but have terms that extend beyond the scope of individual events.

WHY?

While international participation is an important component of youth delegate programmes, youth delegates engagement cannot be exclusively limited to doing so.

Mandates that extend beyond individual meetings are necessary for youth delegates to have a meaningful contact with the youth in their countries. This allows them to collect views and opinions and facilitate global discussions amongst local young people. Overall, it results in the enhanced representativity and legitimacy of youth delegates.

Youth delegates should be also able to engage with their countries' work in international decision-making processes between major meetings (e.g. COPs, UNGA, HLPF), as important and relevant decisions are taken there. Furthermore, prolonged mandates allow youth delegates to build stronger relationships with relevant actors, focus on policy implementation, as well as familiarise themselves with the discussions around major meetings. Combined, this results in increasing youth delegates' effectiveness, when it comes to advocating on behalf of their peers.

It is up to each country to define how long the mandate of youth delegates should be, however it is reasonable to define this to not be less than one year. In the chapter "how long are the mandates of youth delegates?" (page 7) from the [Global Youth Voices report](#) more information can be found on how different countries define the length of their youth delegates' mandates.

We recommend youth delegate programmes have a mandate of a minimum of one year, which is already a common practice in many programmes.

5 Youth delegates must be appointed through a fair and transparent process, which meaningfully involves youth.

The youth delegate selection process needs to be transparent and include clear selection criteria.

Furthermore, young people should be meaningfully involved in the selection process, for example through the inclusion of youth-led organisations, such as national youth councils.

WHY?

A process that is clear and transparent can ensure the legitimacy of youth representatives, as well as avoid suspicions of corruption or nepotism.

It is also important that young people themselves play a crucial role in selecting their own representatives. It is therefore a good practice to involve in the selection process young people who can speak on behalf of diverse youth groups. These could be, for example, representatives of national youth councils, as well as other representative youth-led organisations.

Minimum standards for European national Youth Delegate Programmes to the UN

1. Youth delegates must be young.
2. Youth delegates must be representative.
3. Youth delegates must be part of a country's official delegation and their tasks should be relevant for their role as representatives.
4. Youth delegate mandates must have an appropriate length
5. Youth delegates must be appointed through a fair and transparent process, which meaningfully involves youth.

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