



Global Youth  
Biodiversity  
Network Europe

UNITED  
NATIONS  
YOUTH  
DELEGATE  
PROGRAMME

**RALLYING  
YOUTH VOICES  
FOR BIODIVERSITY**

# UN YOUTH DELEGATES FOR BIODIVERSITY

A tool for democratic and meaningful youth participation in  
the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity





# Why is it important to have UN Youth Delegates on biodiversity?

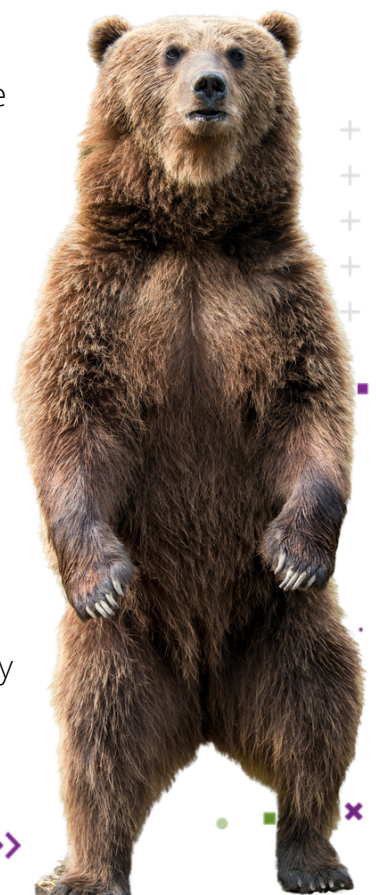
**Our world faces a huge environmental crisis**, encompassing the climate, biodiversity and health crises which are interlinked and equally urgent. **Young people recognise the urgency of our situation and are demanding transformative change and effective action to stop and reverse them.**

While the media gives a lot of attention to the climate crisis and the pandemic, **not many focus on the biodiversity crisis** and how we are in the world's 6th mass extinction event which threatens our life support systems. **Without healthy ecosystems, we lose access to clean air, clean water, food and so much more**

**The biodiversity crisis must be immediately tackled to ensure a sustainable future for our generation**, and for the ones yet to come. And because of this, young people across the world have been raising their voices to call for a real global change and to stop "business as usual".

However, despite the central importance of this crisis for the future of our generation, we have seen that **the majority of countries across the world have not been good enough at including youth** in the international multilateral fora where decisions regarding this crisis are being taken.

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), also known as the Biodiversity Convention, drives a global response to this global crisis. Here, **only very few countries have decided to fund and include Youth Delegates** in their national delegations. Other countries have a hybrid system, where governments are supporting youth to participate in CBD meetings in other ways. One should not exclude the other: countries can both create a UN Youth Delegate Programme to the CBD and support civil society youth to join the negotiations.





We think this is a problem, because the **decisions taken in the CBD will affect the future of our generation**, and therefore it is important that we as youth have a seat and a say at the table.



In order to change this trend, **we wish to see that countries represented in the CBD put in place UN Youth Delegate Programmes** to ensure that youth is meaningfully involved and have a voice both at the global negotiations on biodiversity and in the national processes leading up to it.



# What is a UN Youth Delegate?

Many countries offer a UN Youth Delegate programme. Differences may appear, as there is flexibility in the way such programmes can be implemented. In this section, we will introduce the core-elements of a successful UN Youth Delegate Programme, before presenting the features for which there is room for manoeuvre.



## 1 UN definition and guide<sup>1</sup>

According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, a UN Youth Delegate is **a young person, selected in a representative manner to participate in one or more multilateral processes as the representative of youth in a UN Member Country**, normally **as part of the national delegation**. UN Youth Delegates are often granted a mandate of at least a year, during which they work to integrate the voice of youth in the work of their national delegation. **The decision to create and fund a UN Youth Delegate programme is up to every country**. It displays a will to listen to and empower Youth, and it allows the delegation to benefit from their innovative and ambitious input.

## 2 Representation role

The role of a UN Youth Delegate is to **represent the voice of their generation**. To do so, they are **selected through a thorough process** organised by the national representative interest organisation for youth, often referred to as the Youth Council, or any other process, **which can guarantee representation**.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/what-we-do/youth-delegate-programme.html>

Some countries select their delegate by asking them to fill in an application form and to pass interviews in order to assess their abilities to speak in public, their knowledge of the political process and of policy content, as well as their intention to truly represent their peers. This is for example the case in French-speaking part of Belgium. Some other countries organise an election process where young people elect their delegate, such as in the case of Dutch-speaking Belgium. The candidate has to build up an action plan to carry out during the mandate, to **ensure that their participation truly reflects the views of the youth of their country**, but also to **inform other youth about the UN-processes**. No matter what the selection procedure is, it is important to conceive a **transparent and youth-led process** and avoid non-young people “cherry-picking”, who should represent the voice of youth.

The UN Youth Delegate represents their national youth by ensuring that there are processes in place that ensure that their mandate is representative. Examples of such processes could be to conduct consultations with youth of the country. This is important to ensure that Youth Delegates do not promote their personal political agenda, but **they represent the voice of youth**.

### 3 Being part of the national delegation

UN Youth Delegates should be an integral part of the national delegation of their country. Therefore, they should not be accredited to multilateral meetings as observers, but as country delegates (parties).

A UN Youth Delegate is a representative of the youth, and should therefore be allowed to **speak out the reality of their generation even if it is not in line with the national policy** of the government. They do not work for the government or its administration, and the Youth Delegate mandate is certainly not an internship. Youth should be included in the delegation’s general work, for example through attending meetings and informal negotiations as well as providing assistance in different matters they consider relevant. However, **their independence of thought and speech is essential**.



# 4

## Flexibility of the Programme

The role of a youth representative, the effective integration of the national delegation, and the independence of their speech are key elements that must be implemented. Yet, **the organization of a Youth Delegate programme is up to every country, and different ways of conceiving the mandate exist.**

The length of the mandate is generally one year. Yet, **many countries implemented a junior/senior programme to ensure knowledge building and continuity.** That is, a Delegate is an active junior the first year, and supports the junior during year 2 ; or the opposite, where the Delegate can adopt a “watch and learn” during the first year and actively integrate the national delegation during the second year. As we are interested in the creation of a Youth Delegate mandate for Biodiversity, and as the COP for biodiversity occurs every two years, we suggest that such a mandate would last two years as well.

Also, there are different possibilities to open a UN Youth Delegate mandate for biodiversity. For example, Youth Councils/NGOs can **create a mandate solely for biodiversity**, with a Delegate following only the CBD process, as it is the case in Belgium. It is also possible to **extend the UNFCCC mandate to biodiversity**, creating a broad environmental mandate, as it is the case in Denmark for instance. This depends on the preference of the Ministry, the budget of the Youth Council and the existing mandates. However, it is important to point out that **following the CBD processes and carrying out the other tasks that UN Youth Delegates execute requires a lot of time.** From this, it can be said that combining the two topics requires a lot of capacity. It can be an option in case of lack of funding or administrative issues, or if your country selects more than one delegate to work on those topics.



# In practice - How should the Programme work?



1

## Which meetings should the UN Youth Delegate to the CBD attend?

UN Youth Delegates to the CBD should attend different meetings in order to follow the negotiations and to engage meaningfully in the CBD processes. **Joining not only the COP, but also the SBSTTA and SBI meetings is crucial**, as well as preparatory **meetings at the national level**. These international meetings take place about twice a year during two weeks, while national delegation meetings are held regularly in between the negotiations, and almost every day during the sessions.

The UN Youth Delegate to the CBD can also join other activities during the mandate, for example by joining a national coalition of biodiversity NGOs. **Meeting national Ministers** is also recommended to share the views of the youth.

The main purposes in attending these meetings should be to **stay up to date with national and international biodiversity news, networking, making sure that the youth visions are represented in the spaces where they engage**.

2

## Which voices should they carry?

As mentioned previously, the UN Youth Delegate to the CBD **represents the youth of their country**. This means that they should not speak in their own name when attending meetings as a UN Youth Delegate, but rather in the name of the national youth. To do so, **it is essential that the UN Youth Delegate work to get to know what the youth of their country think**, by running surveys, consultations, or other activities with youth. They could also rely on recent positions that have been previously written by their organisation.





3

## How should they interact with the Ministry in charge of biodiversity ?

**Interacting with the ministry should be a win-win collaboration.** While the Ministry can provide useful information about current national discussions and help the UN Youth Delegate navigate through different issues, they might be interested in having the views of the youth to draft their own positions. **Youth can then become a good ally** by consulting youth on specific points or giving different insights on the work that is being done by the ministry. **Regular meetings** - about once a month - could be a good starting point for a successful collaboration between the UN Youth Delegate and the ministry.

During the negotiations, **the UN Youth Delegate should be included as a member of the official delegation and accepted in all internal meetings.** They should receive a **party badge**, provided by the delegation. Some UN Youth Delegates are allowed to speak on behalf of their delegation. However, as mentioned above, UN Youth Delegates carry the mandate of the youth in their country, and should be allowed to have different positions than their government. The success of this inclusion relies on a **trust-based relationship** built throughout the mandate.

It is therefore highly recommended to **get in contact with the ministry before setting up a UN Youth Delegate programme to the CBD**, to envision how the collaboration could occur in a way which benefits both to the ministry and to the UN Youth Delegate.

# 4

## What are the responsibilities of the organisation supporting the UN Youth Delegate ?

Funding the UN Youth Delegates is essential to **guarantee that economical privilege does not play a role in the (s)election of the delegate**. The funding should include travel, food and accommodation costs during the negotiations, but also financial support through the whole mandate to attend national meetings, run consultations, activities with youth, etc. This might represent a cost since the negotiations often take place outside of Europe. Funding does not necessarily need to come from the organisation coordinating the programme. In many cases the programme is publicly funded or funded by a private actor, such as an NGO.

The UN Youth Delegate might also need support to **get in contact with other youth, run campaigns, organise the travels**, etc. They need a contact person within the organisation, who has time to help with these activities.

Since UN Youth Delegates often have other responsibilities , it is also important to remember that this programme takes this into account and helps the delegate with **personal development**, rather than leading to mental health issues due to an excessive workload.



# 5 STEPS

## to start a Programme

1

### Get in touch with the Global Youth Biodiversity Network

We can help you through the whole process!

2

### Contact the Youth Council of your country

Many countries have a Youth Council. European Youth Councils can be found in the member list of the European Youth Forum. If your country does not have a Youth Council, you can try to contact environmental NGOs.

3

### Contact your National Focal Point to the CBD

You can find out who they are on the [official website of the Convention on Biological Diversity](#). National Focal Points are usually part of the Ministry.

4

### Find funding

Funding can be provided by the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or directly by an NGO.

5

### Elect or select UN Youth Delegates to the CBD

Launch a campaign to encourage youth to apply, and start an election or selection process to select the UN Youth Delegate(s).

# EXAMPLES OF UN YOUTH DELEGATE PROGRAMMES IN THE CBD NEGOTIATIONS



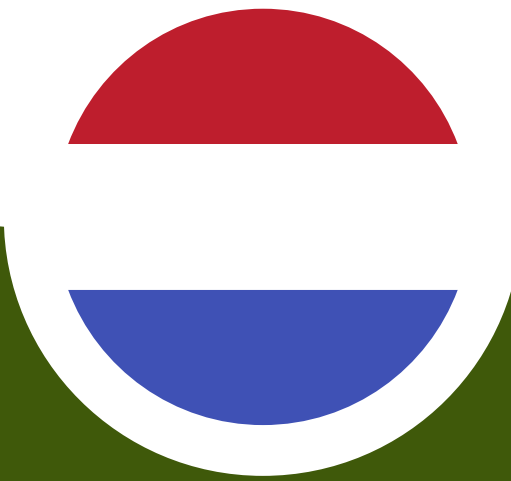
## UN Youth Delegate Programme

Denmark has two Youth Delegates to the UN that focus on climate and biodiversity. This means that instead of having one youth delegate focusing on climate and one on biodiversity, Denmark has chosen to have both focusing on the two areas in order **to create synergies between them**. Youth Delegates in Denmark are **chosen by the Danish Youth Council for a period of two years**.

The Danish Youth Delegates are official members of Denmark's delegations to the UNFCCC, CBD, and other relevant conventions. While the international work takes a substantial amount of their time, it is also an important part of their work to **conduct national activities with young people** from all over the country to ensure that bridges between global and local level are built.

The Danish Youth Delegates can and do **speak in multilateral fora under Denmark's speaking time**, however when they do so, they do not follow the Danish government's mandate, but instead the mandate of the Danish Youth Council, which is the representative mandate of youth in Denmark.

**The programme is funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**



## UN Youth Delegate Programme

The Netherlands has had youth representatives for a long time. **The importance of biodiversity, as an individual theme, grew and together with the introduction of the Food System Summit, there was a need for a new mandate.** While both the ministry (of agriculture, nature and food safety) as well the youth council felt the urge for youth representatives on these topics, the Dutch youth council was the one to apply for funding and runs the election process.

The selection process for all youth representatives starts with a motivation letter, followed by an interview. From the 10-15 people that were interviewed up to 5 people are selected to do a pitch and to give a guest lecture. Two finalists then continue in the final round which consists of a week of training, a week of campaigning and ends in a final presentation with a jury. **The person who collected the most votes and presented the best speech at the end of the week will be elected as the new youth representative.**

**Every three weeks the youth representatives have a meeting with their contact persons within the ministry.** Furthermore, they are linked to several working groups within the ministry, such as food security. Their contact persons email them events, papers and everything they need to know to stay up to date and are happy to support them wherever.

Dutch youth delegates **need to gather input from as many Dutch youth as possible in between the summits.** They do this by giving guest lectures in high schools with a team of 15 volunteering youth. Furthermore, they organize their own events to increase awareness and to get the youth to discuss everything related to biodiversity and food systems. Besides this, they are the voice and the face of the Dutch youth on these topics. This means they speak on events, national conferences and media outlets.

*In some countries, it is not possible to implement a UN Youth Delegate Programme. However, it is still possible to support youth engagement in the CBD negotiations. In any case, we recommend to take into account the guidelines of this document, to ensure representation and meaningful youth participation. Here are two examples of flexible programmes:*



## NGO Youth Delegate Programme

**The programme started in 2012** (for CBD COP 11), when NAJU (a youth environmental organisation) asked their Ministry for funding to **send 6 youth to the CBD COP**. Since then, they get funding from the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN). The German programme is focused on the COP: their delegates do not attend SBSTTA, SBI nor OEWG meetings. However, they attend trainings and other meetings related to biodiversity and to the CBD COP.

Delegates apply by handing in a CV and a cover letter. **The best ones are selected by a jury of cbd-experienced people, including the Global Youth Biodiversity Network.**

In Germany, **for legal reasons, it is not possible for youth to be directly part of the German delegation.** However, the relationship between the youth delegates and the official delegation is rather good, since the former youth delegations left good impressions. **They normally don't attend the official delegation meetings** (except if invited) but are in touch during COP.

Usually, **the youth delegates are members of other youth organisations so that they can carry the topics CBD and biodiversity to their organisations**, but also to their personal networks and if possible to the media.



## NGO Youth Delegate Programme

For **Canada**, it all began during the SBSTTA and SBI meetings in Montreal, CA. One person was invited to be on the Canadian Delegation as a part of a different NGO. While there, this delegate was able to meet many Canadian youth who were all interested in becoming more involved in this process. They then decided to **start the Canadian Youth Biodiversity Network (CYBN)**.

At the beginning youth were selected through an application basis. **Two of the youth selected were from CYBN and were given funding to attend.** Afterwards, CYBN as a group were asked to participate in the Canadian Delegation in a more official youth capacity role. They are allowed to put forward a list of names for the Delegation. **Their relationship with Environment and Climate Change Canada has evolved for them to be the youth voice. The Canadian delegation is now comfortable in going to the youth and vice versa.** While a part of the Delegation, **youth participants are allowed to comment on agenda items, put forth recommendations and even sometimes negotiate depending on the topic.**

# How can we support you ?



**Global Youth Biodiversity Network Europe**



**Global Youth Biodiversity Network**



**Empowering Youth For Biodiversity**

The **Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN)** is the official constituency for **youth in the CBD**. GYBN has 550 member organisations and a total of 1.2 million members from 140 countries worldwide. GYBN's job is to coordinate the global youth action on biodiversity, this is done through **coordinating advocacy work, mobilising youth, and conducting capacity building**. GYBN is the official voice of youth in the CBD negotiations and has a permanent seat in it.



*The different chapters of GYBN*



Both GYBN Europe and GYBN international want to support you in your efforts of developing a Youth Delegate Programme and support the work of your UN Youth Delegates, as they play a fundamental role in representing the views of youth from your country at the CBD. We wish to support them by:

1

**Offering training and capacity building on the functioning of the CBD** and the work related to it. As a UN Youth Delegate on biodiversity, one needs to know how the CBD works and be up-to-date on the current status of negotiations. This can be quite overwhelming, especially when one has just started their mandate as Youth Delegate.

Because of this, GYBN Europe has created a **toolkit with all the basics on biodiversity and the CBD**, as well as we will be conducting capacity building sessions on relevant matters, which we hope can be useful to supporting your Youth Delegate through their journey.



## 2

**Inviting them to join a global network of experienced and passionate young people working with biodiversity and the CBD** at all levels. Being a UN Youth Delegate can be tough, as one needs to continuously know how to navigate the many complexities that the CBD has. Therefore it is important to not be alone when advocating for the interest of youth of your country.

We would like to invite all Youth Delegates to join our network and work together with our many other engaged young people from across the world, some of whom have been working with the CBD for many years. This is both to support them with their work, but also to include the visions and perspectives of youth of your country in the work of our network. Additionally, **we wish to give all Youth Delegates access to the different channels of advocacy and decision-making at the CBD level, to which we have access too.**

Furthermore, we have a network of Youth Delegates to the CBD, to ensure that there is continuous communication and cooperation among Youth Delegates to the CBD, we would like to include your Youth Delegate in this network.

## 3

Finally, we think that **the youth perspectives of your country**, carried by the UN Youth Delegate, **can benefit both the national delegation and GYBN's delegation.** Therefore, in addition of being part of country delegations, we would like to encourage them to **join the GYBN delegation in the different CBD meetings and negotiations.** We hope that through the inclusion of Youth Delegates in the work being done by the GYBN delegation in the CBD we can both **support their national advocacy work, as well as strengthen our capacities to represent the global voice of youth.**



# RALLYING YOUTH VOICES FOR BIODIVERSITY



Global Youth  
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Empowering  
Youth For  
Biodiversity



Japan  
Biodiversity  
Fund



Convention on  
Biological Diversity



United Nations Decade on Biodiversity



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