FROM PRESENCE TO INFLUENCE

THE 1ST JOINT NORDIC UNESCO YOUTH STATEMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF PEACE.

ADOPTED 10 SEPTEMBER 2026 · LUND, SWEDEN

A SHARED VISION FOR YOUTH INFLUENCE.

We, the Nordic Youth Delegates to UNESCO, have gathered in Lund during the Nordic Meeting of National Commissions and Permanent Delegations for UNESCO to reflect on how youth can contribute meaningfully to UNESCO's work across education, science, culture, communication and information.

> Our message is clear: young people must be recognised as active partners across UNESCO's mandate, not only as beneficiaries of UNESCO's work.

Meaningful youth participation cannot depend on symbolic inclusion, individual goodwill or temporary youth spaces. It requires structures that give young people real influence, independence, resources, feedback and accountability. The 14th UNESCO Youth Forum in Samarkand called on decision-makers to place young people at the decision-making table as partners in shaping collective futures, and to ensure that youth participation is resourced, measured and followed up. It is crucial that such forums create a safe and empowering environment where youth steer the agenda to the fullest extent.

ACROSS UNESCO'S SECTORS, WE IDENTIFIED FOUR PRIORITIES:

01 Education for peace

Firstly, young people need education for peace, democracy and sustainable development. This requires a stronger emphasis on such concepts within Nordic education policy and curricula. This will help schools strengthen democratic participation, enhance a culture of peace with a focus on human rights and sustainable development.

02 Culture and belonging

Secondly, access to culture should mean more than access to heritage and institutions. It should also mean active participation, creation and interaction. Young people, including LGBTQI+ youth, Indigenous youth and minority youth, need spaces to express identity, belonging, memory and hope. There is an urgent need for funding and long-term platforms for such initiatives, especially for young aspiring artists.

03 Inclusive science

Thirdly, UNESCO's science work should start from local knowledge. The knowledge of youth, women, Indigenous peoples and marginalised groups should be included in science programmes, designations and sustainability work — not as an afterthought, but as part of how knowledge is created and used. Diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives to create paths for more people into STEM are crucial.

04 Information and digital agency

Fourthly, in terms of communication and information, young people need trustworthy information environments and the digital skills to navigate them. Digital platforms shape information, identity, organisation and public debate. Responses to online harms, including age limits for social media, must not shift responsibility away from platforms. Protection must go hand in hand with platform accountability, moderation, anti-discrimination work, media and information literacy, AI literacy and young people's own agency.

FROM PRESENCE TO INFLUENCE.

Across all sectors, we are concerned by signs of a shrinking democratic space for children and youth organisations. The growing challenges to civic participation risk limiting young people's opportunities to organise, express themselves and influence decisions that affect their lives. This is not only a youth issue. It is a democratic warning sign.

THEREFORE, WE CALL ON NORDIC NATIONAL COMMISSIONS, PERMANENT DELEGATIONS AND ALLIES TO TAKE THREE STEPS:

01

Strengthen youth participation across all UNESCO sectors...
...by involving young people earlier and more systematically in working groups, consultations, delegations, designations and follow-up processes to design the national strategies and priorities of the commissions. This calls for an increase in the options for youth engagement around UNESCO's mandate, beyond the current Youth Delegate Programs.

02

Share best practices for youth perspectives and participation.
UNESCO is a normative organisation with expertise and legitimacy in the fields of peace, democracy and sustainable development. By sharing best practices, knowledge and proven approaches to youth participation, including methods and recommendations developed at global and regional levels within the UNESCO system, and by amplifying the issues raised by young people and youth organisations, we can extend their reach and contribute to meaningful impact beyond UNESCO itself.

03

Address barriers to youth civic space...
...including threats, harassment, discrimination, security concerns, lack of resources, platform dynamics and fragile structures that limit young people's ability to participate publicly and influence UNESCO-related work. If youth are to be a prioritised group within the organisation, the institutional structures should be favourable in order to make this possible.

After all, freedom of expression is not only the formal right to speak. It is also the ability to become a voice, and to remain in public life after speaking. The question is no longer whether young people should be heard. The question is whether UNESCO's structures are ready to work with young people as partners wholeheartedly, in the journey towards a peaceful future.

Youth participation should not stop at presence or tokenism.
It should lead to influence.

A COLLECTIVE NORDIC VOICE

Signatories: The Nordic UNESCO Youth Representatives

SWEDEN
Brendan R. Joseph
Sweden's Youth Representative to UNESCO ('24–'30)

FINLAND
Iina–Lotta Kuisma
UNESCO Youth Delegate of Finland ('25–'26)

FINLAND
Senja Tertsunen
UNESCO Youth Delegate of Finland ('26–'27)

ÅLAND
Jack Hancock
UNESCO Youth Delegate of Åland ('23–'26)

DENMARK
Signe Tolstrup Mathiasen
Youth Representative at Denmark's UNESCO National Commission ('24–'27)

ICELAND
Arna Dís Heiðarsdóttir
UNESCO *Youth Delegate of Iceland and Youth Representative in Iceland's National Commission ('24–'26)*

NORWAY
Sofie Sangnæs
Youth Representative at Norway's UNESCO National Commission ('24–'27)

FAROE ISLANDS
Jastrið Gullbein Augustinussen
Youth Representative at Faroe Islands' UNESCO National Commission ('25–'29)

Building peace in the minds of people.

Inspired by the founding principles of UNESCO's Constitution.