

INPUT FROM THE CONUN WORKING PARTY TO THE CONSULTATION PROCESS
ON A YOUTH ACTION PLAN IN EU EXTERNAL ACTION

At its meeting on 17 November 2021, CONUN was updated by the European Commission and External Action Service on the process leading to the elaboration of a Youth Action Plan in EU external action and invited to provide input to the process in its sphere of work.

This input is a summary of the contributions made by Member States at the meeting, as well as written answers received from Member States to the three guiding questions posed at CONUN.

What could be considered a successful Youth Action Plan? What would you like to see accomplished by 2027?

The Youth Action Plan (YAP) should promote a more youth-centred approach in EU external action and the meaningful participation of youth in all relevant processes along the full spectrum of EU external action.

The YAP should ensure that youth are not just heard but also considered. A successful YAP should address the gap between commitments and the actions being taken. The YAP should contribute to the achievement of the goals of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 by implementing an effective structure that would enable youth to be involved in a meaningful manner in national and international socio-political matters, in particular by engaging in the decision-making process.

The YAP should contribute to addressing the issues that youth is most concerned about, such as poverty, lack of access to medical services and quality education, unemployment, and obstacles to their political participation, aiming at results-oriented policy lines on these issues. Particular attention should be paid to the continuum education-training-employment. Specific attention should be given to the most marginalised groups of youth (Youth in conflicts, Youth in Poverty, Youth of Ethnic, Religious, Social and other Minority Groups, LGBTI Youth).

Youth should be given the possibility to choose the subjects on which they want to engage given their areas of interest and expertise. National or European programmes of voluntary/solidarity work, including South to North may help in empowering youth and ensuring meaningful participation of youth in society.

The YAP could also highlight the importance of dialogue with youth in third countries, with the aim of promoting European values, as per Art. 2 TEU.

By 2027, young people should be regularly consulted and included in key decision-making, and the EU regularly including youth representatives of diverse backgrounds at negotiations, within the EU and abroad. Youth dimensions should be mainstreamed across various sectors and thematic policies, such as health, security, research and development, education, climate change/environment, while promoting gender equality. The youth dimension and youth engagement should be taken into account in the ongoing discussion on the EU's Strategic Autonomy.

What are the main challenges today for more meaningful youth participation to the work of the United Nations? In addressing those challenges, where would EU action have the greatest impact?

There is a certain lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of youth participation in multilateral affairs. At the same time, youth may encounter a lack of information about how the multilateral system works.

Institutional and procedural rigidity hinder youth participation in decision-making processes. We need more innovative ways of cooperation and interaction that offer real and pragmatic opportunities for young people to engage in multilateral fora. A Youth Committee in the General Assembly or a UN Youth Convention could bring to the table concrete solutions in this regard.

Youth organisations often lack the resources or the platform to fully participate in and influence decision-making. The EU should invest in young people's capacities, leadership and agency. EU could contribute to ensuring that youth delegates receive information, training and support to enable them to participate "beyond tokenism". Inclusiveness should not simply be perceived as providing a platform for the voices of youth to be heard, but also by providing youth with an opportunity to contribute effectively towards the implementation of the UN agenda. Youth should not be just taking part in speeches and events, but also in actual negotiations.

Youth delegates often share some frustration for not being able to cover all subjects, nor to participate meaningfully in all debates, due to the lack of time and knowledge on certain subjects. A revamped EU portal for youth could be envisaged to provide access to relevant information.

An EU programme could help to cover the travel expenses of youth delegates from all regions to the UN or other multilateral fora. The EU could organise workshops where youth delegates and representatives of Member States may share best practices and lessons learned in order to constantly improve national and EU youth related programmes. The EU could extend and optimise the use of instruments such as Erasmus + and the European Solidarity Corps, in particular in conjunction with developing countries outside Europe. This would offer young people the opportunity to come into contact with and experience the reality and principles of the EU, many of which are largely related to the principles and objectives of the UN.

Another issue often highlighted by youth delegates is the lack of structure and consistency of the UN Youth Delegate Programme. Youth may perceive the UN as a faraway organisation, where youth related programmes and documents are not operational. Therefore, it is necessary to implement a more effective and structured programme that can ensure a higher level of youth involvement and engagement.

The UNSG's report Our Common Agenda provides substantial recommendations on youth. The EU and its Member States should foster concrete actions to implement those recommendations focusing on key deliverables that could be presented at the Summit on the Future Generations 2023.

Which should be the thematic priority areas of the Youth Action Plan? How can such Action Plan contribute to the attainment of the EU's multilateral priorities?

The YAP should have a set of priority areas related to the accomplishment of the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. Digitalisation, gender equality and the promotion of human rights and democratic values should also be among the specific priority areas of

the YAP. Other areas like civic engagement, voluntary work, international solidarity and social entrepreneurship, knowledge of other cultures and ways of living and thinking should also be considered. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of issues have re-emerged as pressing matters for young persons, such as access to education, health (especially mental health) and employment opportunities. The crosscutting issue of Youth/Marginalisation (double disadvantaging due to Youth & Poverty, Ethnic Background/Migration, LGBTI, etc.) should also be prioritised.

The plan should complement and strengthen both the EU and Member States' efforts in this regard. Prior consultation with the youth from each Member State could be envisaged. Moreover, the Plan should also consider topics from the Conference on the Future of Europe and from the Lisboa+21 Declaration.

We should encompass all these actions for the coming years, especially for the European Year of Youth 2022, which will surely have an echo in the UN, and Our Common Agenda launched by the UN Secretary General in September 2021.