



Future  
Agents  
NOW

# GLOBAL YOUTH VOICES

A mapping report of youth  
delegate programmes to the UN

This report 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 strives to strengthen and enhance diversity in youth delegate programmes, as well as build the capacities of delegates.

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## Introduction

A youth delegate is normally 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.

This report presents an overview on how youth delegate programmes to the UN function across countries. This will be done by shedding light on the similarities and differences found across programmes, as well as focusing on specific characteristics of how the programmes are organised.

There are different types of youth delegates. The most common type are youth delegates to the United Nations (UN), which engage in decision-making processes within and around the UN. For purposes of comparability, this report focuses exclusively on youth delegates to the UN.

The chapters of this report are structured around questions relevant for understanding the functioning of youth delegate programmes. For example: *Who funds youth delegate programmes? Which international meetings do youth delegates participate in? or how are youth delegates selected?*

The chapters can be used as databases of information on how youth delegate programmes are structured internationally, as well as inspiration for designing or further developing youth delegate programmes.

The outcomes of this report will be used as a knowledge base to develop a set of recommendations for youth delegate programmes, which will be published by the end of 2023.

## Research methods

This report is built upon individual semi-structured interviews conducted primarily amongst programme managers of youth delegate programmes operating in 27 different countries. In a few cases, where interviewing programme managers was not an option, youth delegates were interviewed instead.

The interviews were conducted in the summer and autumn of 2022 and the report was fact-checked by most interviewees at the start of 2023. Therefore, the content of this report reflects how the programmes were operating at the time interviews and fact-checking took place. It is important to remark that youth delegate programmes are in continuous development and therefore some of the information of this report may be outdated, at the time this is read.

The interview questions are found in the annexe to this report.

Youth delegate programme representatives of the following countries were interviewed: Albania, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the French Community of Belgium, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and USA.

After the report was written, the information collected was fact-checked by 25 of the 27 interviewed programmes. The two programmes that did not participate in the fact-checking process were invited to do so but were not available to be part of it.

The writers and organisations behind this report would like to thank all the interviewed programme managers and delegates for dedicating time to contribute to this report.

All countries with youth delegate programmes to the UN, that the authors were aware of, were contacted for an interview. However, for diverse reasons beyond the writers' control, it was not possible to set up interviews with all of them. Despite this, the interviewed sample still represents, to the best of our knowledge, the majority of existing youth delegate programmes. European countries are particularly well represented in this report, which largely reflects the high level of activity of youth delegate programmes in Europe, as well as capacities to establish such programmes. A list of the youth delegate programmes contacted is presented in annexe two of this report.

Youth delegates to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the European Union (EU), and the Nordic Council of Ministers are omitted from the findings of this paper.

Youth delegates to UNESCO often engage with UNESCO's national commissions. Youth delegates to the EU do so as part of the EU Youth Dialogue, as well as

occasionally other EU activities. Youth delegates to the Nordic Council of Ministers engage with the Nordic Youth and Childrens' Committee (NORDBUK). The reasoning behind omitting these categories of youth delegates is that there are major differences in how these delegates are engaged and defined in different countries. While some countries engage with their youth delegates to UNESCO, the EU, or the Nordic Council of Ministers in the same way they do with youth delegates to the UN, other countries engage with them in radically different ways, sometimes not even defining them as youth delegates. Another difference is that the funding for youth delegate programmes to the UN comes in many cases from different sources than the funding for youth engagement in UNESCO, EU, and the Nordic Council of Ministers. Selection procedures and training may also differ, and, in some cases, youth delegates to UNESCO, EU, and Nordic Council of Ministers are not supported by the same entities managing youth delegates to the UN programmes. Furthermore, not all countries with young people engaging in the above mentioned fora have youth delegates to the UN.

These comparability issues were therefore considered a challenge for the cohesiveness and scope of this specific report. However, the writers of this report recommend conducting further and specific research on how young people are organised in UNESCO's national commissions, the EU Youth Dialogue, and the Nordic Council of Ministers, as valuable lessons and inspiration can be drawn from youth engagement in these organisations as well.

Omitting the youth delegates to UNESCO, the EU, and the Nordic Council of Ministers means that countries where youth delegates to these fora are considered as an inherent part of their youth delegate programmes may appear to have less youth delegates than what they themselves report that they have. A good example is the Finnish youth delegate programme, where they have twelve youth delegates, but in this report they are only presented as having seven, since five of them are delegates to UNESCO, the EU, and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Another detail worth mentioning is that in Australia and the USA youth delegates are referred to as 'Representative to the UN' and 'Youth Observer to the UN' respectively. As their role matches the definition of youth delegate used in this report, these representatives will also be referred to as youth delegates across this paper for simplicity and cohesiveness reasons.

## How many delegates do programmes have?

There are substantial differences across countries, when it comes to how many delegates programmes have per year.

Most countries have one or two youth delegates. Australia, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, and the USA have one; whilst Austria, Albania, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Romania, and Slovenia have two. In Ukraine, while the general norm is to have two delegates, the number may be expanded to three, in cases where a highly qualified third person applies for the position.

Some countries break the norm by having a larger number of delegates per year. Countries with larger numbers of delegates tend to assign different areas of focus or themes to these, while countries with three or less delegates assign a more general role to youth delegates.

Iceland has five delegates, one on human rights, one on children and youth, one on climate, one on sustainable development, and one on gender equality. The Netherlands and Sweden have six delegates each. The Netherlands has two on human rights and security, two on biodiversity and food, and two on sustainable development, while Sweden has two on sustainable development, two on climate, and two on human rights. Finland has seven youth delegates, one on decent work, two on climate, two on biodiversity, and two on the UN in general. At the time of writing, Norway has seven delegates, two for the UN General Assembly (UNGA), one on biodiversity, one on climate, one on sustainable development, one on gender equality, and one on global health. However, the number of youth delegates in Norway changes periodically and oscillates between five and eight delegates per year. Denmark, the French Community of Belgium, and Switzerland have the three largest programmes, when it comes to the number of youth delegates per year, with eight delegates each. Denmark has two on vocational education and training (VET) and job creation, two on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, two on democracy and partnerships, and two on climate and biodiversity. The French Community of Belgium has two on climate, two on biodiversity, two on youth, and two on sustainable development. As of 2023, Switzerland has six delegates without any specific themes assigned to them, and two with an exclusive focus on climate.

## How long are the mandates of youth delegates?

Most youth delegates are chosen for a mandate of one or two years. In Australia, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and USA they operate with one-year mandates; while in Austria, Denmark, Finland, the French Community of Belgium, Israel, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Sweden, and Switzerland they have two-year mandates.



Norway has one-year mandates for most of its delegates, with the exception of the ones on climate, who serve for two years. Albania and Bulgaria operate with 18-months mandates.

Several countries with more than one youth delegate and mandates of over a year have implemented a senior-junior system for the replacement of delegates. Instead of replacing all delegates at the same time, the mandates of youth delegates are partially overlapped so that these countries replace their delegates at different points in time, in order to ensure that there is always an experienced delegate in the team. In the case of those countries with two-year mandates that follow this system, only half of the delegates are replaced every year. In this way, older (senior) and newer (junior) delegates overlap for one year. This system is used in: Austria, Denmark, Finland, the French Community of Belgium, Israel, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Sweden, and Switzerland.

### **FINLAND: WORKING TOGETHER AS JUNIOR AND SENIOR DELEGATES**

In Finland, a junior-senior system is in place for youth delegates. Mandates last for two years.

The delegates work closely together in national activities. The senior delegate helps to introduce the junior delegate to government contacts and other stakeholders. The pair also travel together to major international meetings whenever financially possible.

#### **The youth delegates see several benefits to attending international meetings in pairs:**

- The senior can help the junior to navigate the meeting and make introductions to the contacts they have formed at previous meetings
- The youth delegates are better capacitated to follow the different aspects of complex meetings.
- The youth delegates can dedicate more resources for communications, organising side events, official note-taking for the country's delegation, or coordination with other young people without burning out during intensive meetings such as Conference of Parties (COP) or UNGA.

The two countries with 18-month mandates, Albania and Bulgaria, follow this system as well, however the overlap between senior and junior delegates is only for six months, instead of a year.

Senior and junior delegates do not engage equally with the programme in all countries. In the cases of Albania, North Macedonia, and Switzerland only junior delegates participate in international activities; while in Austria, Bulgaria, and the French Community of Belgium it is the senior ones that engage internationally. In most cases the logic behind this differentiation is knowledge sharing. The rationale behind exclusively engaging the junior delegates internationally is so that the senior can take on the role of experienced adviser, whilst, in the opposite case, the rationale is that the junior delegate will learn from the senior one before they start attending international meetings.

In Iceland, youth delegates have a mandate of one year, however it is



mandatory that their youth delegates join the international committee of the Icelandic National Youth Council (the organisation that coordinates the programme) for one more year once their mandate is over. Slovenia also has one-year mandates, but the new and old delegates overlap for a month, in order to ensure a good transfer of knowledge.

## **Are youth delegates remunerated?**

Despite most youth delegates receiving a form of financial compensation under international travel in the form of daily allowances or refunds to cover their expenses, the largest majority of youth delegates are volunteers.

However, there are few exceptions. In the Netherlands youth delegates receive a monthly remuneration of 600€ and in Finland 200€, both from the organisation managing the youth delegate programme. In Albania, youth delegates receive a stipend of ca. 135€, which is funded by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). In Israel, if the youth delegates are students, as is usually the case, they receive financial compensation in the form of a grant under a scholarship programme. Estonia does not remunerate its youth delegates, however, whenever possible, they seek to offer them paid positions in the national youth council (the organisation that manages the programme), where they work with tasks related to their previous work as delegates.

Several programme managers from countries where youth delegates are volunteers indicated that they would like to give their delegates financial compensation for their work, as they considered that youth delegates are required to devote a great amount of time in carrying out their role. The offer of financial compensation is also thought to remove some of the barriers to applying to be a youth delegate, especially for those from less secure economic backgrounds. However, in all cases, financial limitations were cited as the reason against providing such remuneration.

## **Which international meetings do youth delegates participate in?**

Youth delegates participate in a wide variety of international meetings. While some meetings are attended on a regular basis in many countries, there is also variability from year to year within countries, depending on available funding and shifting priorities.

Most youth delegate programmes prioritise participation in meetings under the UN General Assembly (UNGA), and/or the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (Australia, Austria, Albania, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the French Community of Belgium, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg,

the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine). The case of Israel is particularly interesting, as Israeli youth delegates stay two months in New York during the UNGA and become part of the overall team of Israel's mission to the UN, where they work with matters related to youth.

Many youth delegates also participate in the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) (Denmark, Finland, the French Community of Belgium, Georgia, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Ireland, Sweden), where that they are sometimes responsible for presenting part of their countries' national Voluntary National Reviews (VNR).

Several youth delegate programmes engage with environmental bodies. Some engage with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Denmark, Finland, the French Community of Belgium, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovakia, Slovenia), and some also participate in meetings within the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Denmark, Finland, the French Community of Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway). Furthermore, Finnish youth delegates participate in the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA).

Other UN bodies that some youth delegate programmes engage with are the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) (Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland), the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) (Albania, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovenia), the UN Commission for Social Development (CSoD) (Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia), the World Health Assembly (WHA) (Denmark), the Gender Equality Forum (Iceland), the International Labour Conference (Denmark), and the Food Systems Summit and other meetings relating to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (Italy, the Netherlands), amongst others. Furthermore, several youth delegate programmes engage in meetings organised by the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN).

It is important to remark that even though youth delegate programmes often have a relatively stable list of fora with which they are systematically engaged, most programmes have a certain level of flexibility, which allows them to participate in

### ISRAEL: YOUTH DELEGATES' WORK AT THE ISRAEL'S MISSION TO THE UN

Israel has two youth delegates, who have a mandate for a two-year period, where they follow a junior-senior system. Every September, the Israeli youth delegates travel to New York to participate in the UNGA. One of the delegates usually stays there for 3-4 weeks, while the other remains for two months and joins the team of the Israeli mission to the UN.

As part of this team, the youth delegate that stays for the longer period supports the mission primarily with work related to the UNGA's Third Committee. This includes, for example, advising on how to include youth perspectives into Third Committee resolutions and discussions.

The youth delegate that joins the mission's team receives a remuneration at the same grade as Israeli assisting staff.

meetings outside these lists, whenever relevant. This is especially the case for one-time conferences or other temporary fora.

## **Who coordinates youth delegate programmes?**

Youth delegate programmes are coordinated by different types of organisations and institutions. While differences were seen across the interviews, there are clear trends that can be identified in the daily organisation and management of the programmes.

The most common type of organisation responsible for the management of youth delegate programmes are national youth councils (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden). These are non-governmental bodies that organise youth organisations and often act as the legitimate and representative voice of youth in the countries they are based in.

In other countries, different types of non-governmental organisations are responsible for programme management (Albania, Australia, Bulgaria, the French Community of Belgium, Italy, Latvia, Ukraine, USA). Concretely, in the case of Albania, Bulgaria, Italy, and USA, it is their countries' UN associations, which are tasked with the coordination of their youth delegate programme.

In some countries, it is governmental institutions, such as ministries and public agencies, which coordinate the programmes (Hungary, Israel, Georgia, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia). Ministries for youth, education, and the ministries of foreign affairs are the most recurrent cases, when it comes to youth delegate programmes being managed by governmental institutions.

Despite most youth delegate programmes being managed by non-governmental actors, most of these still have a close level of cooperation with governmental bodies, which, in some cases, set the framework for the functioning of the programmes, as well as assisting with different tasks.

In the case of the Austrian, Estonian, Georgian, Norwegian, and Slovenian programmes, youth delegates have to sign contracts or memorandums of understanding with the coordinating organisations. These signed documents include important information on the responsibilities youth delegates have to follow, such as meetings to be attended, mandates to be followed or mandate termination in case of inactivity.

## **Who funds youth delegate programmes?**

Youth delegate programmes receive finances from different sources, however here, too, similarities and differences are encountered across many programmes.

Most youth delegate programmes are financed through public funding (Denmark, the French Community of Belgium, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden). Ministries of foreign affairs, youth, and education are common funding sources. Public funding is not provided by the same ministry or agency in all cases, but several youth delegate programmes are financed by a combination of

#### **ALBANIA: FUNDING SOURCES BEYOND THE ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT**

The Albanian youth delegate programme has had different sources of funding throughout the years. Beyond the USA embassy, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, and UNICEF, the programme has also been funded by the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as ad-hoc national grants. In 2022, 90% of the programme's budget came from sources outside the Albanian government.

Funding granted to the programme tends to be earmarked for specific purposes. For example, funding from the UN Resident Coordinator's Office has been granted for funding youth delegates' participation to UNGA, while WHO and IOM funding was aimed at supporting specific initiatives designed by the youth delegates.

According to the Albanian youth delegate programme, external funding ensures higher levels of independence from governmental political interests and priorities and allows for more autonomy in the management and development of the programme, as well as providing opportunities for meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships.

However, it was also mentioned that such a system requires substantial time resources to be allocated by staff members each year to fundraising-related activities, which could be instead dedicated to support the engagement of youth delegates. Furthermore, this type of funding is often of a short-term nature, which can be a challenge for the economical sustainability of the programme, as well for the capacities of programme managers of long-term planning.

different public funds. This is the case of Israel, Luxembourg, Norway, and the Netherlands, where the youth delegate programme budget is the result of a combination of different public sources.

A difference seen amongst some programmes, when it comes to public funding, is whether direct funding for the youth delegate programme can be used to cover management expenses. In some countries, like Denmark or Slovenia, public grants for youth delegate programmes cover management expenses, including salary costs of one or more programme coordinators. In other countries, such as Iceland, Norway, or Sweden, public funding cannot be used to cover management expenses, and these must be covered by the coordinating organisation.

Other examples include countries where the funding for youth delegate programmes comes from different sources. In Austria, the youth delegate programme is financed by the Austrian national youth council. In Italy and the USA, it is their national UN associations that are the ones responsible for funding the programme. In the case of Ukraine, the programme is financed by a private foundation, while in Albania, this is funded by a combination of quite diverse sources, such as the

embassy of the USA, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, and UNICEF amongst others. It was flagged by some of these countries that, despite there being some benefits to receiving funding from sources independent from the government, this was seen by some as a problem, which had a negative impact on the sustainability and capacities of the programmes and organisations involved in them.

In a few countries, youth delegate programmes are co-financed between the government and other sources (Australia, Estonia, Finland, Switzerland). In Switzerland and Estonia funding is shared between the government and national youth council. In the former, the funding responsibility is divided in equal parts, while in the latter most of the funding comes from the ministry of foreign affairs. In the case of Australia and Finland, in most cases, international travel is covered by governmental funding, while the rest of the programme is to be financed by the managing organisations. Concretely, in the case of Australia, supplementary funding is collected through partnerships with for-profit entities, which are interested in the data collected by youth delegates, as well as charging fees to these organisations, whenever they invite a youth delegate to speak in their events.

## **What is the purpose of youth delegate programmes?**

Most youth delegate programmes align to a great extent with each other on their stated purposes. In most cases, these purposes are primarily: to represent young people in the UN and to empower local youth.

Most interviewed programmes considered that it is a key purpose of their programme to provide the UN with a representative voice of young people of their countries, as well as to have a tool for young people to influence their countries' positions in global decision-making. Some added that such representation does not only support young people from their countries, but also has a positive impact in increasing youth participation at national and international levels.

In the same way, most youth delegate programmes saw the empowerment of local youth in their countries as a key purpose of their work. It was mentioned that the programmes contribute to bringing the UN and the Sustainable Development Goals closer to young people, as well as engaging local youth in global agendas, democratic processes and the development of their communities. This is carried out, through education, the promotion of role models, and the provision of concrete tools to enable young people to act as agents of change, both as youth delegates, as well as in other ways. Many programmes mentioned the importance of focusing on vulnerable young people, as well as those youth, who are less likely to be engaged with global agendas.

Beyond these, youth delegate programmes may have other goals, which are of special relevance for the context in which they operate. For example, Israel's programme aims to promote a positive image of the UN and to counteract the negative image of

it that they consider many have in their own country. Another example is the Austrian programme, coordinated by a national youth council, which considers a goal of their work to strengthen their member organisations' global perspectives, as well as to build closer connections with international organisations based in Vienna. Similarly, the Slovenian youth delegate programme sees this too as a tool to strengthen international and national cooperation with relevant actors, such as the UN association of their country, their ministry of education, their ministry of foreign affairs, and other relevant ministries and actors.

## How are youth delegates selected?

The selection of youth delegates relies on an open call for applications from young people in all interviewed countries. Selection processes and eligibility criteria differ somewhat, but overall the selections aim at youth representatives with the motivation and capacity to engage both with the UN system and with other young people in their country.

Most typically, the selection process of new youth delegates includes written applications and in-person evaluations. Sometimes video applications are also used (Albania, Austria, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Ukraine). In some countries, such as Australia and Georgia, youth delegate programmes attract hundreds of applications, whilst most receive applications in the tens to below a hundred. In Georgia, the popularity of the programme is attributed to high social media presence and prestige of it.

Evaluations usually include interviews in a national language and the testing of proficiency in English. Other common evaluation measures include tasks related to public speaking (Australia, Bulgaria, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden). The scale of evaluations varies greatly, in some countries in-person evaluations take up an entire day or more (Australia, Bulgaria, Germany, Netherlands, Slovenia), whereas in

### GEORGIA: SELECTION OF YOUTH DELEGATES DURING A PUBLIC CONTEST

Until 2020, the Georgian youth delegate programme had a three-phase recruitment system. In the first phase, candidates were asked to apply by sending an essay, an action plan, and their vision for future work. In the second phase, candidates were interviewed by a jury that was hired to act as selection committee. Finally, in the third and final phase, the best candidates participated in a public contest, where they were invited on stage to deliver a speech. Young people from different backgrounds and fields of studies from all over the country were invited as a public audience and were asked to vote for the best candidate. At the end of the contest, the jury selected the youth delegate, taking into account the attendees' views.

This recruitment system was stopped in 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic made it harder to gather enough people at the public contest. However, the programme is considering reinstating this practice in 2023.



Denmark selection relies solely on one round of written applications.

Recruitment teams usually consist of the coordinator of the youth delegate programme together with either board members, previous youth delegates, youth organisation representatives, NGOs, government officials, or a combination of the above. However, some countries facilitate the wider engagement of young people in the selection process. In the Netherlands, final selection of new youth delegates is based on votes from young people after a campaign week by the candidates and, until 2020, in Georgia the decision was influenced by audience ratings of speeches given by the top candidates at a public contest organised specifically for youth delegate recruitment.

## Who can apply to be a youth delegate?

The maximum age limit for youth delegates ranges from 24, in Austria and the Netherlands, to 30 at the time of selection as a youth delegate, in Denmark and the French Community of Belgium. Usually delegates have a minimum age of 18 to ease international travel, with the exception of Australia, where the minimum age is set at 17 years old.

Some programmes enforce gender quotas (Austria, Romania) and many more aim for gender

## THE NETHERLANDS: SELECTION OF YOUTH DELEGATES BY PUBLIC VOTE

In the Netherlands, candidates to be youth delegates need to go through several rounds of recruitment, in order to be considered for the position: they need to write a motivation letter, go through an interview process, as well as give a small guest lecture. A selection committee, composed of representatives of the board of the national youth council, representatives of its member organisations, and senior youth delegates, selects the two best candidates of each theme (the Netherlands has three UN themes). These candidates go forward to a final selection round, where a public vote decides which candidates are to be granted the youth delegate positions. Only one per theme can be selected.

During the public vote phase, finalists have to conduct campaigns, where they need to reach as many young people as possible and convince them to grant them their votes. Candidates reach young people through social media, as well as in-person actions, such as school visits and handing out flyers. All young people under 30 years old can vote for their preferred candidate.

This phase lasts a week and culminates in a big finale, which takes place during an annual youth event. In this event, finalists give a short speech before votes are counted. Youth delegates are selected through a scoring system, which combines the total number of votes and the assessment of a jury.

Before the campaign week, the Dutch national youth council organises a training day for the final candidates. The training focuses on how to prepare for the week, as well as tips on how to perform during it. The goal of such training is to ensure fair competition amongst candidates.

The Dutch youth delegate programme considers that this practice ensures transparency by allowing young people to publicly elect their representatives to the UN. Also, the way candidates design their campaigns can provide an indication before selection on how they will mobilise and engage with young people, if they were to get selected. However, it was also mentioned that this system can also be very intense for candidates, which is something the youth council needs to tackle through continuous guidance and support.

balance without strict quotas. Interestingly, women are over-represented in almost all countries, and many programmes are struggling to attract and select more men as youth delegates.

Other common selection criteria include living and/or having nationality in the country of the programme, fluency in English, some knowledge of the UN system and the themes related to the delegate position, as well as experience in and interest towards engaging other young people. Event organisation skills, social media experience, SDG knowledge, familiarity with youth organisations, and communication and lobbying skills are also commonly valued.

Higher education is usually not required for youth delegate positions, with some exceptions such as Ukraine, where a relevant higher education degree is considered desirable (although not mandatory). Even so, most delegates in the interviewed countries tend to be university students (typically in international relations or politics), of the ethnic majority, living in large cities, and often with higher socio-economic standing than their peers on average. Many programmes recognise and attempt to reduce overrepresentation of young people with this profile either through relaxing the criteria for prior experience, adapting recruitment notices and their targeting, or with remuneration systems.

In some programmes, particularly in Northern Europe, candidates must be nominated by a youth organisation to be eligible to apply (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden). Candidates are not only considered as individual young persons, but as representatives of their nominating organisations. The rationale for nominations is based on a goal of ensuring balanced representation of young people and youth organisations involved in the youth delegate programme.

## **What type of handover and training do youth delegates receive?**

Most youth delegate programmes have some form of handover or training system for new youth delegates. The purpose of these systems is to provide delegates with the essential knowledge, skills and confidence to carry out their mandate.

Some programmes have youth delegates spend an entire day in handover meetings, where they are introduced to the programme and their duties, and in addition they may receive training on a variety of relevant skills. Other programmes have similar meetings, which, instead of being one-day long, span over several days. Most programmes with more than one full training day arrange meetings lasting two to three consecutive days, often during a weekend. However, in the case of Israel, the newly selected youth delegate receives training, which takes place over four to five consecutive days, and in the cases of Australia and Germany, the length of the handover period is somewhere in between two weeks and a month. In some

### **GERMANY: INTERNSHIPS AT THE MINISTRIES OF YOUTH AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

After being selected, German youth delegates start their mandate with a two-week internship at the German ministry of youth. Several months later, before participating in UNGA, youth delegates have a second 3 to 4 days internship at the ministry of foreign affairs.

According to the programme, the purpose behind these internships is for the youth delegates to gain a better understanding of the functioning of the two ministries relevant for their work. It is also to introduce helpful contacts, hand over any recommendations, and discuss their concerns with politicians and civil servants. Furthermore, during the internship at the ministry of foreign affairs, youth delegates will learn about important developments in the UN, as well as positions adopted by the German government.

programmes handover responsibilities are placed in the hands of the entity coordinating the programme, while in others, it is a responsibility of the youth delegates themselves to set this up. In the cases of Australia and Germany, it is primarily the ministry of foreign affairs, which is responsible for training. Concretely, in Germany, youth delegates are invited to intern at the ministries of youth and foreign affairs for short periods of time, where they are familiarised with issues relevant for their mandates.

Former or senior youth delegates often play an important role in handover and training. In many programmes previous or senior delegates have introductory meetings with newly selected youth delegates, in order to secure a smooth transition into the new role. These meetings allow the new delegates to ask questions, discuss expectations and learn best practices, amongst others, with peers that already have had personal experience in the role. In other programmes,

engagement with former and senior delegates is not limited to a meeting, but it is expected to happen during part of or throughout the entire mandate of the newly selected delegate. This is always the case with programmes that follow the senior-junior approach, where senior delegates are expected to have a guiding role, at least during the beginning of the mandate of the junior delegate. However, in cases such as Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, or Slovenia, alumni youth delegates are expected or encouraged to offer support to youth delegates who are in office.

In some programmes, ministries also play a role in handover events and training for new youth delegates. In countries such as Australia, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania or Ukraine, relevant ministries arrange introductory meetings for newly selected youth delegates. These meetings may address matters such as diplomatic etiquette or matters of political importance for the country in question. They may also be used as an opportunity to establish initial contact with the government officials, with whom youth delegates will be working.

Many programmes complement their training provision with written material, whilst those that do not provide in-person training often use such material as a substitute.

In some cases, the written material provided contains general information, such as information on the functioning of the UN or on the functioning of the entity coordinating the programme, whilst in some others, specific and continuously updated handover materials are circulated to new delegates. In the cases of the Netherlands and the USA, former or senior youth delegates are particularly tasked with writing a handover manual to be given to newly selected delegates.

Whilst handover and training for newly started youth delegates is a feature in most youth delegate programmes, the training provided in Albania, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland, aim to additionally provide continuous training for youth delegates throughout their mandates. These training sessions offer concrete knowledge and skills sessions that enable the delegates to build and develop their own capacities. For example, the Finnish delegate programme offers training in social media and public speaking, facilitated by specialists, while the Italian and German programmes provide specialised training before the participation of the youth delegates in international meetings. Another interesting example is found in Switzerland, where youth delegates are sent to an annual training event on advocacy held abroad by the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN).

## **What type of support do youth delegates receive?**

The large majority of youth delegates receive continuous support from the entity coordinating their programme, often by one or more programme managers. The type of support often depends on the financial capacities of the programme, as well as the way programmes are structured. Some programmes have one or more full-time staff members focusing on supporting youth delegates, while, in other cases, it is staff members with a few hours allocated or volunteers that take on that responsibility. Some programmes support youth delegates with political questions, whilst others are structured in a way where programme managers are expected to not engage with politics.

Most programmes provide delegates with administrative and logistical support, especially in relation to participation in international events. Support related to communication, including social media, is also quite common, as well as help with making necessary contacts and promoting delegates to be able to take part in events or be included in diverse decision-making processes. Some programmes offer support on content-related questions, such as technical information or the drafting of speeches. Some support is also available with the planning of events.

Programme managers often hold coordination and support meetings with youth delegates. Some programmes have regular, periodic systems of support for youth delegates, whilst others support delegates when they reach out for support. The way these meetings function varies widely amongst programmes. In some programmes, coordination and support meetings are held up to twice a week, whilst in others, these are held once every several months or only in connection with key dates, such

as international events. Meetings are held for all youth delegates together, in teams based on thematic focus areas, one-on-one, or a combination of these.

In youth delegate programmes managed by non-governmental organisations, ministries also play an important role in supporting youth delegates. Unlike the support from the coordinating organisations, this support tends to be more ad-hoc and on the basis of need. This support is mostly provided by ministries of foreign affairs and country missions to the UN, however it is not uncommon that other relevant ministries, such as ministries of environment, education, or youth will also provide delegates with help.

Ministries often support youth delegates by providing them with technical and political information relevant to the delegates' areas of work. This is especially the case right before and during international meetings. Many ministries support delegates by inviting them to participate in different events and by providing them with speaking opportunities or other similar roles, as well as by putting them in contact with relevant actors. Ministries might also help through sharing content on youth delegates in their communication channels, including social media, and through providing delegates with facilities for having meetings or events. Some ministries support coordinating organisations with logistical aspects related to participation in international events, and in some cases, they provide additional funding for specific projects.

Some programmes receive support from local UN agencies, for example UNICEF in the case of Albania and North Macedonia. Specifically, in the case of Albania, UNICEF supports youth delegates in their consultation efforts through including some of their questions in their different data collection campaigns. The Latvian youth delegate programme receives support from embassies from other countries, such as France, Sweden or Ukraine, who, for example, provide support by offering facilities for events.

In Latvia, the Netherlands, and Romania, youth delegates receive support from teams of young volunteers put in place specifically to aid delegates in their work. These teams may help delegates with content-related matters within their areas of work, as well as with administrative and managerial tasks. In the Netherlands, every youth delegate theme (the Netherlands has six youth delegates equally distributed among three themes) is connected to a volunteer reference group, with which they cooperate on matters related to their areas of work. In Latvia and Romania, youth delegates choose their team of volunteers based on what kind of aid they need for their mandate, so the role of volunteers changes from year to year. In 2022, Romanian youth delegates had chosen a team of eight volunteers, who focused on, amongst other things, external and internal representation, communication and social media, and budgetary-matters. In the same year, Latvian youth delegates had a volunteer team with members having different areas of expertise, these being: education, security, climate, and gender equality. This team was complemented by other volunteers, who aided delegates with other forms of support, such as report writing or event-planning. In both the Latvian

and Romanian cases, youth delegate support teams are chosen through application processes.

## How do youth delegate programmes ensure representation?

Representation plays an important role in youth delegate programmes, as youth delegates are expected to act on behalf of their peers in international fora. Therefore, it is important that the messages communicated by delegates reflect the general views and concerns of youth in their countries, and not exclusively their own personal opinions. There are substantial differences on how youth delegate programmes aim to ensure that youth delegates are representative.

A rough distinction can be made between an emphasis on descriptive representation or substantive representation of youth. Programmes focusing more on descriptive representation are concerned with who youth delegates are and the extent to which their socio-economic characteristics reflect the makeup and diversity of the youth population of their countries. Programmes with emphasis on substantive representation pay more direct attention to the values and agendas youth delegates act upon as a reflection of “the youth opinion” or “the common good” of youth. In reality, both types of representation are usually sought after, with different weight given to issues in different countries.

The most common method for gauging the youth opinion is to conduct consultations. Some programmes conduct in-person consultations, where youth delegates arrange workshops, meetings

### DENMARK: NATIONAL WORKSHOP TOURS

In Denmark, youth delegates travel around the country hosting workshops on global agendas for schools and youth-led organisations. These workshops have to take place in all five regions of the country.

Workshops for schools are held for students of different age groups, as well as types of education. The primary purpose of these is to engage children and youth in global agendas through raising awareness and inviting them to reflect on different global issues.

Workshops for youth-led organisations take the organisations’ expertise as their point of point of departure and aim to strengthen the mandate and knowledge of youth delegates. Workshops are often held for organisations, which conduct global projects or have relevant international experience. During the workshops, the organisations inform youth delegates about their experiences and the issues they consider important to bring to global fora. Organisations also provide youth delegates with relevant knowledge and facts, which may support their engagement in the UN. The organisations for which workshops are held are diverse, from political organisations and students’ unions to the scouts and religious organisations.

Before hosting the workshops, youth delegates undergo a training programme on how to successfully facilitate and host such an event.



or conferences with young people to hear their opinions on different matters relevant for the delegates' work (Albania, the French Community of Belgium, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine). Some of these programmes conduct nationwide tours, where youth delegates travel across their countries conducting consultations, in order to ensure a geographically representative sample. The targeted groups differ across programmes. For instance, some programmes prioritise conducting workshops in schools and other education institutions, others prioritise meeting with representatives of youth-led organisations, and others periodically change the groups they focus on. Several programmes have indicated that they focus on ensuring that young people from minorities or vulnerable backgrounds participate in these consultations.

The Bulgarian programme conducts an annual survey over three months, where they collect the answers of, at least, five hundred young people. The results of this survey guide the work carried out by their youth delegates.

Some programmes, managed by national youth councils, aim to ensure legitimate representation by requiring delegates to follow the councils' position papers (Denmark, the French Community of Belgium, Iceland, Slovenia). Specifically, in the case of Denmark, the Danish Youth Council's board adopts and revises a set of thematic policy papers every year, which are exclusively developed to guide the political engagement of their youth delegates.

In the case of other youth delegate programmes, representation is sought by combining some of the methods previously mentioned. Australia combines in-person consultations with surveying young people, whilst in Austria youth delegates are required to follow their national youth council's policy, as well as conducting consultations.

A substantial number of youth delegate programmes do not have a systematic method of ensuring legitimate representation by collecting inputs from young people through consultations, surveys, policy papers, or others. Instead, most of these programmes aim to ensure representation through their selection processes, where they strive to select youth delegates, which they consider would act as legitimate representative during their mandates. For some, these are young people, who have had previous experience in the youth sector or similar representative positions, for others, this is achieved through recruiting young people from diverse backgrounds.

Compared to other forms of youth political representation, youth delegates tend to have high levels of independence, when it comes to setting their political goals and strategies. In many cases, there is no continuity of advocacy strategies from one youth delegate team to their successors, and often coordinating organisations do not engage with strategic planning but leave it up to the delegates themselves to define that. Whilst there are clear benefits of this system, it can also lead to challenges, when it comes to the effectiveness of youth delegates' advocacy work. Many youth delegates

have to start from scratch, whenever their mandates start. This means that often they need to conduct new consultations, develop new advocacy goals, and come up with new strategies, usually based on what their personal interests are. No interviewed programme had a long term political strategy, which included goals, which had to be pursued across generations of youth delegates. This situation may lead to youth delegate programmes experiencing regular changes in direction for their advocacy strategies within a relatively short period of time, as the youth delegates' mandates do not last longer than two years. This could be a challenge, when aiming to influence complex political processes in systems like the UN, where negotiations extend over several years and where institutional memory plays an important role.

## **How do youth delegates engage with local youth?**

Most youth delegate programmes prioritise engaging with local young people in their countries. The reasons for doing this can be to educate young people on global agendas, inspire them to take action, or to collect their perspectives, with the aim of bringing their views forward to international fora, as described in the previous section. Overall, most youth delegate programmes aim to build bridges between what is happening at the global level and the daily local realities of young people.

One way of doing so is to conduct in-person consultations and surveys, as previously mentioned. However this is not the only way in which youth delegates engage with their peers at the local level. Methods include organising debates, events, conferences, workshops, meetings, and tours that aim to reach young people in their countries.

Schools are spaces of particular interest for youth delegate programmes, when it comes to engaging with local youth. A substantial number of programmes periodically organise activities for school students, where they engage them in discussions concerning diverse global agendas.

Some youth delegate programmes have systematic methods for engaging with local youth, through participation in annual events or activities. For example, in Latvia, youth delegates are required to hold a national conference, the outcomes of which are presented during the UN General Assembly. In Denmark, youth delegates are required to arrange workshops for youth-led organisations each year, and, in Germany, delegates have to participate in a national tour, where they meet young people from rural areas, as well as groups of socially excluded young people.

In some other programmes, whilst it is required that youth delegates engage with local youth, it is the responsibility of the delegates themselves to define how to do so. For example, in the case of the Ukrainian youth delegate programme, delegates are required to implement a youth engagement project of their own design during their mandate, whilst in Slovenia, potential youth delegates need to outline in their applications how they intend to engage with local youth.

## **What challenges do youth delegate programmes experience?**

Most youth delegate programmes experience challenges, which are considered by programme managers to be obstacles to the successful implementation of these programmes. Whilst some challenges are specific to the specific and unique contexts under which these diverse programmes operate, some other issues are recurrent across different programmes.

A substantial number of programme managers indicated that financial limitations represented an issue for their programmes. Some programmes do not have stable forms of funding, and financing for these programmes has to be secured by periodically applying for further economic resources. This lack of stability in turn creates a financial uncertainty which acts as an obstacle for the long-term sustainability of the programmes.

Other programme managers consider that their budgets are simply too small, which results in their having to limit their ambitions for the programmes. More specifically, some indicated that small budgets restricted their ability to recruit staff resources which in turn leads to youth delegates not receiving the support they require to successfully conduct their work. Others mentioned that despite them wishing to expand the impact of their programmes by having more delegates or engaging with new international fora, they are not able to do so, given their budgetary restrictions.

Another recurrent issue is that youth delegates are required to dedicate large amounts of time to their mandates. In the vast amount of cases, they do so as volunteers, it is often hard to combine their delegate duties with their other life responsibilities. Managers noted that this challenge leads to youth delegates struggling to keep the necessary high levels of engagement throughout their entire mandates, and that their availability and motivation tends to fluctuate based on other responsibilities, such as jobs or studies. Some managers mentioned that, in some cases, this results in delegates not finishing their mandates, given stress-related reasons caused by unhealthy levels of workload during prolonged periods of time. This situation has led some programmes to seek to remunerate their delegates. However, as previously seen, this is in most cases not a possibility, given limited financial capacities.

Several non-governmental programme managers commented that they experience challenges in their relationships with the ministries they cooperate with. It was mentioned that cooperation is, in many cases, dependent on the level of engagement of the ministerial staff responsible. In the recent past, the passive engagement from relevant ministerial staff has had major negative consequences on the functioning of programmes, as ministries are often gatekeepers to the way delegates can engage with international decision-making bodies. It was also commented that ministerial staff may at times lack understanding about the functioning and needs of youth delegate

programmes, as well as on how their capacities differ from their own. One specific example of this is that ministerial staff may at times expect youth delegates and managers to operate on short deadlines, which programmes often struggle with, given limited economic and human resources.

Other challenges that were mentioned were the lack of cooperation platforms for youth delegate programmes across countries, both for youth delegates and programme managers, the lack of awareness of youth delegate programmes and their work amongst decision makers and the public, as well as the lack of diversity amongst youth delegates.

## **Annexe 1: Interview questions**

- How is your youth delegate programme structured in your country? Who manages it? How many youth delegates do you have and for which themes? How long is the mandate of your youth delegates?
- What kind of impact does your youth delegate programme aim to achieve and how do you work to achieve it?
- How is your youth delegate programme financed? Do your youth delegates receive any form of economic compensation?
- How is your relationship with the different relevant ministries? What type of support do you get from them?
- How are youth delegates recruited in your country? What are the qualities and qualifications you seek in youth delegates? What platforms and institutions do you use to promote recruitment?
- How is the transition process between new and old youth delegates? What type of training do youth delegates receive? Do you provide any type of written material for new youth delegates?
- How does your organisation support your youth delegates?
- How do you ensure that your youth delegates are representative?
- How do youth delegates in your country engage at the national level?
- What are the general challenges your programme encounters?

## **Annexe 2: List of contacted youth delegate programmes**

Afghanistan	Malaysia
Albania	Malta
Australia	Mongolia
Austria	Netherlands
Bulgaria	North Macedonia
Croatia	Norway
Czech Republic	Pakistan (Kashmir)
Denmark	Perú
Estonia	Poland
EU-UN YD programme	Portugal
Finland	Romania
The French Community of Belgium	Serbia
Georgia	Slovakia
Germany	Slovenia
Hungary	South Korea
Iceland	Sri Lanka
Ireland	Suriname
Israel	Sweden
Italy	Switzerland
Latvia	United Arab Emirates
Lithuania	Ukraine
Luxembourg	USA



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