

Working Group 3

CHALLENGES OF MEANINGFUL MRS YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Discussion paper

prepared for the Second Macro-Regional Citizen Agora

Brussels, 17 December 2024

A. BACKGROUND AND STATE OF PLAY

In her State of the Union address on 15 September 2021 European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that 2022 will be dedicated to youth highlighting the EU's commitment to placing young people at the centre of the European recovery efforts after COVID-19. This was also the time when activities and consultations of the Conference on the future of Europe were held with special attention to empower young people to shape their future.

The European Year of Youth 2022 served as a catalyst for highlighting the importance to address issues of primary concern for young people, such as climate change, education or employment opportunities and strengthening the role of young people in EU policy-making.

In the Mission Letter to the Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport it is stated that annual Youth Policy Dialogues will be organised, the first of which should take place within the first 100 days of the newly approved European Commission. We believe that stakeholders of the macro-regional strategies, especially civil society organisations and youth should be involved and actively participate in this process.

B. MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The EU's macro-regional strategies (MRSs) have also taken steps to engage young people in their respective macro-regions. However youth involvement in the four MRSs greatly varies in scope and intensity.

Today there are established Youth Councils in three of the four MRSs (Alpine, Danube and Adriatic-Ionian). In the EUSBSR there is no „officially” recognised youth council but there are various structures such as the Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Youth Forum or the Nordic Baltic Youth Summit giving space to young people of the region.

Besides Youth Councils there are other initiatives, structures and programmes to ensure that the voice of young people are taken into consideration:

- **EUSBSR** - The Baltic Sea Youth Camp was organised for the first time in 2019 to increase the involvement of young people in Baltic Sea Region politics. Ever since it developed youth input to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The camp includes workshops and capacity-building activities to improve regional cooperation.

- **EUSDR** – There are two distinct youth-related structures in the EUSDR: the Danube Youth Council (DYC) and the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON). The DYC represents individuals, the DYON focuses on connecting youth organisations to reach a wider audience and promote community engagement. The establishment of the DYON was endorsed by EUSDR member countries in September 2024. The open network of youth organisations from the Danube Region aims to complement the work of the Danube Youth Council (DYC). DYON focuses on institutional outreach, facilitates collaboration, resource sharing, and the exchange of best practices among youth organisations.
- **EUSAIR** – The POPRI Initiative is an innovative initiative designed to transfer entrepreneurial knowledge to young people, equipping them with crucial soft skills and offering opportunities to enhance their abilities in digitalisation, innovation, adaptability, risk-taking. Starting in the Goriška region of Slovenia, EUSAIR POPRI Youth has grown into an international platform. It helps young people develop entrepreneurial skills and innovative business ideas over several months, supported by mentors and business institutions like technology parks and incubators. Participants gain valuable knowledge, linking school with the labor market and addressing brain drain by finding local opportunities.
- **EUSALP** – The Pitch your Project is a competition for young people between 16 and 29 years old living in the Alpine Region. They are to submit a project idea for a sustainable development of the Alpine Region individually or as a group. A jury selects the top 5 ideas from all submitted projects. The selection is based on relevance, feasibility and innovation potential. The five applicants or group applicants selected by the jury will have the opportunity to present their project, in English, in a five-minute pitch during an international EUSALP event where the audience vote directly on the five projects. The three best projects will receive prize money for the further implementation of their projects:

	EUSBSR (Baltic Sea Youth Forum)	EUSDR (Danube Youth Council)	EUSAIR (EUSAIR Youth Council)	EUSALP (Alpine Youth Council)
Recognised Youth Council		✓	✓	✓
Year of establishment		2022	2024	2020
Membership	individuals and representatives of youth organisations	individuals	individuals	individuals
Number of members		2 per country, 28 in total	2 per country, 20 in total	4 per country, 28 in total

	EUSBSR (Baltic Sea Youth Forum)	EUSDR (Danube Youth Council)	EUSAIR (EUSAIR Youth Council)	EUSALP (Alpine Youth Council)
Age group	16-29	18-29	18-29	18-29
Mandate		1 year renewable for another year	1 year renewable for another year	1 year renewable for another year
Members of the Youth Council receive official invitation to attend meetings of the MRS		✓	✓	✓
Other recognised youth structure(s)		Danube Youth Organisations Network		

C. COMMON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- **Challenges:**

- Lack of awareness and experience among young people about EU policy-making.
- Lack of systemic dissemination of information obtained in MSR policy-making bodies in youth constituencies (multiplier effect)
- Unprepared and/or non-consulted contributions by youth representatives in MRS policy-making bodies.
- Unequal access to resources and opportunities across macro-regions.

- **Opportunities:**

- Expand existing networks of youth organisations within the macro-regions.
- Enhance cooperation between youth organisations across the macro-regions.
- Share good practices through youth projects within and among macro-regions.
- Develop joint positions on MRS-related policy issues.

D. PROPOSALS, NEXT STEPS

Securing meaningful youth participation in EU macro-regional strategies requires a structured approach to inclusion, capacity building, and sustained engagement. Here are some key strategies:

1. Foster Capacity Building and Education

- **Workshops and Training:** Offer educational programmes, workshops, and training on EU policies and macro-regional governance to empower young people.

- **Mentorship Programmes:** Pair youth with experienced policy-makers for guidance and collaboration.
- **EU Awareness-Raising Campaigns:** Increase awareness of the macro-regional strategies through educational campaigns targeting schools, universities, and youth organisations.

2. Leverage Digital Platforms

- **Interactive Platforms:** Create accessible online platforms where youth can provide input, share ideas, and track the progress of initiatives.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Use social media to engage youth through targeted campaigns, polls, and live discussions.
- **Open Consultations:** Enable youth-friendly online consultations to gather feedback on strategic goals and actions.

3. Promote Local Engagement

- **Regional Hubs:** Establish local hubs to connect young people with MRS initiatives, fostering grassroots involvement.
- **Youth-Led Projects:** Encourage youth-led projects aligned with macro-regional priorities within and across macro-regions.
- **Engage Schools and Universities:** Involve educational institutions in macro-regional projects to inspire long-term interest.

4. Encourage Cross-Border and Other Activities

- **Regional Exchanges:** Facilitate cross-border exchange programmes to strengthen youth collaboration across macro-regions.
- **Joint Projects:** Support joint initiatives between youth organisations in different regions to address shared challenges.
- **Europe-level cooperation:** Organising the summit of various youth structures of the four macro-regions.

5. Celebrate Success Stories

- **Showcase Youth Impact:** Highlight examples of successful youth-led initiatives within MRS frameworks to inspire others.
- **Recognition Programmes:** Create awards or recognition schemes for outstanding youth contributions.

6. Provide Financial Support

- **Youth-Focused Grants:** Develop funding programmes aimed at youth organisations or initiatives supporting macro-regional goals.
- **Subsidised Participation:** Cover travel and accommodation costs for youth participation in events, ensuring inclusivity.

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4 December 2024

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