

OVERVIEW OF THE EUSALP YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE STRATEGY

April 2024

BACKGROUND

*"EUSALP wants to develop ways to involve young people in its activities, to raise awareness for EUSALP and to encourage young people to think about their connection to the Alpine region. This is based on the idea that **young people know best what they need to live in a prosperous and ecologically intact Alpine region** in the future. Involvement should not be reduced to a passive role, but young people should take on an **active part in the discussion of Alpine issues and on the future of their own region**. Moreover, EUSALP can be a laboratory and a flagship for the practical implementation of the often raised, but rarely realized call for a stronger voice of young people."¹*

To enable the participation of a greater diversity of young citizens from the Alpine region, several types of opportunities to get involved are possible. In addition to the EUSALP Youth Council, the EUSALP youth can apply for the "Pitch Your Project" competition as well as for the summer camps in the Alpine region.

Since the end of the project "Youth.shaping.EUSALP" led by the region Tyrol and entirely financed by the European Commission, the region Burgundy-Franche-Comté is leading the youth activities in the frame of the Support EUSALP project with the support of the presidencies. As the budget has been reduced by two third compared with "Youth.shaping.EUSALP", the region Burgundy-Franche-Comté finances a large part of the actions dedicated to young people.

Slovene Presidency identified EUSALP youth as their institutional and thematic priority. Building on the discussions from the Executive Board meeting (Postojna, 2 February 2024), BAGL meeting (Postojna, 1 February 2024) and Task Force meeting (Brdo pri Kranju, 20 March 2024) it is of vital importance to screen different aspects of past youth involvement and to build up on that experience and good practices.

The presented document serves as the background document to be discussed at the Executive Board meeting (Brdo pri Kranju, 23-24 April 2024) and is based upon the following Task Force recommendation:

The Task Force invites the Executive Board, in cooperation with the Youth Council and the Action Group Leaders, to take stock of the Youth Council's activities to date and to consider what improvements could be made, focussing on the links between the Youth Council and the other EUSALP bodies (taking into account the Youth Council's activities, the selection procedure, and the resources allocated to these activities).

¹ <https://alpine-region.eu/alpine-youth>

EUSALP YOUTH COUNCIL SELECTION PROCEDURE AND MANDATE

"The EUSALP Youth Council provides a platform for institutional involvement of young people in all EUSALP bodies to make sure that their ideas and viewpoints are heard and considered. It allows young participants, thanks to a legitimate position due to the official nature of their mandate, to discuss the objectives of the EUSALP strategy and to contribute ideas."²

1. CURRENT SITUATION:

Since 2021 every year, 28 citizens of the Alpine region between 18 and 29 years old constitute the EUSALP Youth Council, where maximum 4 representatives come from each EUSALP country. Young councillors have a one-year mandate that can be renewed consecutively for one more year. This limits the mandate of every Youth councillor to maximum 2 consecutive years. In practice, their **mandate lasts from July to July next year**.

a) Selection procedure:

Since 2021, 449 individuals have applied to become a youth councillor, and 79 have been appointed as youth councillors. Every year the **number of these applications varies significantly from one country to another**. On the one side, there are numerous applications from some countries (like France, Italy, Austria), where selection procedure is necessary, on the other side for some countries (like Switzerland, Liechtenstein) selection process is often not needed, since the interest is much lower.

The selection procedure for the Youth Council of EUSALP involves a structured process to ensure **representation and diversity among its members**. Applicants submit their candidacy, detailing their motivation and relevant experience. The selection committee at the EUSALP Support reviews these applications, taking into account factors such as geographical representation, gender balance, and expertise in various fields. Then, the applications are drawn by lot from among the statistical groups.³

Currently the guidance for the youth applicants is the following: *"Participants must be **interested in shaping the future of the Alpine space** and have a **basic understanding of English**. However, there is no need to be proficient in English – we are a multi-lingual team and help you find your way in EUSALP. Moreover, young participants must be **ready to commit for one year** to the EUSALP Youth Council and **available to participate at the teambuilding event**"*⁴

b) Mandate:

After the selection committee completes the selection process, the EUSALP Executive Board validates the list of selected youth representatives from different regions/countries, and proposes this list to the EUSALP General Assembly for a formal approval.

² <https://alpine-region.eu/alpine-youth/youth-council>

³ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ok7sQzYoo1s2yK-o_Fp7PgP5oYY7dZqL/edit?usp=share_link&oid=105428452480551559844&rtpof=true&sd=true

⁴ <https://eusalp-youth.eu/about-youth-shaping-eusalp/>

In practice, the Youth Council list is **validated by the Executive Board at the beginning of summer** so that young councillors can meet during summer at the team building event⁵ and begin to prepare for their mandate.

2. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE:

In order to enhance and improve the involvement and cooperation of the EUSALP governance structures (EUSAP Presidency, Executive Board and Action groups) with the EUSALP Youth Council the following proposals should be taken into consideration.

a) Selection procedure:

Considering the fact that every year maximum 28 youth councillors are selected, it has to be observed that their commitment and representation to different meetings and events varies significantly. In this respect it is essential to find the reasoning – work or school obligations, lack of English knowledge, lack of real commitment or interest after application ...

In this regard, the current selection procedure should be taken into consideration. The current process aims to ensure that the Youth Council **is as representative as possible** of the Alpine youth. However, certain reservations have been raised, and some countries have expressed a desire for a **more selective procedure** to gather profiles with stronger academic or professional backgrounds. While this proposal aims to enhance youth participation in EUSALP activities, it's important to note that there is **currently no correlation between qualification level and active participation in the Youth Council**.

One proposal could be to **strengthen the motivational interview process** and formalize a written procedure (for example by signing a charter) to ensure member participation throughout the mandate.

Additionally, in order to have a **geographically balanced Alpine youth** representatives it would be necessary to raise the interest for Youth Council applications in some countries, especially in Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

PROPOSAL No. 1:

- Reshaping of the selection process and strengthening the participation commitment of the youth councillors.
- Exploring the ways to ensure geographically balanced youth councillors.

b) Mandate:

Since the youth councillors mandate lasts from summer to summer, it is currently not aligned with the EUSALP Presidency mandate (which lasts from January to December).

Some members of the Executive Board and Action Groups have proposed to **align the timing of the mandates of young councillors with the Presidency mandate**.

⁵ This year, team building event will take place in Chamonix alongside the Mont Blanc Climate Solutions event (4th and 5th of July).

The Slovenian Presidency is experiencing two challenges to consider in order to better align both mandates:

- The General Assembly meetings are taking place towards the end of the presiding year (usually in November). Only then are the EUSALP youth councillors officially nominated, making their **mandate official after almost half of their mandate is already running**. From the legal point of view their coverage of costs is challenging for the first months (from July to November).
- In order to work with the Youth Council members, the Presidency is actually engaging two different mandates of EUSALP Youth Council. In order to work with them to provide an input for the General Assembly, the majority of the Presidency work (including different events) has to be done from January till June, since it is difficult to expect from the newly mandated youth councillors to provide valuable input for the General Assembly (in November).

Aligning the EUSALP Presidency mandate and the EUSALP Youth Council mandate would entail a different schedule for the Youth Council, starting in January. In previous consultations, young people indicated that it was easier for them to plan their activities from one school year to another, thus avoiding disengagement during the year for academic reasons.

PROPOSAL No. 2:

- EUSALP Youth Council mandate should be aligned with the EUSALP Presidency mandate.

YOUTH COUNCIL ROLE AS OBSERVERS (EXECUTIVE BOARD AND BAGL MEETINGS)

1. CURRENT SITUATION:

EUSALP Youth Council aims to represent the Alpine youth, their ideas, and their opinions on different topics within EUSALP. Its mission is to bring the youth of the different Alpine regions together and build a bridge between them and the EUSALP governance structures - Action Groups, Executive Board and General Assembly.

Youth Council members are invited to take part in every Executive Board and Board of Action Group Leaders meetings as observers. On the meetings, two designated Youth Council representatives can take the floor on any topic at the agenda, and they can suggest orientations. At these meetings, they are often asked to give an overview of the Youth Council activities over the past period, and to present upcoming activities and projects.

The Slovenian Presidency is a strong supporter of an inclusive approach to engaging young people in all EUSALP processes with the aim not only to listen to their ideas and proposals, but also to hear those proposals. It is essential that young people are given the right tools and means to develop their potentials and innovative ideas. Nevertheless, it is also **the duty of the EUSALP governance structures to properly guide them in order to develop the ideas into actions and projects.**

2. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE:

EUSALP Youth Council should remain an important player of the EUSALP governance structure, actively participating at the Executive Board and BAGL meetings in the role of the observer.

To strengthen the role of Youth Council members in these meetings, it is also important to reinforce the link between the youth councillors and their home region/country. This involves prior exchange sessions before the Executive Board meetings to prepare for the meeting, gather opinions and share feedback from delegations. This initial contact can also manifest through the Youth Council member's participation in pre-organized national coordination meetings.

YOUTH COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACTION GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. CURRENT SITUATION:

The systematic involvement of the youth councillors into Action Group activities and meetings is still being developed. We have seen that young people are often present and intervene at thematic conferences of Action Groups, and their added value is noted as it provides a fresh perspective and another vision of the debated issues.

2. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE:

The aim for the future is for Youth Council to cooperate closely with all nine Action Groups of EUSALP. Hence, the Youth Council shall appoint councillors to facilitate the flow of information between the Youth Council and Action Groups in order to ensure that youth is represented in their decision-making process.

The Youth Council members have tools to facilitate this participation: a shared document that lists invitations, a method for reporting their engagement. The Alpine Space program has also launched the Youth Ambassadors initiative, which allows young people to be invited to meetings of Interreg Alpine Space's awarded projects.

The aim, shared by all EUSALP stakeholders, is to enhance this youth participation in the Action Group meetings. Therefore, it is necessary to: inform the members of the Youth Council about the meetings and extend an invitation to them, collaborate in advance with the designated youth representative and the potential value they can bring (raising awareness about the issues discussed, practical support to help them prepare and participate effectively in these meetings), highlight and communicate about the youth's participation (communication through future EUSALP newsletters, success stories, good practices example).

Additionally, Action group members and their stakeholders could be encouraged to participate in youth meetings (Jour Fixe, team building, summer camps...).

PROPOSAL No. 3:

- EUSALP Youth Council should be better aligned with all EUSALP Action Groups.

YOUTH COUNCIL FINANCING (travel and accommodation costs)

This part aims to provide an overview of the current funding mechanism of the EUSALP Youth Council's travel and accommodation costs and proposes alternative solutions to ensure sustainable support for youth engagement and participation in the Alpine region.

1. CURRENT SITUATION:

The current financing model for the EUSALP Youth Council has been in place since 25th November 2020. Under the current political agreement, states and regions are responsible for covering travel expenses, including accommodation, of the four members per country for at least three trips for each youth councillor. This agreement runs until the end of 2024. The cost per country has been estimated at between €2.000 and €2.500 per year, or €250 per meeting per person.

Annexed you will find a table summarising the various Youth Council members' travels over the past 3 years. This helps to provide context for the discussion.

It is worth noting that **only 6.7% of Youth Council members have requested reimbursement from their host region/country for the initial 3 trips (accommodation + travel) per term** (5 youth councillors out of 74 who actually travelled within EUSALP youth activities). Of these 74, only 6 have never travelled within EUSALP activities. Additionally, it is interesting to note that on several occasions, regions/countries did not have to cover the entire travel expenses (part was covered by another partner, personal accommodation...).

This system has worked well in recent years, and despite some administrative constraints, most young people have been able to attend numerous meetings (175 in total). Today, some countries have expressed the need to rethink this system as we approach the end of the initial contract.

EUSALP is the first macro-region to have established a Youth Council. It is the most advanced macro-region in terms of youth participation, which is a significant asset for enhancing the visibility of EUSALP activities. EUSALP is regularly used as an example in other MRS. Moreover, youth participation is now a stated political priority across different presidencies. This involvement has been made possible thanks to the financial commitment of the regions/countries comprising the Alpine Region. To continue ensuring leadership on this issue, **it is crucial to find a funding solution for Youth Council members' travel expenses.**

2. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE:

(a) Status Quo with regional/country financing:

Continuing with the current financing model, with countries and regions bearing the travel costs of Youth Council members. This option maintains consistency with existing arrangements and enables direct involvement of regions and countries, which strengthens the connection and the notion of representativeness between the two parties.

(b) Financing by EUSALP Presidencies:

Shifting the financial responsibility to the EUSALP Presidencies could provide more centralized funding, ensuring consistent support for youth involvement. However, this option may require negotiation and coordination among presiding countries, potentially leading to delays or disparities in funding allocation.

(c) Financing through ASP Project Support EUSALP:

Exploring the possibility of financing through the next Support EUSALP project, contingent upon a willing partner assuming this responsibility. This option could diversify funding sources and alleviate the financial burden on countries and regions. However, it necessitates identifying and securing a suitable partner willing to undertake funding obligations. This partner must also provide 25% co-financing for the expenses of all youth councillors.

It should be noted that this partner cannot be Burgundy-Franche-Comté for several reasons: their significant involvement of their teams in youth-related matters within EUSALP, as well as their budgetary participation in the project covering various aspects (PYP, summer camps), which already comes from regional funds not supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Here also arises the issue of eligibility of certain countries for expense validation within the framework of Interreg Alpine Space programme.

(d) Hybrid solution: Presidencies and regions/countries

This solution, the details of which still need to be worked out, could enable the Presidencies to finance some events (i.e. thematic conferences, Action Group meetings, Executive Board meetings etc.) and the regions/countries to finance other activities trips to Action Group meetings and internal Youth Council activities.

PROPOSAL No. 4:

- Executive Board should propose one of the financing options to the EUSALP General Assembly.

EUSALP YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AS STAKEHOLDERS

1. CURRENT SITUATION:

In the Stakeholder Engagement Plan document, approved by the Executive Board, an objective of "*a minimum of 150 applications per year, with good representation from all countries*" was indicated regarding the Youth Council. Since the establishment of the Youth Council, **more than 750 young people have participated in one or more youth activities of EUSALP**. This figure, currently satisfactory, provides a good foundation for building a dynamic network and improving the representation of Alpine youth within the governance bodies of the EUSALP.

2. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE:

In order to engage even more young people into EUSALP activities, additional efforts should be taken.

As already mentioned in previous chapters, more efforts should be taken to involve youth as stakeholders:

- Attract youth to apply for the mandate of the EUSALP Youth Council (especially in the countries/regions where there is currently not sufficient applications);
- Perform additional measures to receive more applications for the Pitch Your Project competition. Measures have been taken to broaden the pool of applicants: extending the application period, aligning the age for candidacy with the age of the Youth Council, publication campaigns, and more. However, the success of such a competition depends on the level of involvement of the entire EUSALP ecosystem. Indeed, it is thanks to the national coordinators, members of the Action Groups, and members of the Executive Board that we will be able to engage more young people who will submit high-quality projects. Numerous communication resources will be made available so that stakeholders can engage with this campaign.

PROPOSAL No. 5:

- Within the EUSALP youth plays an important stakeholder and additional measures should be taken in the future to empower their engagement.