



**ESDN** REPORT

# ESDN YOUTH NETWORK

Memorandum of Understanding of  
Youth Participation within the ESDN

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>7</b>
AIMS & BENEFITS OF THE NETWORK	7
MEMBERSHIP	9
NETWORK ACTIVITIES	10
FURTHER DEVELOPMENT	11
<b>CHAPTER 2 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>12</b>
COMMITMENT OF THE ESDN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE	12
INVOLVEMENT OF ESDN YOUTH NETWORK REPRESENTATIVES IN ESDN ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS	12
MAIN CONDITIONS FOR ESDN YOUTH NETWORK REPRESENTATION	12
ROLE & WORK OF ESDN YOUTH NETWORK REPRESENTATIVES	13
SELECTING ESDN YOUTH NETWORK REPRESENTATIVES	13

# TERMS & ABBREVIATIONS

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**AB** – Advisory Board

**BMUV** – German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection

**ESDN** – European Sustainable Development Network

**ESDN Office** supports the work of the ESDN Association. Since 2023, the ESDN Office is led by Eric Mulholland as the Executive Coordinator. Previously, the ESDN Office was located at the Institute for Managing Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business.

**ESDN Youth Network** is an informal network for Youth Representatives closely linked to the ESDN.

**ESDN Youth Network Member** is a Youth Representative who has agreed (written form) to be part of the ESDN Youth Network.

**ESDN Youth Network Representatives** are up to four persons per year that represent the ESDN Youth Network towards the ESDN, mainly by participating in the ESDN Advisory Board Meetings.

**ESDN Youth Support Team** supports the ESDN Youth Network since 2022, located at the Institute for Managing Sustainability, Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), with Ursula Kopp and Mariia Kostetckaia.

**EU** – European Union

**SD** – Sustainable Development

**SDGs** - Sustainable Development Goals

**UN** – United Nations

**UNYD** – United Nations Youth Delegates

**WU Vienna** - Vienna University of Economics and Business, Institute for Managing Sustainability

**Youth Representatives** are all those UN Youth Delegates/national representatives of youth organisations/associations that are contacted and invited to the ESDN Youth Network.

# INTRODUCTION

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Alongside ecological and social issues, **welfare of future generations** is one of the main concerns of the concept of Sustainable Development, which rests on a strong sense of **intergenerational equity**.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims at leaving no one behind and thus takes intergenerational equity seriously. The young generation shall not be left to deal with the consequences of unsustainable policies of previous generations. The implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), should allow for a paradigm shift towards a more participatory model of **multi-stakeholder governance for sustainable development**.

The UN aims to recognize young people's agency, resilience and their positive contributions as **agents of change in order to "benefit from their views, insights and ideas"**.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the UN Youth Strategy 2030 aims to address the needs, build the agency and advance the rights of young people, and to ensure their engagement and participation in the implementation, review and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda as well as other relevant global agendas and frameworks. It is a priority 1 aim to "advocate for expanded and meaningful youth participation in intergovernmental forums at the global and regional levels, particularly those

related to the SDGs, including through extensive and streamlined support to youth delegates and representatives"<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, the current EU Youth Strategy aims to "encourage and equip young people with the necessary resources to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change" and to "improve policy decisions with regard to their impact on young people across all sectors".<sup>3</sup>

To support this development, the **European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) aims to include Youth regularly, and in a structured way, and to support the work of Youth, and to benefit from their view and ideas in the form of active contributions in ESDN events, recommendations for ESDN activities, and inclusion in the discussions of the ESDN Advisory Board.**

The ESDN is a network of national policymakers and civil servants responsible for sustainable development in their national governments. It focuses on informal exchange of good practices and peer learning, it provides knowledge products on SD policies and offers advice to policy makers.

Founded as an informal network in 2003, it became a formalized association in 2019 with its own formal Statutes, which

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<sup>1</sup> UN Youth Strategy 2030, p. 5

<sup>2</sup> UN Youth Strategy 2030, p. 10

<sup>3</sup> The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01), p. 2

can be found on the [ESDN website](#), and outline how the ESDN functions and the different roles different members have within the Network.

This **Memorandum of Understanding** outlines how the cooperation between the ESDN and the ESDN Youth Network will function. This will then serve as the guiding document for the ESDN and the ESDN Youth Network.

**Chapter 1** outlines the development, structure and function of the ESDN Youth Network.

**Chapter 2** focuses on the details of the collaboration between the ESDN and the ESDN Youth Network – the Memorandum of Understanding.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE ESDN YOUTH NETWORK

After two successful Youth Workshops in October 2020 and November 2021, the ESDN decided to institutionalise Youth participation in its activities in a more permanent way. In order to lay the foundation for an **ESDN Youth Network that provides added value for both Youth and the ESDN**, the ESDN Office was asked to carry out a survey on the situation of UN Youth Delegates and other national Youth representatives in Europe.<sup>4</sup> The ESDN publication, “**ESDN Youth Network – Concept**”, (ESDN Report, Dec 2021) summarizes the results of interviews held with UN Youth Delegates and other national Youth representatives on SD, the desk research on European Youth Networks, and the ESDN Office’s conclusions and suggestions for an ESDN Youth Network.

Since then, the ESDN carried out two additional Youth Workshops, one in 2022 and one in 2023, and discussed the function and structure of the ESDN Youth Network, and the collaboration between the Youth Network and the ESDN, in several personal meetings and in a written feedback process between the ESDN Executive Committee, the Advisory Board and the Youth Network Members. This co-creative, participatory<sup>5</sup> process led to this Memorandum of Understanding.

<sup>4</sup> Sponsored by the German BMUV

<sup>5</sup> Moderated and documented by the ESDN Youth Support Team

<sup>6</sup> Referring to SDG 17: institutionalisation, competence increase for youth representatives/delegates, more

### Aims & Benefits of the Network

The **overall aim** from the ESDN’s side is to **incorporate the voice of the Youth in its activities**, and that **policymakers have constant contact with Youth Network Members** and are exposed to their ideas and concerns, **fostering meaningful and permanent exchange on SD issues**.<sup>6</sup>

A main role of the ESDN Youth Network is to support its Members in their work and the impact they can have on sustainable development and also make them ambassadors of the ESDN. The ESDN Youth Network aims at attracting as many European countries with youth networks for sustainable development as possible, with a view to also foster the introduction of Youth Delegate programmes and youth expert groups in countries where they do not yet exist.

By incorporating the perspective of Youth, the ESDN will benefit in several ways<sup>7</sup>:

- It will add to the credibility of the ESDN, as it will highlight the ESDN’s commitment to intergenerational justice and cooperation.
- Youth involvement in regular ESDN events will enrich discussions and conversations at those events.
- The recommendations formulated by ESDN Youth Network Members,

opportunities and impact, more awareness about the work of Youth representatives.

<sup>7</sup> ESDN Youth Network - Concept, ESDN Report, Dec 2021, p. 26

which are based on the results of the annual ESDN Youth Workshop, will provide important added value for the ESDN in its general discussion on the implementation of the SDGs and on SD policy priorities.

- ESDN Youth Network Members will give presentations and participate at panel discussions during ESDN events. They will bring in their views, perspectives and recommendations in the discussion with other SD experts and ESDN Members.
- The ESDN Youth Network will give the individual members of the ESDN direct access to Youth Network Members, not only in their own country, but also in all (most) of Europe. Enhanced cooperation with Youth will enrich the ESDN members' perspectives on issues they are working on and is likely to inspire more Youth involvement in national policymaking, too.

For the involved Youth Network Members, the ESDN Youth Network seeks to:

- 1) Provide a platform to network
- 2) Offer direct exchange with policymakers
- 3) Support discussion on SD policy and policy process learning
- 4) Help to acquire expertise
- 5) Encourage Youth to express their views
- 6) Support Youth Members attending and presenting at ESDN events

- 7) Provide reimbursement for travel and accommodation so long as there is adequate budget to do so.

**These aspects of the ESDN Youth Network will be explored in more detail below:**

**1) Provide a platform to network**

The ESDN Youth Network provides a formalised and structured environment for Youth Network Members to meet and exchange with one another. Networking is provided online and via face-to-face meetings.<sup>8</sup>

Youth Network Members from smaller countries, and those who are the sole representative of their country, would particularly benefit from this more formalised way of networking.

**2) Offer direct exchange with policymakers**

The ESDN Youth Network will provide a space for Youth Network Members and policymakers to connect and exchange perspectives on SD issues regularly at the events of the ESDN and at the yearly ESDN Youth Workshop.

This is a unique approach of the ESDN Youth Network, as currently no other organisation can offer such direct, informal, eye-level exchange with high-level policymakers.

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<sup>8</sup> See also section "Network Activities".



### **3) Support discussion on SD policy and policy process learning**

The “ESDN Youth Network – Concept” (ESDN, 2021) showed a lack of knowledge about political and policy processes amongst the Youth Representatives. By providing an opportunity of formal and informal exchange, the ESDN Youth Network would foster the discussion of Youth Network Members on SD policies in Europe with experts and amongst themselves.

### **4) Help to acquire expertise**

Enhanced expertise about sustainable development issues and policy processes will allow Youth to articulate demands more effectively and confidently. It will also help them follow and participate in meetings and consultations with policymakers and representatives of national governments and international organisations.

### **5) Encourage Youth to express their views**

The ESDN Youth Network Members will be encouraged to collaboratively develop their views on certain SD topics and to express their views in form of a document (paper, presentation, video etc.) and a personal presentation at the three main ESDN events (Conference, Workshop, and Peer Learning Platform).

### **6) Support Youth Members attending and presenting at ESDN events**

The ESDN Youth Network will provide essential support to Youth Members attending and presenting at ESDN events. This support may include organizing calls to help Youth Members prepare for the events, offering guidance, and being available for questions and requests.

### **7) Provide reimbursement for travel and accommodation so long as there is adequate budget to do so**

When budget allows, ESDN Youth will reimburse travel and accommodation costs for youth members participating in ESDN events. The availability of funding will always be communicated in advance to help youth members make informed decisions about applying for participation.

## **Membership**

The core target group of the ESDN Youth Network are United Nations Youth Delegates (UNYDs) for Sustainable Development and members of other youth expert groups focusing on sustainable development. However, many countries do not have UNYDs specifically for Sustainable Development, in which case the network invites other UN Youth Delegates. For countries without a UN Youth Delegate Programme, participation is open to other official, preferably national, Youth Representatives (case by case check).

The Network shall grow by continuing to include Youth Network Members whose mandates as UNYD or as national youth representatives have ended. This can be ensured through the use of private email addresses for those Members who are interested in continuing to be part of the Youth Network. The continued inclusion of these Members in the Network will help to preserve and transfer knowledge, to provide contacts, continuity, and information to the new Network Members. Therefore, it is highly encouraged that Youth Network Members remain in the Network even after their mandates are over.

While all Youth Network Members receive invitations to ESDN events, priority is given to Members who have an active mandate in the case of limited capacity and/or resources. This will support the networking effect and foster the transfer of knowledge from one generation of Youth Network Members to the next.

In the case that Youth Network Members stay in the field of sustainable development in their professional careers, and they maintain an interest in the ESDN, then they are encouraged to become ESDN Associate Members by contacting the ESDN Office via email.

## **Network Activities**

Participation in the ESDN Youth Network should not be a financial burden for the Members. Therefore, travel and accommodation costs for participation in

physical ESDN events will be covered by the ESDN, provided that sufficient funding is available. Core activities of the ESDN Youth Network include:

### **ESDN Youth Workshop**

The yearly workshops will be the main activity of the ESDN Youth Network, serving three main purposes: Firstly, they are the main opportunity for the Youth Network Members to get to know each other in person and network. Secondly, they will provide knowledge and expertise on different SD topics to Youth. Thirdly, they enable a close exchange between the ESDN and Youth Representatives on SD-relevant topics.

### **Youth Network Contributions to ESDN**

The Youth Network Members will be given the opportunity to contribute their own ESDN Policy Note after the Youth Workshop, which will allow them to reflect upon the results of the event and the topics they discussed. This also allows them to communicate these results in a concise manner (4-5 pages), which can then be shared on the ESDN website, with ESDN Members, as well as featured on the ESDN's social media channels.

### **Youth presentations at ESDN events**

ESDN Youth Network Members will express their views regularly at ESDN events on the topic of the event.

In addition, by exchanging with the ESDN policymakers, they will also gain technical expertise about how their demands could be implemented and what would be the challenges.

### **Regular online meetings**

The ESDN Youth Support Team provides regular online meetings to:

- Inform about and discuss the yearly ESDN program with the ESDN Youth Network Members
- Discuss possibilities as to how ESDN Youth Network Members can participate in and contribute to ESDN events.
- Exchange with the ESDN Youth Network Members and welcome new ESDN Youth Network Members.
- Distribute other possibilities for the Youth to contribute to related events / processes after consulting with the ESDN Executive Committee regarding any additional events that are outside the ESDN Conference, Workshop, and Peer Learning Platform.
- Prepare and debrief the Advisory Board meetings.
- Include former ESDN Youth Network Members, to provide a resource for engaged Youth beyond their mandate and to foster learning from them.

- Moderate the process to select and brief ESDN Youth Network Members.

### **Webinars**

Webinars for ESDN Youth Network Members could be organized by the ESDN Youth Support Team with experts on SD topics the ESDN is addressing during a given year, as a way to better inform and prepare the Youth Network Members for contributions to ESDN events. They should only be organized if the Youth Project Budget allows for their organisation.

### **Further Development**

The ESDN Youth Network is understood to be an opportunity and platform that is provided by the ESDN to engaged Youth Network Members and national youth representatives to exchange on pertinent topics in sustainable development that are important to the ESDN and to Youth Members. The further development of the ESDN Youth Network will be carried out in an iterative, participatory process between the ESDN and the ESDN Youth Network Members. The ESDN aims at a long-term continuity, although future activities depend on the financial possibilities the ESDN has each year to carry out this project<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Since 2020 the ESDN Youth Network activities have been sponsored entirely by the BMUV.

# CHAPTER 2

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN YOUTH & ESDN

This Memorandum of Understanding describes the collaboration between the ESDN Youth Network and the ESDN bodies and is valid from January 1, 2024.

To involve the ESDN Youth Network meaningfully and directly in the work of the ESDN, the Executive Committee decided to offer two representatives of the ESDN Youth Network a seat in the Advisory Board (AB) of the ESDN by actively participating in every AB meeting. The ESDN Youth Network will select Representatives to be sent to the Advisory Board meetings of the ESDN. Since, according to the ESDN Statutes, the Executive Committee selects the members of the Advisory Board, it will confirm the appointed ESDN Youth Network Representatives announced by the ESDN Youth Network Members (via the ESDN Youth Support Team).

The following pages describe the representation and the collaboration between the ESDN and the ESDN Youth Network in detail.

### Commitment of the ESDN Executive Committee

The ESDN Executive Committee commits to:

- Confirm the ESDN Youth Network Representatives, announced by the ESDN Youth Network, to become members of the Advisory Board.
- Invite the ESDN Youth Network Representatives to all Advisory

Board meetings and inform them accordingly.

### Involvement of ESDN Youth Network Representatives in ESDN Advisory Board Meetings

The ESDN Youth Network Representatives elected to be a part of the ESDN Advisory Board will have the same rights as other ESDN Advisory Board Members when it comes to suggesting topics to be covered in the meetings, which would appear on the meeting agenda. The Youth Network Representatives will be able to offer their ideas on all agenda topics where it makes sense.

As the ESDN Youth Network itself is neither a government, nor a paying member of the ESDN, Youth Network Representatives will not have the right to cast votes during meetings should any votes take place. This right is reserved for the ESDN Regular Members who pay the annual ESDN membership fee, and who represent European governments, as set out in the ESDN's Statutes.

### Main Conditions for ESDN Youth Network Representation

The ESDN Youth Network selects its Representatives as follows:

- For each calendar year a team of 3-4 Representatives is selected by the members of the ESDN Youth Network.

- The ESDN Youth Network Representatives work together, but only two can attend each Advisory Board meeting (self-selected, rotating), ensuring continuity and information of each other in case of sickness or other obligations, as well as the passing on of information to the other Youth Network Members.
- In order to pass on knowledge to the next ESDN Youth Network Representatives, it is the aim to establish a system, where for 2 of the 4 Representatives the work does not end on December 31, but continues for a couple more months of the following year (until after the first AB meeting of the following year).

### **Role & Work of ESDN Youth Network Representatives**

ESDN Youth Network Representatives commit themselves for minimum one year to:

- Take part in all Advisory Board meetings of the ESDN of the respective year (two of them). Currently 9 countries are represented in 3-5 AB meetings per year, with around 28 persons being invited (including Executive Committee and Youth Network Representatives).
- Organize themselves and present their ideas on agenda points in the Advisory Board meetings. Prepare for the Advisory Board meeting

together with the other Youth Network Representatives, as well as coordinate any internal meetings with the other ESDN Youth Network Members.

- Voice the opinions and ideas of the members of the ESDN Youth on the issues discussed during the Advisory Board meetings.
- The ESDN Office will write the official AB meeting minutes. However, the Youth Network Representatives can brief the Youth Network Members on the meeting and provide an unofficial overview.

### **Selecting ESDN Youth Network Representatives**

The ESDN Executive Committee and Advisory Board will not be involved in the selection of ESDN Youth Network Representatives. The ESDN Youth Network Members should decide the way in which they would like to elect Members to be their Representatives in the Advisory Board.

The ESDN will also not prescribe selection criteria, as selection processes should be free to change with each election cycle, as agreed upon by the ESDN Youth Network Members.

The Youth Network Members should also agree upon a method for its Members to indicate their interest in running to be a Youth Network Representative.

Once an agreed upon method for selection has occurred, the ESDN Youth Support Team is then tasked with carrying out the vote and collecting the results. The results should then be communicated to the ESDN Youth Network and to the ESDN Executive Committee, as they will need to approve the Representatives.

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# ESDN

*The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is a non-profit, pan-European peer-learning, networking, knowledge, and advocacy platform for sustainability professionals in the public sector working in collaboration with other organisations and institutions dealing with sustainable development issues. It is based on the transparent and trustful cooperation of these actors. It collects, compiles and shares information on sustainability policies, strategies and practises, and provides expertise to political decision-makers at European, national and sub-national levels. The ESDN also fosters sustainable development through active communication and continued cooperation with other stakeholders and civil society.*