

# NOTE ON YOUTH ENVOY

## European Youth Envoy in External Action

### Introduction

In 2020, 24% of the world population is between 10 and 24 years old. In Africa, young people represent more than 30% of the population.<sup>1</sup> As the world's largest donor, the European Union (EU) has the potential to impact on the lives of millions of young people not only inside the EU but also outside, on all continents. The EU's work could have a positive impact in different areas of their lives, such as education, health, economic empowerment, peace and gender equality, from their childhood until they reach adulthood.

With such a potential, it is essential that the voices and interests of young people, in all their diversity, are reflected in EU policies. In both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Consensus on Development, the importance of youth engagement is a cross-cutting issue. The EU has recognised that *“young people are agents of development and change and, as such, are essential contributors to the 2030 Agenda”*. Sustainable development will not be reached without investing in children and young people and actively working with and involving them in decision-making, in order to address the challenges they face.

The EU is already working with young people, for example in Africa through initiatives such as the EU-AU Youth Coordination Hub, unlocking their potential to contribute positively to sustainable development and ensuring that it invests in youth-led solutions. However, the EU would greatly benefit from stepping up the visibility, and scope and impact of its actions by establishing mechanisms that bring the needs and rights of young people at the heart of its decision-making on external action.

***With this brief, we would like to introduce the idea of an EU Youth Envoy as a position that would advocate for the youth agenda and open up more channels for the voices of young people in the EU's external action.***

### Existing Structures

Other intergovernmental or continental unions such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) have a Youth Envoy. This section describes in more details the background for the creation of these positions and the function of Youth Envoys within these two fora. It also reflects on the mechanisms that exist to support the EU's internal youth policy.

### UN Youth Envoy

#### Vision

In 2013, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon created the role of [UN Youth Envoy](#) and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. He recognised that youth have a key role to play in sustainable development and peace and that these two goals cannot be achieved without unlocking the potential of youth and involving them in decision-making.

---

<sup>1</sup> **UN World Population Prospects 2019:** <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>. Note: Plan International considers that a young person is between 15 to 24 years old.

## Structure

The Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth - Jayathma Wickramanayake since 2017 - works in the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, which is part of the UN Secretariat. She reports directly to the Secretary General. Her office is funded by UN member states.

## Profile

Jayathma Wickramanayak, originally from Sri Lanka, was appointed to the position at the age of 26. Prior to taking up her post, she played an active role in youth participation and youth development both in Sri Lankan national politics, and in global arenas. For instance, Jayathma was a member of the Sri Lankan Youth Parliament as Senator, and advocated for youth globally as the first ever Sri Lankan Youth Delegate to the UN. Among other things, her engagement was instrumental in creating "Hashtag Generation", a civic and political movement for young people in Sri Lanka, especially young women, and in establishing World Youth Skills Day.

## Mandate & Strategy

The UN Youth Envoy works to bring attention to the needs and rights of young people and to open spaces for them at UN level. She highlights the positive contribution of young people in the areas of sustainable development, peace building and human rights and aims to enable their meaningful participation at all levels: national, regional, and global, with particular attention to the most marginalised.

In 2018, she launched the '[Youth2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy](#)' which describes [her plans](#) to increase meaningful youth participation in decision-making at UN level focusing on Peace and Security, Human Rights, Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Action, including through strengthening existing mechanisms and mobilisation of young people around these topics, and supporting young people working for the UN. Youth organisations were involved in the development of the strategy itself by providing input to the early drafts.

## AU Youth Envoy

### Vision

2017 was the year for «Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investment in the Youth» in the AU. On this occasion, Member States of the AU recognised the importance of involving and investing in young people as drivers to achieve sustainable development. As a result, the AUC developed a Youth Engagement Strategy, with the objective to open spaces for young people within the AU. The framework for implementation of this strategy foresaw the appointment of an AU Youth Envoy by the chairperson of the AUC – Aya Chebbi took over this position in 2018.

### Structure

The AU Youth Envoy is part of the AUC Chairperson's office, and is appointed by and reports to the Chairperson. The Youth Envoy also works closely with the Human Resources, Science and Technology Department that among other things promotes the youth development agenda. Her work is supported by the Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE), composed by young leaders and the Youth Advisory Council (which is also appointed by the AUC), made up of young people from the five regions of the continent, with a balanced gender and regional representation. An online network of young volunteers is also contributing to the work of the OYE.

## Profile

Aya Chebbi, originally from Tunisia, took up the position of AU Youth Envoy at the age of 30. Aya has an extensive background as a Pan-African youth activist and mentor for the young generation. She is

the founder of multiple platforms, such as Afrika Youth Movement (AYM), one of Africa's largest Pan-African youth-led movements. She also played an active role in the non-governmental sector as member of the Board of Directors of CIVICUS, the World Refugee Council and Oxfam Independent Commission on Sexual Misconduct. Aya became a world-renowned blogger during 2010/2011 Tunisia's Revolution, and since then has been supporting and mentoring thousands of youth activists across the African continent.

## Mandate & Strategy

Aya Chebbi represents and advocates for the interests of African youth to the different AU bodies, and in particular for the implementation of the [African Youth Charter](#), the Demographic Dividend Roadmap and [Agenda 2063](#). The mandate lasts 2 years.

Her work is divided in 4 strands:

- Participation: creating mechanisms at national, regional and global levels and facilitating youth access and engagement in the AUC;
- Advocacy: promoting youth issues, mobilising and building capacity of youth;
- Partnership: engaging with a variety of stakeholders and forming multi-stakeholder partnerships on youth issues;
- Harmonisation: promoting the adoption and implementation of the African Youth Charter and other policies and actions to improve youth participation.

[The 2019/2020 Action Plan of the Office of the Youth Envoy \(OYE\)](#) identifies actions and priority thematic areas to respond to the needs and expectations of African youth during the Envoy's two years mandate. The Action Plan was informed by concrete recommendations from over 1000 young people via online consultations and workshops. The five thematic areas in focus are: Youth refugee voices; Ending violence against young women; Employment and education; Youth health and wellbeing; Young peacebuilders.

## EU internal youth policy

There are also existing mechanisms at EU level for internal youth policy. The new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 focuses on 3 core areas of action and 11 goals formulated through a youth consultation. Youth participate in the formulation and implementation of this strategy through several mechanisms, including an 18-month cycle of [EU-Youth Dialogue](#).

One innovation in the new EU Youth Strategy is the creation of an **EU Youth Coordinator** position within the European Commission. The role of the coordinator is to enhance cooperation and exchanges within the European Commission and to advise on (internal) youth policy. The coordinator is also the point of reference and of contact with youth and communicates with them through different platforms such as the [European Youth Portal](#). This position has not yet been allocated to a person.

## EU Youth Envoy

Plan International believes in young people's potential as agents of change and in the necessity to involve them in policy and decision making that impacts their lives. By developing further

mechanisms for youth participation and engagement in EU external action, the EU can ensure youth-led, innovative solutions that contribute positively towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. We consider that the creation of an EU Youth Envoy working on EU external action could be an important step to adequately represent the rights and needs of young people.

As Plan International, we also find it essential that the work of the EU Youth Envoy has a focus on gender equality and links with policies such as the Gender Action Plan (2016-2020), taking into account the particular concerns of and challenges girls and young women face. In fact, gender equality has been an important part of the work of both the UN and AU Youth Envoys. One of the thematic priorities in Aya Chebbi's Action Plan is around advocating for gender equality, young women's rights, and champion the AU campaign to end Female Genital Mutilation and Early Child Marriage. In her last briefing to the UN Security Council, Aya advocated for a feminist pan-Africanism and for the Women, Peace and Security agenda<sup>2</sup>. Jayathma Wickramanayake's youth strategy adopts a gender transformative approach, she was a speaker at Women Deliver Conference 2019<sup>3</sup>, and she participated in a Generation Equality event as part the 74th session of the UN General Assembly<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://auyouthenvoy.org/press-release-african-union-youth-envoy-briefing-un-security-council/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2019/06/130275/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/9/news-coverage-un-promotes-young-womens-leadership>