



**YFJ Strategy Paper:**

**The European Youth Forum and the  
United Nations System: the way  
forward!**

Adopted by the Bureau

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*This policy document is by far not the first one produced by the European Youth Forum related to the UN since 2001. This strategy does not want to duplicate all past positions but aims to build on them to provide some clear guidelines for future development of YFJ relations with the UN.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

With 1.300 millions of young people now living in the world – the largest youth group in history - there has never been a better time to invest in Youth. However, failure to seize this opportunity to empower them more effectively to be active citizens could lead to widespread disillusionment and further social tensions.

These basic facts show the potential impact of decisions taken at the global level on the present and future living conditions of young people. The Millennium Development Goals and the World Programme of Action for Youth are the concrete references in the European Youth Forum's work with the United Nation System in the youth field (GA 0605-04).

To this end, good and productive co-operation between youth NGOs and the United Nations System is a requirement for both parties engaged in the work to improve the situation of young people on the global level (COMEM 0719-01). This cooperation has great room for improvement.

## **2. BASIS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE YFJ AND THE UN**

### **a. Legal basis**

The YFJ enjoys Consultative Status at the Economic and Social Committee of the UN (ECOSOC) since 1996. This legal basis allows the YFJ to be recognised in various Agencies and Programmes of the United Nations as an important stakeholder representing the European youth sector of the civil society (COMEM 0070-02, GA 0605-04, Bureau 0171-06a, Bureau 0171-06b). Further, the YFJ has official working relations with UNESCO.

## **b. Policies**

The YFJ believes in the cooperation of youth organisations in different regions of the world. As the representative platform in Europe, the YFJ advocates for the interests of its entire membership, while raising awareness on issues of global concern. Therefore, the outreach of the YFJ beyond the borders of Europe should be coordinated with all the relevant actors through effective and credible mechanisms of cooperation, such as the Global Cooperation Coordination Committee (GCCC) and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO), and promoting Member Organisations' involvement in participation programmes at the UN level (GA 0605-04, GA 0667-06, GA 0544-06). When producing policy statements, these would be done in cooperation with ICMYO.

## **3. CRITERIA FOR GLOBAL YOUTH COOPERATION**

In order to guarantee the legitimacy of political inputs on youth issues at the institutional level) the YFJ chooses its youth partners in democratic processes at the global level according to the following principles:

*Internal democratic processes; bottom-up approach; accountability and transparency; legitimacy and credibility; constructive and positive common goals; effectiveness and efficiency impacts; sustainability for global cooperation; respectful of cultural and ideological diversity, as well as human rights.*

This is not an obstacle for the YFJ's recognition of the expertise of researchers and other actors in the youth field but sets the clear precondition that political input on behalf of youth should be coordinated and put forward by democratic youth-led structures only.

When working with networks and other structures without clear democratic processes it is important that the YFJ stresses the importance of and supports the up-building of democratic decision-making processes within these structures.

## 4. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

### a. Prioritisation of youth in the UN Agenda

Youth issues gained some important visibility spaces in the past years at the UN, for example with two reports on Youth in 2007: "Development and the Next Generation" (World Bank) and the "World Youth Report 2007" (UN), but they still need to receive appropriate prioritisation in the system, and the topics of future reports should be consulted with young people in advance. The main attempts to put youth higher on the global agenda, made by the former president of the World Bank James Wolfensohn, through the *Youth Development and Peace* initiative, and by the former Secretary General of the UN Kofi Annan, with the *Youth Employment Network*, lost the momentum and the political backing reached between 2002 and 2004.

This trend is surprising and worrying, taking into consideration that the youth cohort represents 18% of world population and that in some continents such as Africa, young people below 30 years of age are the majority of the citizens. Young people play a key role or are affected directly in all the major issues which are at the stake globally today: employment, conflicts, migrations, democratic participation, climate change and environmental hazards, are just few examples of the scope of the importance of "youth matters" which is currently understated in the global political arena.

***✓A coordinated effort by youth organisations is needed to advocate for a higher political profile of youth issues as a central keystone of the main headlines of the agenda of global decision-makers.***

### b. The organisation of youth affairs within the UN System

The low profile of youth issues within the UN system is reflected, as a consequence, in the organisational matters. The current *Focal Point* within the United Nations system on matters relating to youth issues is the Programme on Youth, in the Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

It is important to recall the challenges that the YFJ and its partners currently face in working with this *Focal Point* because of:

- lack of financial and human resources;
- lack of support by the UN system and the national governments;
- lack of results regarding the actual implementation of policies;
- lack of follow-up and monitoring as well as limited multiplier-effect.

The past years saw as well a multiplication of “youth” focuses in various *UN Agencies* with the abandon of the existing coordinating mechanisms, such as the World Ministerial Conferences and the World Youth Forum. More than 20 Agencies, Departments and Specialised Organisations have currently specific initiatives and programmes targeted at youth. Those parallel trends risk jeopardising the impact of the youth policies at the UN.

***✓A coordinated effort by youth organisations is needed to advocate for increased coherence in the youth field at the UN following the principles of the UN Reform “Delivery as one” which is backed by the UN Secretary General. The UN must make such coordination on the national level possible in developing countries that are pilot countries of the “One UN” Reform.***

*Taking into account this context, the interaction between YFJ and the UN system can be divided in two levels:*

- Influencing the political decision-making*
- Influencing the implementation of policies*

## **5. INFLUENCING THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING**

### **a. Delivering as one and at the same time show the diversity of Youth Organisations**

- The YFJ cannot act in isolation towards the UN system and cannot aim to represent alone the organised youth of the world, this would be against the mandate and the principles of the organisation.

- The International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO) proved to be the right tool as a space for coordination, for sharing and building the capacities of youth organisations from various continents and for increasing their participation to a global process. In ICMYO youth organisations can discover where they have common priorities in the global cooperation and make common strategies towards different UN institutions, at the same time leaving space for different fractions to have different political priorities.

- The YFJ should encourage a stronger ICMYO to allow the appropriate level of coordination and ensure a full representation of the different voices of youth movements around the world. In order to fulfil this goal, this coordination needs the appropriate financial support to act as true multiplier and facilitator (i.e. resources for regular meetings, support youth representation from all over the world, a permanent coordination office close to the UN HQ). YFJ cannot provide all these needed resources but can facilitate contacts with potential funders and MOs interested to contribute.

## **b. Delivering as one at the global decision-making level**

- It is important to build on the capacity of the ICMYO and of the National Youth Councils in order to lobby together as a global coalition of youth organisations to establish a Coordination Mechanism on Youth of the UN.

- The main interlocutor at the UN Secretariat identified to this end is the Cabinet of the Secretary General in its function of Chair of the “UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination”. The action with the Board of Coordination can eventually strengthen the Youth Focal Point as well.

- A full proposal for an operational coordination of youth affairs at the UN System should be discussed together with the other partners in ICMYO. However, the YFJ highlights the importance to involve the following actors in this coordination:

- Participants to the ICMYO (following the criteria for global cooperation);
- Representatives from all UN Agencies dealing with youth issues;
- Representatives of Member States, including Youth Delegates

- The coordination of youth affairs at the UN should take into consideration the current re-structuring reform of the Institution (Delivery as one) and the existing tools for youth participation such as the Global Youth Advisory Panel of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the experts meetings of the UN, the UN Youth Delegates programmes of the Member States, etc. Further, it should take inspiration from the best practice of advocacy made for the Gender Architecture Reform.

### **c. Delivering as one at national level**

- The YFJ supports its MOs, in particular National Youth Councils (NYCs), to have an influential role on the decision-makers of Member States on keeping their commitments in youth matters at the UN level. NYCs can play a key role in partnership with ICMYO in lobbying Governments for a strong coordination of youth affairs at the UN.
- The YFJ supports the key role of NYCs in the official delegations of the Member States and promotes NYC representatives to the UN GA and all the spaces (UN meetings, conferences, commissions) relevant for youth. Through the GCCC the YFJ will aim for more youth delegates from developing countries.
- YFJ promotes the involvement of its MOs, in particular NYCs, in actions aimed to increase the national coordination of the youth-related UN agencies/offices/programmes (i.e. UNESCO National Commissions, UNICEF, etc.).

## **6. INFLUENCE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES**

The YFJ is, over the period 2007–2012 (GA 0544-06), pursuing its work with a focus on five priority areas of action.

- Education

- Participation and Youth Policy Mainstreaming
- Youth Work Development
- Human Rights
- Employment and Social Affairs

The geographical scope of the policy and advocacy work under those areas is Europe, even though there are links with the work with the YFJ partners in the other continents and most of the issues have a global dimension as well.

Further, the United Nations System is not only organised globally, but has a regional infrastructure which is present in Europe as well. As a pan-continental youth platform, the YFJ can benefit from working regionally with the UN System, in particular agencies and specialised organisations, in the frame of the priority areas of action. In this frame, the YFJ should expand cooperation with the UN at the regional level for a better implementation of its work priorities, along the following guidelines:

a) *Strengthen capacity of youth organisations on the field:* UN agencies and programmes are important actors in the youth field in certain regions in Europe which are priority for youth work development, such as South East Europe, Caucasus and the Russian Federation. The YFJ should increase support and facilitation of contacts on the field between UN System and youth organisations.

b) *Implementation of YFJ adopted policies:* Recent policy papers adopted by the Council of Members, foresee closer cooperation with UN agencies/organisations (i.e. IOM, UNFPA, WHO, UNCHR, etc) in the implementation phase. For other specialised organisations, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, there are already specific policies adopted by the YFJ (COMEM 0070-02, Bureau 0172-06a, Bureau 0172-06b).

c) *Synergies between the UN System, the EU and the Council of Europe in the Youth Field:* The YFJ should promote synergies between the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe where this can be an added value for youth organisations in terms of human and financial resources and to advance on youth policy development. Concrete example is the forthcoming joint study WB/EU on the impact of Non-Formal Education in Europe and Central Asia.

In the frame of the cooperation with other regions of the world, the YFJ can promote contacts with UN programmes and agencies on the field, but the leading coordination of those partnerships should be made by its respective regional partners, following the principles of ownership and equality.



## 7. INVOLVEMENT OF YFJ MOS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

This strategy will be implemented by the YFJ with close involvement of its Member Organisations. In particular, as foreseen by the internal restructuring proposal of the YFJ, the Coordination and Advocacy for the UN should foresee:

- a) Coordination meetings for youth delegates before the UNGA and before the relevant Commissions of the UN System, together with the ICMYO Task Force, and open to other ICMYO members;
- b) Coordination with other regional youth platforms and INGYOs in ICMYO to follow global processes;
- c) Coordination with NYCs and party political youth organisations in order to reach different governments.

### REFERENCES: YFJ POLICY DOCUMENTS

COMEM 0719-01, *An additional mechanism for co-operation between NGOs and the United Nations;*

COMEM 0070-02, *European Youth Forum Position Paper on The United Nations' Youth Employment Initiative;*

GA 0723-02, *European Youth Forum Policy Paper on Youth Participation at the Global level;*

COMEM 0912-02, *European Youth Forum Resolution, Youth issues in danger at the United Nations;*

COMEM 0715-03, *Position paper on youth responses to global issues – consultative practices;*

GA 0605-04, *Policy Paper « A Youth Vision for Co-operation and Development - principles and institutional relations »;*

Bureau 0171-06a, *Strategy paper on developing cooperation between the European Youth Forum and UNICEF;*

Bureau 0172-06b, *Strategy paper on developing cooperation between the European Youth Forum and the UNESCO Joint Programmatic Commission;*

GA 0667-06, *Policy Paper on UN and Global Youth Work Development;*

GA 0544-06, *Strategic Priorities of the European Youth Forum 2007-2012.*