

## YEE's intervention at the 18th session of the UNECE Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and Just Transition

---

Presentation and thank yous for the invitation

Dear delegates,

I am here today to present the recently established UNECE Youth platform and advocate a deeper involvement of youth representatives within the UNECE as a whole.

As Caitlains has already demonstrated, young people possess the motivation, knowledge and skills to become major stakeholders in the green transition. And, besides, the importance of youth engagement has been repeatedly acknowledged by the international community like in 2009 in the UN General Assembly resolution 58/133 and more recently in the Sharm El Sheik implementation plan which :

- Recognized *the role of children and youth as agents of change in addressing and responding to climate change*
- Encourages *Parties to include children and youth in their processes for designing and implementing climate policy and action,*
- Consider *including young representatives and negotiators into their national delegations*

Unfortunately, in reality, our participation in the actual decision-making process remains marginal. From our experience, youth is facing numerous challenges when trying to get involved in policy-making. From insufficient consideration of the views expressed to limited seats in the discussions which greatly hinders the delegate's capacity to properly express the variety of positions youth organisations have, to a severe lack of funding opportunities. Rather, it represents an exclusionary process that generates passive and disengaged forms of citizenship.

Within the UNECE, encouraging steps have already been taken to engage in a proper youth dialogue. The Youth Platform, initially established as an ad-hoc group to advise the ESD Steering Committee in its 2022-2030 ESD Strategy (adopted at the 9th Environment for Europe Ministerial Platform) was recently formalized within the UNECE ESD Steering Committee as an advisory group on youth and as a Youth Platform in the UNECE region and beyond.

The purpose of this platform is to become a network of communication enabling young people from countries of the UNECE to interact with each other, thus fostering their capacity to participate in the development of ESD-related policies and to involve them directly in the work of the UNECE steering committee on ESD.

The concrete objectives of this platform are as follows:

- The implementation of policies increasing young people's decision-making power on ESD at the state level
- Enabling young people to implement ESD related actions
- Establishing this Youth platform as a well-functioning, recognizable and inclusive youth network
- Encourage the implementation of ESD-related actions by young people themselves

The youth platform has already shown its capacity to engage its network through the publication of a major document, gathering 18 articles from different countries of the UNECE presenting the “Good Practices in the Engagement of Youth in Education for Sustainable Development”. This inspiring publication, which I encourage you to consult, provides interesting insights into the role of non-formal education formats in education for sustainable development.

So, what are the next steps?

Though formalized as an advisory body to the ESD steering committee, the youth platform hasn't yet been involved in any kind of decision-making. At this stage, the platform doesn't allow for the establishment of the desired intergenerational dialogue. The first step will thus be to clarify the role and position of this platform within the ESD steering committee in a way that ensures regular and active participation of its members.

To address this issue, it is my understanding that a discussion has already started with the UNECE secretariat regarding the creation of a youth task force as the principal advisory body for the activities on the Strategy for education for sustainable development in the UNECE region.

If we support the idea of creating a youth task force, we advocate for a more holistic approach of youth involvement within the UNECE. The commission mandate is broad and made up of committees and expert groups working on many issues youth organizations could certainly contribute to. We believe it is thus counter-productive to limit our participation to advising the ESD steering committee or this group of experts specifically. In our opinion, this task force should ideally become an overall advisory to the various UNECE committees and expert groups which they could regularly consult and involve in their decision making process.

Once these structures are fully established, their role clearly defined and they receive adequate secretarial support to function, it is also paramount to ensure proper funding. Indeed, like our presence today in Geneva today, all the work put into the drafting of the Good practices document by the platform was not funded by the UNECE. Youth organizations generally rely on external contributions and have to choose the focus of their work partly based on the funded opportunities presented to them.

In the same way the UN unpaid internships create a de-facto discrimination based on the socio-economic status of their applicants, as long as the involvement of youth in the UNECE remains unfunded, there cannot be a proper representation. Indeed it is essential to try and involve representatives who reflect the diversity of regions of the UNECE. This requires important travels for some delegates, which cannot be borne by their organizations or themselves.

Finally, as my fellow presenter already mentioned, to attract the attention of today's youth,

communication, on social media among others is key. And this is something we can help with. By sharing materials you produce, by helping you make it more accessible to the young generation and by using our network to involve a broader range of youth organizations in the UNECE region.

Indeed, I am here today as a representative of Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) the largest independent European network of environmental youth organisations. Uniting 42 member organisations coming from 25 countries, we aim to voice the needs of European Youth, empower young people to take action on environmental issues, and promote sustainable development in Europe. YEE works with its member organizations and partners to create a platform for youth-led initiatives and support their implementation at the local, national, and international levels.

The scope of projects we are leading is wide. From our involvement at the COPs, to the participation in the Aarhus convention processes or the exploration of climate litigation opportunities, and most importantly by making education a central element of our action. With a project dedicated to environmental law and the energy project I have the pleasure of leading, our goal is clear: Empower the young generation on topics often highly technical and thus too simplified and blended with other environmental concepts.

We want to create a network and platform where clear information on a wide array of topics and in different mediums will be readily available for our member organisations to use in their advocacy work and for the training of their volunteers. We want to go beyond the pure educational content on energy transition and discuss with elected representatives, professional lobbyists, and experts of the energy sector what are the main issues at hand, how national and European policies emerge and what are the most efficient ways to successfully push for a more ambitious sustainable agenda.

This is a process in which cooperation with this working group could certainly be mutually beneficial. We are searching for new topics and opportunities to discuss to help our member organisation develop a deeper understanding of sustainability issues, we would certainly benefit from the expertise of this room. On the other hand, taking part in our initiative would increase the expert group and the UNECE's visibility.

Overall, if they see the proper incentive, there are many ways youth organizations and the UNECE could cooperate and we are more than willing to work together to establish a strong and functional intergenerational dialogue.

Thank you for your attention,