

EUSAIR Youth Council Concept Paper

1. Introduction

Following the 'EU Youth Strategy'¹ resolution and the 'Manifesto for young people by young people to shape the European cooperation policy'² and the recognised need for stronger involvement of youth in EUSAIR decision-making, agreement was reached in 2022 under the EUSAIR Albanian Presidency and confirmed by adoption of the Tirana Declaration to establish EUSAIR Youth Council. This is a pivotal initiative that aims to ensure active youth participation and representation. It ensures that their voices, perspectives, and priorities are considered. In line with UNSDG principle of 'Leave no one behind' this helps create more inclusive policies that better address the needs and aspirations of young people from all kinds of backgrounds and foster intergenerational dialogue and understanding. Young people often have unique insights and can offer creative solutions to complex challenges. Their involvement can lead to more relevant and future-oriented policies that adapt to the changing needs of society. Through participation in youth councils and other existing initiatives, young people can develop leadership skills, entrepreneurial attitude, gain experience in governance and decision-making, and become active agents of change in their communities. Some EUSAIR initiatives, such as those listed in the Annex A), have already shown the concrete results of equipping young people with concrete skills and giving them concrete challenges.

In line with the conclusions of the 17th EUSAIR Governing Board meeting (03/2022) and adoption of the Tirana Declaration, the process of establishing EUSAIR Youth Council started under the EUSAIR Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, continued and reached its critical point under the leadership of Croatian Presidency.

The present document was drafted based on EUSAIR Youth Consultation results and discussions held in the EUSAIR Youth Consultation Task Force. EUSAIR Youth Consultation process was led by the EUSAIR Youth Consultation Task Force and it was intended to gather inputs on how youth should be formally involved in EUSAIR. Materials were prepared during summer 2023 and the online consultation took place during September 22nd and November 17th, 2023. The consultation was accompanied with extensive communication campaign supported by the Task Force members and Facility Point partners.

The open consultation gathered opinions of young people (indiscriminately) through an online survey, whereas the closed consultation gathered opinions of youth stakeholders (national authorities responsible for youth, youth organisations and associations, etc.) through the same survey. Together the consultation had 556 participants, 498 from the open and 56 from the closed consultation.

¹ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14080-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

² https://peopleandskills.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/youth_manifesto_interreg_en.pdf

Participants from all 10 EUSAIR participating countries took part in open consultation. While the closed consultation was missing participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Greece. The average age of the participants was 18,6 in the open and 27,3 in the closed consultation. Results are attached as annex to this document, public report will also be prepared and published once the concept paper will be approved (as decided by the TF).

2. Members of the EUSAIR Youth Council

Members of the EUSAIR Youth Council should represent Youth in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and not political parties, organisations, or participating countries' national interests.

Age

The EUSAIR Youth Council should be composed by young people aged 18 – 29.

Number of members per participating country

There should be equal representation from all EUSAIR participating countries. Each participating country shall be represented by 2 members.

Youth organisation membership

The EUSAIR Youth Council should be composed by young people, who are engaged in civil society, policymaking, or related fields of social impact.

Mandate

The representatives would have a one-year mandate with the possibility of two extensions for another year. In this way continuity of the activities and processes of the Youth Council will be ensured. Once the members reach their 30th birthday, they can complete their mandate, however not extend it.

Gender equality

Consistently with the EU Strategy for gender equality 2020-2025, the EYC shall be as much inclusive and balanced as possible in its composition.

3. Application and selection process

Application process

Once the concept paper will be approved the preparation of the Call for Applications for EUSAIR Youth Council membership will start, led by the Presidency and Youth Consultation Task Force and carried out by the Facility Point. Here only the basic outline of the process is foreseen.

Call duration

To receive a substantial number of quality applications, the Call shall be opened from 6 to 8 weeks. Based on experiences from Youth Consultation process this is the minimum duration for the communication campaign to reach its intended audience and results. Deadline for submission will be set and clearly communicated.

Communication campaign

The Call will be accompanied by extensive online communication campaign. The experiences, contacts and channels established during the communication campaign for Youth consultation process will be used. Further ways and channels will be sought to reach out to even wider audience. Communication campaign will be supervised by the Task Force and carried out by the Facility Point project, assisted by the StEP project. Task Force members, National Coordinators and TSG members, especially of TSG5 are kindly requested to spread the word through their channels as well.

Application pack

Application pack will include online application form and a template for the motivational letter. The duly completed form and motivational letter need to be submitted within deadline for the application to be successful. Application pack will be approved by the Task Force.

The application form should include questions that will enable selection of suitable members (allowing the assessment under the below criteria). Apart from demographic questions, also questions regarding the thematic interest (educational or professional) in the topics of EUSAIR Pillars including the horizontal and cross-cutting topics, rural/urban residency or origin and similar, will be asked.

The motivational letter will be composed of a selected number of pre-defined and agreed questions. Possible questions proposed:

- What are your long-term personal and professional goals, and how does being a part of the EUSAIR Youth Council align with these aspirations?
- What unique perspectives or experiences do you bring to the EUSAIR Youth Council, especially considering your background? What skills and experiences do you possess that make you a suitable candidate for the EUSAIR Youth Council?
- Are you active in any youth or other civil society organisation or network (could be from any field of interest, not just active citizenship, but also sports, culture, hobby...)? Do you have the possibility to reach out to young people in the region or to youth or other civil society organisations and networks and in what way?
- Describe a challenge faced in the Adriatic and Ionian region that you are passionate about. How would you propose to address it through the EUSAIR Youth Council?

The assessment and selection process for Youth Council membership

The assessment and selection procedure will be centralised and the same for all participating countries. It will be carried out by the Facility Point Project and its partners.

Assessment of applications

The applications will be assessed by Facility Point based on an agreed set of eligibility criteria:

- **The applicants need to be in the range of 18 till 29 years old.** At the time of submission of the application for membership applicants need to comply with the age restriction.
- **Permanent residency in the Adriatic–Ionian Region.** For Italy that does not participate with the entire territory, the residency criterion applies to participating regions.
- **Fluency in English.**
- **At the time of applying,** the candidate **should not be a member of the EUSDR or EUSALP Youth Council.** Applicants who were previously members of another MRS Youth Council are welcome to apply.
- The applicant should not be a member of political party or interest group.
- The application needs to arrive within the given deadline and needs to be complete (application form and motivational letter included).

The received applications will be first checked for eligibility criteria. Only motivational letters of those that pass the eligibility criteria will be further assessed. Motivational letters will then get graded. Only applicants reaching the required threshold will proceed into the next step of the selection.

Selection procedure

From the list of eligible and most motivated applicants, the final list of candidates for Youth Council membership will be drawn up to ensure balanced representation by gender, urban or rural residency, country/region, thematic interest, and age in as far as possible. Random selection with the help of an algorithm will be applied in case a high number of applications will be received. There should be attention given to balanced representation per country, to the gender balance in the Council as well as equal representation of youth from both rural and urban environments. The representatives should come from different educational backgrounds and have different interests to cover topics of all EUSAIR Pillars. The final list of members will be approved by the Governing Board. It will be ensured that each participating country has two representatives in the Youth Council.

4. Role of the EUSAIR Youth Council

EUSAIR Youth Council is an independent advisory body representing the perspective of youth from the Adriatic-Ionian region. Youth Council interacts with the EUSAIR Governing Board (GB) and the Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs) **in a consultative role.** The youth representatives would voice opinions and recommendations to EUSAIR GB and TSGs regarding EUSAIR topics, especially when dealing with youth themes. In return, the **EUSAIR governance structures would provide their feedback and clear follow-up.**

The EUSAR Youth Council also cooperates with EUSAIR Presidency on all questions related to youth and on issues of common interest to the Presidency and the Youth Council.

In its work the Youth Council shall fully respect the provisions set in the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the European Union (Council conclusions on strengthening the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the European Union, 6795/21). EUSAIR Youth Council Rules of Procedure will define how to act in the case of misconduct.

Regarding the topics discussed in the EUSAIR Youth Council, they could be part of two principal areas of work: 1. working on individual thematic topics falling under the EUSAIR Pillars, including the horizontal and cross-cutting topics, 2. youth-specific topics of EUSAIR, collaborating with the newly established Social Pillar and its youth priorities (ex. Brain drain).

The members of the EUSAIR Youth Council will play an active role in communicating, orienting and implementing EUSAIR. The EYC members will be promoting the Strategy in their respective participating countries, collecting youth views and perspectives, and consequently, providing insights to the Youth Council.

EUSAIR Youth Council should facilitate connections among youth to promote cohesion, EU enlargement and neighbourhood relations in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

5. Work in the EUSAIR Youth Council

Set up

Immediately after the Youth Council set-up and each time the membership is being updated **capacity building** activities will be carried out by the Facility Point project.

The Rules of Procedure (RoP) will be developed by the members of the Youth Council with the support of Task Force and EUSAIR Facility Point project once it will be set-up, however, there are several recommendations to be considered when drawing up the RoP:

- The Youth Council should be a single body of representatives with all members having equal status (no hierarchy). However, the representatives could establish organisational structure, for example Pillar working groups or a youth-specific working group. This should be done to ensure a functioning and sustainable EUSAIR Youth Council and efficient and impactful engagement with the EUSAIR governance structures and other Adriatic-Ionian youth initiatives and organisations.
- Decisions in the EUSAIR Youth Council should be made by consensus³.
- The representatives should meet four times a year, this means that at least once a year the Youth Council would meet in person, the other times the council could meet online. If deemed necessary, the council should meet more often.

Furthermore, the members of the newly established Youth Council should define ways of cooperation with Adriatic-Ionian youth initiatives and projects as well as youth organisations.

³ As a recommendation from the EUSAIR Governing Board, decision making rules should comply with the principle of consensus, applied by all EUSAIR bodies, and, more generally, within the governance of EU MRS and European territorial cooperation programmes. Taking decisions by consensus encourages cooperation, understanding of different standpoints and encourages seeking of joint solutions. However, considering that the consultation process indicated that Youth preferred the principle of majority to be applied for decision making within the EYC, the final decision will be taken by the EYC members within the process of drafting their RoPs, under the guidance of the Task Force.

- The EUSAIR Youth Council can work closely with the already established Adriatic-Ionian youth initiatives and other public initiatives and projects in the areas of common interest with the aim to find synergies and complementarity in activities. Youth Council could develop/label EUSAIR Youth Flagships for future close cooperation with EUSAIR.
- The Council can also work with youth organisations and/or youth umbrella organisations in the EUSAIR participating countries in an Ad hoc manner. This would be facilitated by using already established Adriatic-Ionian youth organisation networks and other relevant civil society organisations' networks and could be supported by the EUSAIR Stakeholder Engagement Platform.

Bearing in mind above mentioned, EUSAIR Youth Council members are expected to interact also with youth organisations in their country, they act as spokespersons for the Strategy in their country and bring inputs from the organisations in the participating country to the Council.

It is also recommended that in the Rules of Procedure the possibility of future establishment of EUSAIR Youth Alumni (for the former members of the Youth Council), should remain open.

Financing

The three EUSAIR governance support projects – EUSAIR Facility Point, EUSAIR Stakeholders Engagement Point (StEP) and EUSAIR Strategic Implementation (SP4EUSAIR) – will try, as much as possible, to involve the EYC in their activities, according to their functions and available budgets.

EUSAIR Facility Point has foreseen resources for support to the establishment of the Youth Council, for operational support to organisation of Youth Council meetings (travel & accommodation of members, agenda, organisation of the venue and catering, materials, minutes, mentorship), support in preparation of recommendations of the Youth Council for GB and TSG meetings based on inputs received from youth in the territory, support active participation of youth representatives at GB, TSG meetings when relevant (making sure YC is part of the agendas and macroregional processes), support small scale Youth Council initiatives and actions, engaging the youth in the Adriatic-Ionian territory to concretely address specific themes of common interest. Furthermore, capacity building is foreseen when Youth Council is appointed, and each time membership substantially changes.

6. ANNEXES

- A) Contributions from other existing Adriatic-Ionian youth initiatives and projects (EUSAIR POPRI, AI-NURECC PLUS, Cooperation & Development Institute, At the School of OpenCohesion – ASOC)
- B) EUSAIR Youth Closed Consultation results
- C) EUSAIR Youth Open Consultation results