



ESDN REPORT

CONCEPT FOR A ESDN YOUTH NETWORK

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of Sustainable Development is mostly interpreted as a concern for the welfare of future generations along a range of ecological and social dimensions and rests on a strong sense of intergenerational equity. Through the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), published in 2015, the international community decided to tackle global issues in a new way, by bringing together economic, environmental and social dimensions in an integrated manner. The 2030 Agenda aims at leaving no group behind and taking intergenerational equity serious. The young generation shall not be left to deal with the consequences of unsustainable policies of previous generations. The SDGs, now being implemented in the EU via the European Green Deal, should allow for a paradigm shift towards a more participatory model of multi-stakeholder governance for sustainable development.

Young people have the right to have a say on matters that concern them and should be enabled to engage in the decision-making process at the EU level in a structured and formal way as "critical agents of change". Additionally,

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 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other relevant global agendas and frameworks. To support this development, the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) aims at including Youth in a structured way.

The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is a network of policymakers and civil servants responsible for sustainable development in their national governments. It focuses on informal exchange of good practices and peer learning.

After two successful Youth Workshops in October 2020 and November 2021, the ESDN would like to institutionalise Youth participation in its activities in a more permanent way. This would ensure that the ESDN incorporates the voice of the Youth in its activities, and that policymakers have constant contact with Youth representatives and are exposed to their ideas and concerns. However, it is important to avoid

tokenism and only using the Youth participants as a box to that needs to be checked off. Thus, this concept has been established in close cooperation with young people and is based on their needs.

Youth involvement in any kind of organisation or process should be organised in a way that provides value to both sides; the Youth who usually provide their time voluntarily and without any remuneration, and for policymakers, who should have mechanisms in place to take up suggestions by the Youth.

In order to lay the foundation for a network that is providing added value for both Youth and the ESDN, the ESDN Office conducted 12 interviews in autumn 2021. These interviews were held with eight United Nations (UN) Youth Delegates, two UN Youth Delegates for Sustainable Development, one member of the Finnish 2030 Youth Group and one representative of the Irish Youth Organisation ECO-UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

All interviewees participated also in the ESDN Youth Workshop 2021. The interviews investigated on the Youth Representatives' backgrounds, their

networking activities with other Youth Delegates in Europe and their experience in interacting with policymakers. The focus was on UN Youth Delegates, as they are the main target group of ESDN Youth workshops. UN Youth Delegates have an official mandate by their country and are usually an official member of their government's delegation to either the UN General Assembly, the High Level Political Forum or other high-level UN Assemblies or meetings.

In addition, their mandate often includes connecting to Youth and Youth organisations at home. Not all European Union (EU) and ESDN Member states have such a Youth Delegate Programme, and their structure as well as support arrangements vary widely from country to country.

The ESDN Office also conducted desk research into other Youth organisations that are active in Europe and loosely connected to Sustainable Development. This was to establish whether there were other networks, through which UN Youth Delegates could formally connect, and to gather inspiration for a potential ESDN Youth Network, as well as to avoid duplicating structures.

Part A of this concept note provides an overview of the current situation of UN Youth Delegates in Europe with regards to their networking activities between each other and their interactions with policymakers and other decisionmakers. Chapter 1 summarises the findings from interviews that the Office conducted with UN Youth Delegates in autumn 2021 and lists the UN Youth Delegates programmes in Europe. Chapter 2 provides an overview of existing Youth networks in the realm of Sustainable Development in Europe. The conclusions on the interviews lead to Part B.

Part B focuses on the ESDN Office's concept proposal for a permanent ESDN Youth Network as a part of the ESDN. Chapter 3 outlines the vision and functions of the network while Chapter 4 describes the potential activities. Chapter 5 contains some final thoughts and additional considerations.

CHAPTER 1

INTERVIEW WITH UN YOUTH DELEGATES

Background

The UN Youth Delegate Programme is run by the UN Department on Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and it gives countries the opportunity to include Youth Representatives into their delegations at high-level meetings at the UN. By far not all UN Member States have a UN Youth Delegate Programme and neither do all countries in the EU (see overview below). In addition, structure and scope are different from country to country. While some designate one or two Youth Delegates for the UN General Assembly, others select many more Youth Representatives who are responsible for certain topics, such as sustainable development, biodiversity, climate, gender equality, security, and many more. Since most conferences and meetings have been conducted online in the past two years, Youth Delegates have had the opportunity to attend more meetings, including those that were not specifically in their mandate. Usually, a mandate lasts between one and two years.

Almost all of the Youth Delegates who the Office interviewed reported that they had been engaged in volunteering activities in Youth organisations before their mandate. Several of them were

active in the Boy or Girl Scouts, which is also where they came into contact with sustainability issues for the first time. Others were engaged in the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) or local or national organisations working on climate, biodiversity, education, sustainability and Youth engagement. Even though the Youth Delegates come from a varied background, their motivation for their mandate is very similar. The overarching goal is to promote Youth participation in sustainable development and in (international) politics, in general. One Youth Delegate wants to highlight the issues of Youth in rural areas and show young people from rural areas that their voices matter, too.

Throughout their mandates, Youth Delegates engage in a variety of activities. Often, their only official task is to represent their country's Youth at one or several UN-level conferences. Usually, they are also asked to meet with the Youth of their country to gather inputs that they can then bring to the UN or international or national level policymakers. They are free to undertake other activities at their own initiative. As Youth Delegates are usually highly motivated individuals with experience in

volunteering and advocacy work, they engage in a variety of activities.

This depends on the length of their mandate and the means that are available to them. The Youth Delegates that were interviewed engaged in the following activities:

- Organising and connecting Youth organisations in the country;
- Events to meet Youth of the country, both to hear their concerns and to motivate them to become active for sustainable development, such as by visiting schools and universities;
- Establishing structures for more Youth participation in policy-making (for sustainable development and in general) in their country;
- Speaking at the UN (UN General Assembly (UNGA), UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, ...) and providing inputs to speeches given by other country Representatives;
- Giving inputs on strategies and policies, (sometimes on their own

initiative and sometimes they are asked for their inputs by policymakers; and

- Commenting on new laws or policies and informing young people about them.

Networking

There is no formal platform for UN Youth Delegates to connect with one another. In the interviews, most of them mentioned that the main way to connect are several informal and self-administrated WhatsApp Groups. In addition, there are Google Docs that contain lists and the contact details of UN Youth Delegates. These are self-maintained and therefore not always up-to-date. In addition, not all Youth Delegates have access to them from the beginning of their mandate. This is often the case in smaller countries with only one Delegate. If their predecessor did not pass on access, they need to find them on their own, which can be tedious. One Youth representative from a smaller country reported that she researched and emailed Youth Delegates country by country in order to make contacts. This is how she was eventually invited to the relevant WhatsApp groups.

The extent to which UN Youth Delegates are connected to each other varies substantially. Youth Delegates from larger countries are generally better connected than those from smaller countries. It seems that it is easier to network when there are two Delegates in their country and when the mandate lasts longer than just one year. It is made even easier when there is a rolling system, where there is always one junior and one senior Youth Delegate, such as in Sweden and Germany.

Two of the interviewees were no UN Youth Delegates. The Irish participant was from the largest national Youth organisation for sustainable development in Ireland, ECO-UNESCO and the Finnish workshop participant was a member of the 2030 Youth Group. Neither of them had connections to other Youth in Europe through their role in their organisation.

Youth Delegates use the existing means to network for a variety of topics. Often, it is events-based. This means they plan side-events for the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) or the UN General assembly (UNGA) together. In addition, WhatsApp Groups are used for advice on different issues and to inform each other about events and other ongoing

activities. One Youth Delegate said that she found it very helpful to ask questions on these groups, as there are usually more Delegates with the same problem and through exchanging ideas and, thanks to advice from other members of the group, they are often able to find a solution.

The most frequently mentioned benefit of networking is the exchange of experiences and knowledge. It helps prevent the loss of knowledge and experience when the mandate changes from one generation to the next. Important information that is passed on through the groups is often logistical or procedural, for example about interesting events or activities currently going on and whom to contact, where, and for which activities. In addition, Youth Delegates work together to plan events and activities.

Many of the interviewees expressed a desire to work together more frequently and in a more systematic way, to come up with ideas and to discuss ongoing Youth events, policies and activities at the national, European and international/UN level. All interviewees believed that when they are more connected, Youth could be more powerful in bringing about change.

The institutional side does not provide much support for Youth Delegates to connect with each other. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs does not provide any forum or even a contact list of all sitting UN Youth Delegates. The European Youth Forum is the main umbrella organisation of Youth organisations in Europe. It used to run a workshop for all UN Youth Delegates in Europe in preparation for the HLPF and the UNGA. However, this workshop was last held in 2018. Youth Delegates are in contact with the European Youth Forum to re-establish such a workshop.

UN Youth Delegates to the UNGA have reported that a representative of the EU Delegation to the United Nations provides them with information about ongoing events and with contacts to other Youth Delegates. Those who were able to go to New York in 2021 met with the EU Delegation to discuss future collaboration. So far, however, this seems to only have happened at the UNGA and is very focused on activities at UN level.

It is important to note that all UN Youth Delegates interviewed were only in office during the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore most of them were not able to meet their peers in person. Many

expressed a wish to meet in person and those who were able to meet in person emphasised the improved communication afterwards. The opportunities for networking before the pandemic were therefore different.

Engagement with Policymakers

One of the main tasks of UN Youth Delegates is to be a part of their country's delegation at high-level UN meetings. In this role, they cooperate with other members of their delegation. Most of them expressed that this cooperation is often very productive and helpful. They are informed about ongoing processes and are treated as equal members of the delegation. Only one of the interviewed Youth Delegates (from Slovenia) went to New York City, while the rest were attending meetings virtually.

When it comes to involvement in national political processes, the level of engagement differs widely. Most of the Youth Delegates that were interviewed are not involved in political and decision-making processes in their countries at all. Usually, they are not invited to participate in the process. It is part of the mandate of the Finnish 2030 Youth Group to comment on certain

laws or strategies, but this happens more towards the end of the process. Some of the Youth Delegates have been involved in policy processes before, but this was often due to other positions and organisations that they were involved in before their mandate as a Youth Delegate. All interviewees stated that they found Youth involvement in their country insufficient.

The challenges that Youth Delegates and Youth Representatives face in general when it comes to involvement in decision-making processes roughly fall into two categories: access to the process and access to information, expertise and knowledge.

Having access to the policy process is key to having an impact. However, many of the Youth Delegates stated that since they are not invited to participate, it is hard to know where and when they could become involved. One Youth Delegate said that she tried to keep up with policy processes, parliamentary debates, etc. in her country, but it was too much and too complex. This is exacerbated by the fact that Youth Delegates do their work voluntarily and on top of university and/or having a job. Youth Delegates are aware that it is crucial to be involved in a decision-

making process from the beginning, in order to be able to contribute substantially to its outcome. This is only possible, if Youth Delegates are invited from the beginning. However, another Youth Delegate suspected that most policymakers in her country did not even know that she and her role existed and therefore were not aware of the resources that she could provide. All of this speaks to a lack of formal and consistent structures for Youth involvement.

Another aspect frequently criticised is the danger of tokenism. This happens especially when Youth are only involved at the end of a process. Their involvement rather serves to tick the box of 'Youth involvement', rather than actually being interested in what the Youth have to say. Instead, many Youth Delegates have expressed that they want to be treated as equals in the process and be met on eye level. In addition, two Representatives remarked that Youth are only invited to the table when the topic explicitly revolves around Youth. However, many policy areas relate to the concerns of the Youth, such as climate, pensions, or labour markets. They want to be invited to discussions about these topics to ensure representation of the generation who will

bear most of the consequences of the decisions made.

Another issue related to accessibility is that of financial remuneration. One Youth representative remarked that at a table full of stakeholders and decision-makers, Youth Representatives are often the only ones that are not being paid to be there. This is an issue as Youth Delegates often juggle their voluntary mandate with school or university and sometimes even a part-time job. According to the interview partner, remuneration for their time and effort would show Youth Representatives that their inputs are valuable and facilitate their attendance at, and preparation for, events.

In order to be able to participate in a policy- or decision-making process as an equal partner, Youth Representatives need access to information and knowledge. One Youth Delegate said that she often felt insecure in these spaces, as she felt that she did not know enough about the topics being discussed and all other participants seemed to be experts. Similarly, others mentioned being overwhelmed by the complexity of the topics. Several interviewees claimed that they were not given much information before

meetings at the UN and this made it difficult to participate. At the discussion at ReGeneration week, one Youth Delegate told about her experience of not being able to follow meetings at the beginning of her mandate because everyone else was using so many abbreviations that it did not make sense to her. On the other hand, another Youth Delegate reported a positive experience before one meeting at the UN where her country representative called her and explained everything that was going to happen and what her role would be.

In non-transparent processes, Youth Representatives (and other stakeholders) often do not know what happens with their proposals. This is especially frustrating when it is unclear why certain proposals by Youth Representatives have not been taken up. Many interviewees expressed the wish to be informed about the feasibility of their proposals and how policymakers work with them.

Conclusions on Interviews

Youth Delegates and other Youth Representatives are usually highly motivated and passionate young people who are willing to put in a lot of

effort to make a change in the world. However, they are lacking the support and the network to work effectively. They want to participate in policy processes and want their voices and opinions not only to be heard, but also implemented. However, it is often the case that they neither know when to become involved, how to become involved, nor what the best strategies for involvement would be. A more formalised network in Europe could help newly designated Youth Delegates to quickly connect with their peers and benefit from the experiences of those who have been in the role for a longer time. In addition, a more structured network could help Youth Delegates to organise common campaigns and lobby more effectively for causes that they care about. They would also benefit from more in-depth and insider knowledge about how policy processes work.

Overview of Youth Delegate Programmes in Europe

UN Youth Delegate Programmes have a very different structure in each European country and not every country has such a programme. There is no homogeneity on the number of Youth Delegates per country, their role or the duration of their mandate. The following table shows an overview of Youth Delegate Programmes in most European countries.

Youth Delegates Programmes

| Country | Role and number | Duration |
|----------------|--|------------------|
| Austria | 1 UN Youth Delegate | 1 year |
| Belgium | 2 Youth Delegates for Sustainable Development | |
| Bulgaria | 1 UN Youth Delegate | |
| Czech Republic | 2 UN Youth Delegates | |
| Croatia | Youth Delegate Programme exists, active Youth Council | |
| Cyprus | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Denmark | 8 Youth Delegates overall, 2 each for Equality and SRHR, Climate and Environment, Democracy and Partnerships, Technical and Vocational Education | |
| Estonia | 1 UN Youth Delegate | 1.5 years |
| Finland | UN Youth Delegates for Climate, EcoSoc etc., For Sustainable Development: 2030 Youth Group | |
| France | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Germany | 2 UN Youth Delegates to the UNGA, 2 UN Youth Delegates for Sustainable Development | 2 years, rolling |
| Greece | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Hungary | 1 UN Youth Delegate | |
| Ireland | 1 UN Youth Delegate | 1 year |
| Iceland | 1 UN Youth Delegate for Human Rights | |
| Italy | 2 UN Youth Delegates | 1 year |
| Latvia | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Lithuania | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Luxembourg | 2 UN Youth Delegates | 1 year |
| Malta | 2 UN Youth Delegates | 2 years |
| Netherlands | 2 UN Youth Delegates for Sustainable Development | |
| Norway | 1 UN Youth Delegate for Sustainable Development | 1 year |
| Poland | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Portugal | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Romania | 2 UN Youth Delegates | 2 years |
| Slovakia | 2 Un Youth Delegates | 1 year |
| Slovenia | 1 UN Youth Delegate | 1 year |
| Spain | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |
| Sweden | 2 UN Youth Delegates to the HLPF | 2 years, rolling |
| Switzerland | 3 UN Youth Delegates | 2 years |
| UK | <i>No Youth Delegate Programme found</i> | |

CHAPTER 2

RELEVANT YOUTH ORGANISATIONS IN EUROPE

The following overview provides a sample of **big youth organisations that operate on the European level**. They are divided into the subcategories of general networks, networks focused on biodiversity and climate, university networks and a sample of organisations with a regional focus

General:

- European Youth Forum
- World Scouting
- European Economic and Social Committee – Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Table

Climate & Environment

- YOUNGO/ Conference of Youth (COY)
- Generation Climate Europe
- Youth and Environment Europe (YEE)
- Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN Youth)

University Networks

- Aurora
- Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEEGEE)

Regional Networks

- Nordic Youth in Sustainable Communities
- ReGeneration 2030
- Visegrad for Sustainability

General

European Youth Forum

Description: The European Youth Forum is the platform for Youth organisations in Europe, among them many national Youth councils. Focus areas are Youth rights, sustainable development, democracy and young people and Youth organisations.

Type of Organisation:

Umbrella Organisation

Members / Target Groups: Over 100 Youth organisations and outreach to over 25 million young people, including Youth councils, Youth organisations of parties, Scouts and others

Main/relevant activities:

- Report on a sustainable way out of the crisis
- Monitoring activities regarding sustainable development
- Used to hold a training for Youth Delegates before the HLPF (last time in 2019)

World Scouting

Description: International organisation of scouts and girl guides. Provides young people with opportunities to participate in programmes, events and activities to become active citizens.

Type of Organisation: Youth organisation with national and regional chapters

Members / Target Groups: Young people, can be gender separated

Main/relevant activities:

- Educate about the SDGs
- Many scout groups have initiatives pertaining to the SDGs

European Economic and Social Committee – Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Table

Description: Bringing together Youth climate activists and Representatives of Youth groups with the European Economic and Social Committee members and Representatives of the European Commission

Type of Organisation:

Activity by European Union

Members / Target Groups:

Youth activists and Representatives

Main/relevant activities:

- Youth Representatives formulate statements and demands and bring them forward to the European Commission. Representatives of the European Commission directly answer to these demands, explain why they have made certain decisions and why demands are feasible or not.

Climate & Environment

YOUNGO/ Conference of Youth (COY)

Description: YOUNGO is the official children and Youth constituency of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The four major components of the Conference of Youth are: Policy Document; Capacity Building; Skill-building Workshops; and Cultural Exchange.

Type of Organisation:

Part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Members / Target Groups:

Youth activists and representatives in the field of climate action

Main/relevant activities:

- Global COY (GCOY) is the biggest and most substantial Youth conference related to the multilateral UN climate processes. It is the official gathering of YOUNGO members and all interested Youth and it happens a couple of days before the annual Conference of the Parties (COP)
- Regional COYs (RCOY) and Local COYs (LCOY) are organized prior to the GCOY across the world, in order to localize the climate conversation and gather more inputs from the ground.

Generation Climate Europe

Description: Largest coalition of youth-led networks around climate and environmental issues in Europe, focus on advocacy and empowerment. Structured around thematic working groups, eg. on sustainable development and circular economy

Type of Organisation:

Umbrella Organisation

Members / Target Groups:

Coalition of Youth-led networks pushing for action on climate and environmental issues

Main/relevant activities:

- Facilitate internal coordination and collaboration between Member Organisations
- Empower young people to meaningfully engage in EU decision-making processes on climate, environmental and sustainability issues
- Advocate for stronger action on environment and climate by and in the European Union that proactively and regularly includes the voices of young people

Youth and Environment Europe (YEE)

Description: European Network of environmental Youth organisations and a member of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the European Youth Forum.

Type of Organisation:

Network of Youth organisations, umbrella organisation

Members / Target Groups:

42 member organisations from 25 countries

Main/relevant activities:

- YEE organises, facilitates and supports projects and campaigns aiming to increase the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the environment and the awareness of climate issues among young people in Europe

Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN Youth)

Description: The SDSN is an organisation working closely with UN organisations providing scientific and technical solutions for the implementation of the SDGs and achievement of the Paris Climate Account. SDSN Youth provides

training and resources to enable young people around the world to drive change. SDSN Youth provides a very wide range of initiatives with a focus on education advocacy, sustainable cities and entrepreneurship

Type of Organisation:

Network of Youth leaders

Members / Target Groups:

Umbrella network, members: organisations, research institutions, universities

Main/relevant activities:

- Provides trainings and resources to young people, tapping into the SDSN network of academics and professionals in the field of sustainable development,
- Coordinates programs for young people, such as SDG Students Program, Solutions Program, Local Pathways Fellowship.
- Mobilises local youth towards achieving the SDGs through regional/national networks

University Networks

Aurora

Description: University Network Platform of 9 European Universities. The mission is to match world-class academic research with societal engagement and impact. The key themes are diversity and inclusions, societal impact and relevance of research, students and innovation in teaching and learning.

Type of Organisation:

Network of universities

Members / Target Groups:

Members from all levels: rectorate, administration, researchers and students. Students are highly encouraged to participate

Main/relevant activities:

- Project: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Analysis: Bibliometrics of relevance: Dashboard which demonstrates societal relevance and impact of research of the member universities
- Student Schemes: programmes for students to get involved in Aurora projects

Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEEGEE)

Description: European-wide interdisciplinary student organisation. The goal is to empower students and young people in Europe to take an active role in society. Creating a space for dialogue and learning opportunities and acting as representative for young people towards decision makers. Thematic focus areas from 2020-2023 are the climate emergency, mental health, political activism and social equity

Type of Organisation:

Network of university students

Members / Target Groups:

Open to students and young people from all faculties and disciplines

Main/relevant activities:

- Gathers the opinions of European students and represents them towards stakeholders through campaigns, lobby actions, conferences and membership in bigger advocacy platforms.
- Local and international thematic projects developed by members of the network

Regional Networks

Nordic Youth in Sustainable Communities

Description: Aims to create sustainable communities and stronger links between young people across the Nordic region. Annual training for Youth groups and a pool for funding for projects conducted by associations and individuals.

Type of Organisation: Project by Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordic Youth councils

Members / Target Groups:

Youth organisations and self-organised Youth in the Nordic countries

Main/relevant activities:

- Annual Youth training with lectures, workshops, discussions about how to build sustainable communities in the Nordics

ReGeneration 2030

Description: Focus on SDG 12, sustainable production and consumption, aims to connect Youth in the Baltic and Nordic Regions to give young people a voice in the transition processes.

Type of Organisation:

Umbrella Organisation, loose network of individuals, financed by a Foundation

Members / Target Groups:

Youth and organisations primarily from the Nordic and Baltic Sea Region

Main/relevant activities:

- Annual ReGeneration week, a meeting to discuss sustainability issues and find exchange experiences

Visegrad for Sustainability

Description: Collaboration between Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Type of Organisation:

Network of individuals

Members / Target Groups:

Young professionals and young people in the Visegrad region

Main/relevant activities:

- Sustainability Exchange in capital cities to strengthen dialogue and partnerships
- Vision for a sustainable region and advocacy

Conclusions on Research

Most pan-European Youth organisations are umbrella organisations for certain topics, or, in the case of the European Youth Forum, of national Youth Councils. Especially the climate and biodiversity movement(s) are very well connected. However, there is no umbrella or pan-European organisation for sustainable development.

In addition, it is important to note that many Youth Delegates are or were active in other Youth organisations, which is how they found out about the opportunity of the Youth Delegate Programme in the first place. These may be national or trans-national movements (for example the Scouts). However, there is no organisation that offers a platform specifically to Youth Delegates. Even if there are organisations that allow individuals to learn about specific topics, there is no structured opportunity for Youth Delegates to exchange and work together on the very specific challenges that their mandate poses.

An ESDN Youth Network could fill this gap by providing space to exchange and gain information about their particular role. There are many opportunities to work on

single issues and themes on the European level, but no place to learn about processes and strategies to get involved into policy making as Un Youth Delegates. Therefore, the focus of an ESDN Youth network should rather be on learning about processes and about interaction with policy makers.

This report would like to highlight two interesting examples for intergenerational dialogue and exchange with policy makers: the ReGeneration Week and the EESC Roundtable (mentioned on p. 18 and p. 14, respectively).

An interesting feature of **ReGeneration Week** is the intergenerational dialogue. It is set up as a dialogue meeting, not where Youth create demands and tell them to senior decision makers, but rather a format where both sides get to exchange their positions on a question on equal terms. This is a way to build trust and understanding that is not achievable when Youth are always the ones asking or demanding things.

The **European Economic and Social Committee Roundtable** invites Youth representatives (often representatives of umbrella organisations) and European level policymakers. The Youth

representatives prepare demands and statements together (and in collaboration with their organisations) and bring them to the policymakers. Policymakers have the opportunity to read the demands before the meeting and can give detailed feedback, explaining what will be taken up, what is already in process, where youth representatives could get involved and which demands are unfeasible and why. This creates an atmosphere of eye-level exchange and provides Youth representatives with direct feedback on their work, as well as with leads to where else they could get involved.

CHAPTER 3

ESDN YOUTH NETWORK: VISION & FUNCTIONS

The ESDN Office has developed a concept for the Youth Network based on the findings from the interviews and the desk research described above. In addition, discussions about youth involvement at the second ESDN Youth Workshop have been taken into consideration. The following sections will outline a vision, the proposed functions, structure and activities of the ESDN Youth Network. However, it is important to note that this Network would be established to meet the needs of Youth representatives and should always take their wishes and suggestions into account. Therefore, the following should only be considered as a first proposal, which should be developed and amended together with Youth representatives.

Vision

In five years, the ESDN Youth Network could be the most important (if not the only) European platform for new UN Youth Delegates and other Youth representatives in sustainable development to connect, meet policymakers and work on projects together. This will be developed through permanent exchange between current and former UN Youth Delegates and other

members. As there is currently no other platform that targets this specific group, the ESDN Youth Network can fill this niche.

In five years the ESDN Youth Network will also be a platform for policymakers and Youth to have meaningful and permanent exchange about different issues at an eyelevel. (SDG 17: institutionalisation, competence increase for youth representatives/delegates, more opportunities and impact, more awareness about the work of Youth representatives).

Functions of the Network

By establishing an ESDN Youth Network the ESDN should

- ❖ Provide a platform to network
- ❖ Support process/policy process experience and knowledge
- ❖ Help to acquire expertise

for the Youth. The following pages describe those functions.

Provide a platform to network

By establishing the ESDN Youth Network, the ESDN would provide a formalised and structured platform for UN Youth Delegates and other Youth representatives to get to know each other, exchange experiences and knowledge and plan and implement activities together. Coordinated activities or common demands by several European Youth Delegates could have more weight than that of only one country or a few delegates. In the interviews with different UN Youth Delegates, as well as the desk research, no such formal platform or organisation could be identified. This more formalised way of networking (as opposed to the informal exchange that is already happening through Chat-Groups and shared Documents) would particularly benefit UN Youth Delegates from smaller countries and delegates that are the sole representative of their countries. These representatives have reported that they struggle to exchange with their peers and find support in the case of challenges, as they are not as well connected as their peers in bigger countries with more resources.

In addition, the Network will provide a space for policymakers and Youth Representatives to connect and

exchange perspectives. This would be the unique selling point of the ESDN Youth Network. No other organisation can offer such direct and informal, eye-level exchange with high-level policymakers. It would allow Youth representatives to get to know the perspective of policymakers, the process that are involved in making sustainable development policy and create an understanding for the challenges that policymakers face. Policymakers will gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of Youth, and will gain new inspiration for cooperation and their work.

Support process/policy process experience and knowledge

Youth Delegates frequently identified a lack of knowledge about political and policy processes as a challenge for their work. They struggle with knowing when to get involved, how to get involved and identifying the most effective ways of making change in their country or on the international level. By providing an opportunity of formal and informal networking, the ESDN Youth Network would allow UNYDs to exchange their experience of conducting activities or overcoming challenges that other Delegates might also experience. In addition, they can address challenges together. By including

former UNYDs, the network will help to preserve and transfer this often informal knowledge. Former or more experienced UNYDs may also be able to support newer Delegates in other ways, such as providing contacts, event and activity templates or other.

Help to acquire expertise

Technical expertise about sustainable development topics represent another important tool for Youth representatives to facilitate their work. It would allow them to articulate demands more effectively and confidently. It will also help them follow and participate in meetings and consultations with policymakers and representatives of governments and international organisations.

Benefits for the ESDN

With intergenerational justice being a core principle of sustainable development, including the voices of the next generation in any work on sustainable development seems logical. Incorporating the perspective of Youth will improve the work of the ESDN in several ways.

Firstly, it will add to the credibility of the ESDN as it will highlight the ESDN's commitment to intergenerational justice and cooperation.

Secondly, youth involvement in regular ESDN events will enrich discussions and conversations at those events. For example, after the presentation of the Youth Manifesto at the ESDN Conference 2020 in Berlin, participants of the conference kept referring back to the themes and topics brought up by the Youth Delegates.

Thirdly, the ESDN Youth Network will give the individual members of the ESDN direct access to Youth Representatives, not only in their own country but also in all of Europe. This will enrich their perspectives on issues they are working on in their day-to-day work and hopefully inspire more Youth Involvement in national policymaking, too.

CHAPTER 4

ESDN YOUTH NETWORK: STRUCTURE & ACTIVITIES

Structure and Cooperation

The following pages outline the recommendations by the ESDN Office for the structure and activities of a future ESDN Youth Network. This includes the members, the interaction with the ESDN and the different forms of activities that the network could carry out. However, a core principle of the ESDN Youth Network should be to develop all activities, including the structure of the network, for and together with Youth. Therefore, this should only be seen as a first suggestion and can be adapted to the needs and wishes of the Youth delegates. It should be continuously assessed and adapted.

Members

The core target group of the ESDN Youth Network would be United Nations Youth Delegates for Sustainable Development. However, many countries do not have UNYDs specifically for Sustainable Development, in which case the network will invite other UN Youth Delegates. For countries without a UN Youth Delegate Programme, participation should be open to other Youth Representatives, for example representatives of the National Youth Council.

Members should be engaged in Youth Policy on a voluntary basis (this does not exclude those receiving some sort of compensation for their work, but it should not be a major source of income/a professional mandate).

When new UN Youth Delegates are appointed, the organising body of the Network needs to find out who they are, as most mandates last one or two years only. In addition to UN Youth Delegates and other Youth representatives that are currently holding an official position, the Network would also include former participants and would invite them to events (giving priority to current representatives in the case of limited capacity). This will support the networking effect and foster the transfer of knowledge from one generation of Youth representatives to the next (see above).

Topics covered

The programme and activities of the Network should be developed for and together with Youth. Below are suggestions for the types of activities. The topics discussed during these activities should be decided upon by the participants. For tighter cooperation and exchange between the ESDN and its Youth

Network, it could be useful to discuss similar topics to the ones being addressed at the main ESDN events in the same year. That way, Youth could meaningfully participate in those events and voice their thoughts in a more formalised way (for example as participants of a panel discussion). However, at the end this decision should lie with the participants. Similarly, ideas or suggestions for new or changed formats should be discussed with the Youth members of the Network.

While it is important to involve the Youth members in all decisions, their participation in the network should also not present a major time commitment in their already busy schedules. Therefore, the structure and implementation of the events and activities should be provided by the ESDN (Office). Youth involvement in the operations of the Youth Network should follow the rule 'as much as possible, as little as necessary'.

Interaction with the ESDN and Policymakers

Every Youth Network event should have space for at least formal exchange between ESDN and Youth members. If possible, Youth representatives could attend ESDN events and use informal

networking opportunities there. In addition, it is important that ESDN Members and particularly the Advisory Board are regularly involved in the ESDN Youth activities and participate in dialogue and exchange. The ESDN Office also suggests to set up a mentoring programme between ESDN Members and Youth representatives.

In order to avoid the issue of tokenism that was described above, it is important that there are strong mechanisms to include the outcomes of the work of the Youth network in the work of the ESDN. The Office suggests several mechanisms:

- Always reserve a space for members of the Youth Network at ESDN events. This way, they can directly present the results of their work to the ESDN.
- One Vice President of the Executive Committee should be responsible for bringing up Youth concerns regularly. This could also include suggestions by the Youth on which topics the ESDN should tackle.
- Distribute outcomes from Youth Network activities through all ESDN channels.

Participation in the Youth Network should not be a financial burden for Youth

representatives. Therefore, participation in physical events should be covered by the ESDN, in particular travel and accommodation. Ideally, in the future Youth representatives would also be compensated for their efforts.

Activities

As core activities of the ESDN Youth Network the authors of this study suggest to go on with the workshops similar to previous years and to add a mentoring programme and webinars.

Workshops

The workshops would be the key and headline activity of the ESDN Youth Network. They would represent the opportunity for the Youth representatives to get to know each other, work on topics together, network formally and informally and exchange experiences. At least once a year, a workshop should be held in person, as this strongly facilitates networking, especially on an informal basis. It will be easier for the Youth representatives to get to know each other on a personal level when they are able to meet in person.

While the members of the Youth network should be the ones to decide on the

topics they discuss, it could be useful to choose topics that are also relevant for the ESDN, for example the ESDN Conference or ESDN Workshop topic. This way, Youth representatives can participate at ESDN events and make meaningful and thought-out contributions.

The Youth workshops should serve two main purposes: firstly, they are the main opportunity for the Youth representatives to network. Secondly, they will gain knowledge and expertise on different sustainable development topics. While working on a contribution to an ESDN event or another output (manifesto, vision etc.) they will gain subject knowledge. In addition, by exchanging with the policymakers from the ESDN, they will also gain technical expertise about how their demands could be implemented and what would be the challenges.

Webinars

Webinars could take place 2-3 times a year and cover one specific, currently debated, topic. The topic could be suggested by the ESDN or its members or requested by the members of the Youth Network. It could cover topics such as upcoming high-level international meetings, the subject of new EU policies or

other current political developments. The webinars would be hosted by the ESDN. The presentations should be held by members of the ESDN who are experts on the specific topic or other civil servants.

Mentoring Programme

The Mentoring programme would directly connect individual Youth representatives and ESDN members. They would agree to enter a mentoring relationship for the duration of a year. The subject of the mentoring is open to individual needs and possibilities, but should in general revolve around the mentee's (Youth representative's) mandate and the projects he or she is conducting in their role as UNYDs or representatives. For example, the mentor could help the mentee prepare for their participation at international meetings, participating in national policy processes and consultations, or with leading campaigns in their country or internationally.

This will allow Youth representatives to increase their subject knowledge of the topics that they are working on, but more importantly, it will give them more insights into the technical aspects of policymaking. Especially when preparing meetings or policy initiatives together, the ESDN mentor can share their insider

knowledge of how different processes work and where it is most effective to participate and engage.

The ESDN will provide a framework and structure for the exchange, including potential questions, topics and the frequency and duration of meetings.

Before launching the Mentoring program in a full scale, the Network will first test it on a smaller scale.

CHAPTER 5

FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The focus of the ESDN Youth Network should always be to cater to the needs and requirements of the desired target group, which currently includes European UN Youth Delegates (for Sustainable Development) or other official Youth Representatives. In the future, other Youth networks or representatives could be included. However, there needs to be a balance between including as many engaged Youth as possible and maintaining a familiar atmosphere and smaller group size.

Prioritising the wishes and needs of Youth Delegates also means that the development of the Network is an iterative process. This concept presents a first suggestion, which should be discussed and further developed together with the Youth Delegates. In the future, if a certain activity or structure is no longer deemed valuable or functional by members of the Network, it needs to be changed. Similarly, if network members suggest a new activity and identify a new need, this should be discussed with the Network and the administrative entity should try to include it in the activities.

A second consideration concerns the financial and time resources of Youth Delegates. In order to allow participation (especially in physical events) for all Youth Delegates, (at least) travel to and accommodation at the workshop location should be covered by the ESDN. This is especially important as the ESDN should encourage sustainable travel, which can be the more expensive alternative.

The goal of the ESDN Youth Network is to support UN Youth Delegates and Youth representatives in their work and make them more effective advocates for Youth concerns in sustainable development. In addition, by including former Youth delegates, the network will hopefully provide a resource for engaged Youth beyond their mandate and as they enter their professional lives, likely in careers that are related to sustainable development.



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.