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Youth Engagement in the Arctic Council: Background Paper

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List of Content:

1. Scope of the background paper
 - 1.1. Youth Engagement and Sustainable Development
 - 1.2. Definitions of the Youth
2. Arctic Council Youth Engagement
 - 2.1. Arctic Council Permanent Participants Youth Engagement
 - 2.2. Arctic Council Working Groups Youth Engagement
3. Youth Engagement and Participation in the Arctic
 - 3.1. Youth and Young Professionals-Led Networks
 - 3.2. Youth Engagement Mechanisms
 - 3.3. Education and Capacity Building
 - 3.4. Direct Youth Engagement
4. Conclusion

1. Scope of the background paper

In 2019 at the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) plenary meeting in Hveragerði, Iceland SAOs and Permanent Participants (PPs) expressed unanimous support for moving forward on fostering sustainable and meaningful collaboration and engagement between youth and the Arctic Council (AC). The SAOC recognized the strong support from delegates for enhanced work on affairs related to youth and engagement with youth in the Arctic Council. The need to establish a common understanding of what age 'youth' relates to was raised in the meeting. In that meeting, the Chairs of the Working groups of Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) and Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), as well as a representative of the Arctic Youth Network (AYN), were invited to share their efforts to engage young people and comment on how meaningful youth involvement could be ensured in future. The

Chairmanship wants to continue the discussion on how the youth can be stronger represented in the Arctic Council. Icelandic Chairmanship is taking its effort to involve youth to the next level.

This paper presents the forms of youth engagement in international fora and organizations, showcases youth networks and initiatives in the Arctic context, gathers definitions of 'youth' and mechanisms of youth representation. It also includes the proposals for the SAOs on how to engage the youth in the Arctic Council. This paper does not investigate the possibilities and forms of financing mechanisms for youth engagement in the Arctic Council.

1.1. Youth engagement and sustainable development

Sustainable Development Goals are crucial for youth development. The Universal nature of the 2030 Agenda entails that youth should be considered across all Goals and targets. *“As youth are increasingly demanding more just, equitable and progressive opportunities and solutions in their societies, the need to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people (such as access to education, health, employment and gender equality) have become more pressing than ever. Youth can be a positive force for development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive.”*¹

The youth perspectives have been identified as a poorly developed feature in the study of Arctic human development². Furthermore, young people have demonstrated both an interest and legitimate stake in being part of discussions about the future. When youth play a role in decision-making, they are more likely to be engaged and engage others in the future prosperity of the place³.

1.2. Definitions of the youth

This section shows the various definition of the youth applied by international organizations and the eight Arctic Member States. The United Nations (UN), defines 'youth', for statistical purposes, as those persons

¹ United Nations – Youth <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/>; UN Economic and Social Affairs. New York. 2018. World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

² See: Karlsdottir & Jungsberg, 2015 <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1128959/FULLTEXT01.pdf>; Larsen & Fondahl, 2014

https://books.google.no/books?hl=en&lr=&id=BmO2BgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&ots=w09qXv2rKC&sig=ssfM4nk2CDDK1SasfXIX-tue_TA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false; Annika E. Nilsson et al. 2019 Towards improved participatory scenario methodologies in the Arctic, Polar Geography, DOI: [10.1080/1088937X.2019.1648583](https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2019.1648583)

³ Cost 2017 <https://search.proquest.com/openview/c5be6d5bdeb12b4fe0e8ad2b003ff77e/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>; Karlsdottir & Jungsberg, 2015; Chen, Da et al. 2019. Encouraging youth engagement in marine protected areas: A survey of best practices in Canada. Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems. 29. 223-232. 10.1002/aqc.3094.

between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States.⁴ Many countries also draw the line on youth with the 'age of majority' which is often 18. The operational definition of the term 'youth' varies from country to country. The Youth Strategy⁵ of the European Union does not have an official definition of youth. This definition varies from one Member State to another. As an instrument for implementing the EU Youth Strategy, the EU's 'Youth in Action' program⁶ targets young people between 13 and 30.⁷ EU statistical office Eurostat⁸ defines young people to be between 15 and 29 years old.

Canada's two federal government agencies⁹ generally define youth as from an age of 15 up to 24-30. Denmark has neither a single definition of the target group nor the national youth law. Several acts, strategies and institutions target different groups of young people.¹⁰ In Finland all persons under the age of 29 are defined as the 'youth'¹¹. The Youth Act in Iceland¹² is intended for youth activities for children and young people, aged 6 to 25. Norway does not have a specific youth law, and there is no legal classification of youth¹³. Still, some official reports¹⁴ define those persons between 12 and 26 years old as the 'youth'. In Russian Federation the youth definition includes people between 14 and 30 years of age, and in some cases up to 35 years of age and more¹⁵. Sweden's target group for youth policy is young people between 13 and 25 years of age¹⁶. United States of America (Alaska) does not have a set definition

⁴ United Nations – Youth <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/>

⁵ A new Youth Strategy of EU 2019-2027 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0269>

⁶ EU Youth in Action programme 2007-2013 https://ec.europa.eu/youth/success-stories/youth-in-action_en

⁷ European Commission staff working document on EU indicators in the field of youth. 2011.

https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/publications/indicator-dashboard_en.pdf

⁸ Eurostat's statistic on youth in EU <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/youth/overview>

⁹ Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada: A Portrait of Canadian Youth: March 2019 Updates:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2019003-eng.htm#a1>

¹⁰ See: European Commission. Youth Wiki national description: Youth policies in Denmark. 2018:

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/sites/youthwiki/files/denmark.pdf>

¹¹ The National youth work and youth policy programme 2020-2023: Aiming to ensure a meaningful life and social inclusion for all young people. Publication of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. 2020:4.

https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162381/OKM_2020_4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

¹² Youth Act 2007:70 Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland: [https://www.government.is/library/04-](https://www.government.is/library/04-Legislation/Youth%20Act%202017_no%2070_english%202019.pdf)

[Legislation/Youth%20Act%202017_no%2070_english%202019.pdf](https://www.government.is/library/04-Legislation/Youth%20Act%202017_no%2070_english%202019.pdf)

¹³ See more: Country sheet on youth policy in Norway. Youth Partnership. Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262376/Country-sheet-Norway-](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262376/Country-sheet-Norway-2017.pdf/f193d7f5-5b6a-b9d9-21e9-b71fb5563483)

[2017.pdf/f193d7f5-5b6a-b9d9-21e9-b71fb5563483](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262376/Country-sheet-Norway-2017.pdf/f193d7f5-5b6a-b9d9-21e9-b71fb5563483)

¹⁴ Norges offentlige utredninger 2011:20. Ungdom, makt og medvirkning.

<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/e68e3849077544e0a23f060916e2e3f2/no/pdfs/nou201120110020000dddpdfs.pdf>

¹⁵ Russian Federation the Government order (24/11/2014 N2403-p): <http://government.ru/docs/15965/>

¹⁶ Regeringens proposition 2013/14:191 Med fokus på unga – en politik för goda levnadsvillkor, makt och inflytande

<https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/66D9A442-488C-4A98-9053-34A553ECE749>

for the 'youth' and the definition often follows the lead of organizations or funding agencies and their established rules. In Alaska, the grants often define youth between ages 14-24.

Many Indigenous Peoples have a broader understanding of the 'youth' definition. For example, the youth council of RAIPON and the ICC Alaska Emerging Leaders Initiative define also young adults aged 18-35 as the 'youth'.

It is a challenge to come up with a comprehensive definition of the 'youth' by limiting it to a certain age group. In this paper it is proposed to use the description of the target group – the youth in the Arctic as “young people living in the Arctic, those still in their education or young professionals” and proposes to respect each Arctic Council State's definition of 'youth'.

2. Arctic Council youth engagement

Over the years, the Arctic Council has stepped up its efforts to engage youth. Now it is taking the youth involvement to the next level. The AC does not have a separate youth section, board, or council but the youth are engaged through internship programs and the Arctic Council PPs and Working Groups.

The AC Working Groups CAFF and SDWG, have been actively involving the youth in their projects. Moreover, the Arctic Council Secretariat, the AC Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat and the CAFF Secretariat offer internships for students and young professionals. At the SAO plenary meeting in Hveragerði, Iceland the SAOs acknowledged the good work done by the Working Groups.

Since 2013, CAFF has been engaging youth: CAFF has created a strategy “Inspiring Arctic voices through Youth” and is working to provide a platform for youth from around the world to help raise awareness about the Arctic and to engage in international discussions on Arctic issues, strategies, and policies. CAFF has a series of processes focused on youth engagement. To highlight some of them: Youth Summit arranged by WWF and CAFF during the Biodiversity congress in Rovaniemi, Finland in 2018. One of the SDWG youth engagement examples is the EALLU project 'Arctic Indigenous Youth, Climate Change and Food Culture'. EALLU is focused on and led by young Indigenous reindeer herders through the Association of World Reindeer Herders, the AC Observer. The project is a showcase of meaningful and successful youth engagement. Other examples of the SDWG projects that have successfully engaged the youth are 'Circumpolar Resilience Engagement and Action Through Story (CREATeS)' and 'Gender Equality in the Arctic'.

The scope of AC youth activities could be increased to achieve a meaningful engagement that is internationally recognized and acclaimed. To enhance the youth participation at the WG level and ensure that the youth are involved, one option would be to launch an Arctic Council Youth Working Group.

2.1 Arctic Council Permanent Participants' youth engagement

Following the discussions of SAO meeting in Hveragerði in 2019, the Permanent Participants took an action by starting their youth initiative in 2020: the PP Youth Network. The PP Youth Network gathers youth representatives from each PP organizations, who meet monthly to discuss the relevant topics. The Arctic Youth Leaders' Summit (AYLS) in November 2019 in Rovaniemi, Finland was the starting point for the Network. The summit gathered Indigenous youth from all over the Arctic and served as a platform to connect the youth. In the Summit, the PP youth called for more active involvement in the issues that affect them and by doing so they joined a global movement of young people that are speaking up for their rights as they see their future threatened by climate change.

Before this, the PPs have had youth representatives in their delegations to the Arctic Council meetings – a practice, which could be replicated widely throughout all the delegations in the Arctic Council meetings. Many PPs have their youth councils, youth initiatives and youth training and capacity building programs.

3. Youth engagement and participation in the Arctic

This section includes networks that are youth-lead and initiated by the youth: youth councils, boards and ambassador programs in the Arctic as well as education, training and capacity-building programs.

3.1 Youth and young professionals-led networks

A prominent example of the youth networks in the Arctic is the Arctic Youth Network (AYN), a youth-lead network that gathers youth interested in the Arctic from around the globe. AYN deals with COP25 and Gender Equality issues in the Arctic to develop a youth advisory group to inform the work of the GEA Editorial Committee.

The Association of Polar Early Career Scientist (APECS) is an international and interdisciplinary organization for undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, early-career faculty members, early-career professionals, educators, and others with interests in Polar and Alpine regions and the wider cryosphere.

The UN Global Indigenous Youth Caucus is not exactly an Arctic network rather an international network of Indigenous youth that addresses environmental, social, political, and sustainable development issues. The Caucus has regional focal points, including one from the Arctic. Launched as a youth initiative of the UN Indigenous forum, it has since gained the Caucus status and it is entitled to deliver statements at the official sessions in several UN mechanisms and agencies.

3.2 Youth engagement mechanisms

The mechanisms to ensure youth participation are mostly centered around the establishment of youth organizations and initiatives. In most cases, a future youth representative must apply to be chosen for councils, boards or programs. To become a member of the youth initiative, for example, young people would usually have to stand up for election and get voted for by their peers. Youth councils act as intermediaries between the youth and the officials serving as spaces for active citizenship education.¹⁷ There is also a growing trend to involve young people in a range of advisory positions. Such partnerships evolve in mutually beneficial cooperation with young people gaining leadership skills and providing ideas and input to address community problems.¹⁸

At the national level, for instance, Norway has 18 county youth councils that work as a consultative body at the Parliament. The members of the youth councils and municipal boards, aged between 12 and 17 years old, are chosen through direct elections at municipality schools. Some municipalities have elections at their local youth organizations or clubs, or they directly contact young people to become a representative.¹⁹ Many governments also have youth councils. Also, the Sámi Parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden have youth councils or youth policy committees.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States facilitates youth participation through the Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue, the Baltic Sea Youth Platform and the newest project, the Baltic Sea Youth Camp. The Nordic Council of Ministers established a new cross-sectoral strategy for children and young people in 2016. The strategy lays down the vision for the Nordic Council of Ministers' efforts relating to children and young people: that the Nordic Region must be the best place in the world for children and young people. Nordic Culture point – which is a part of the official Nordic cooperation – has a fund The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People that funds children and young people's own projects and organizations.

Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) was established as an independent youth council becoming an official member of the Barents Regional Council in 2018. BRYC members represent the youth from each county, region, republic, and area in the Barents region as well as the Indigenous youth. BRYC works closely with the Joint Working Group on Youth of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). RAIPON and Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association have youth councils to address regional and national youth issues.

¹⁷ See: Alanko, Anu. (2020). Towards a pedagogy of participation? – Exploring children's experiences in regional youth councils. BARN - Forskning om barn og barndom i Norden. 37. DOI: [10.5324/barn.v37i3-4.3386](https://doi.org/10.5324/barn.v37i3-4.3386)

¹⁸ See: Hohenemser & Marshall, 2002 and Chen, Da et al. 2019

¹⁹ Country sheet on youth policy in Norway. Youth Partnership. Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262376/Country-sheet-Norway-2017.pdf/f193d7f5-5b6a-b9d9-21e9-b71fb5563483>

The Arctic Youth Ambassadors Program in Alaska and the Arctic Youth Ambassador Caucus in Canada organize training for youth ambassadors.

3.3 Education and capacity-building

The youth education and capacity-building are crucial part to reach meaningful youth engagement. The UN and the EU supranational and national youth policy frameworks raise the education as one of the most efficient and inclusive way to engage youth.²⁰ In the Arctic Council context, the youth capacity building could be increased through youth training on Arctic and environmental issues, internship programs and, for example, through Model Arctic Council organized by the UArctic. This model should be improved in cooperation with the Arctic Council and universities at the Arctic.

Some PPs already have capacity building and training programs for the youth introducing them to their work at the AC. ICC Alaska has launched the Emerging Alaskan Inuit Leaders Initiative, which intends to produce a fresh perspective on the Inuit issues. Six Inuit youth representatives were selected among 54 applicants. Between 2015 and 2018, ICC Greenland and Saami Council hosted a Capacity-building course for Inuit and Saami youth focused on the Indigenous affairs at the Arctic Council and other international platforms.

Several other Arctic-related programs for the youth or young professionals include the Arctic Initiative of Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, which seeks to develop new insights and collaborations that bring together science, technology, and policy to address the environmental, economic and social challenges facing the Arctic. The Students on Ice was established to educate the world's youth about the importance of the Polar Regions. The Arctic Future Challenge is an innovation competition for young entrepreneurs living in and/or studying/running a business in the Arctic.

3.4 Direct engagement

Many large Arctic fora, events and conferences have recently increased youth participation. For example, the Arctic Circle provides a variety of youth-related events. The Northern Sustainable Development Forum has launched the Youth Northern Forum, a new youth initiative. The Arctic Frontiers encourage youth actors to participate in the Emerging Leaders program for young professionals. In 2019, the 5th International Arctic Forum, 'Arctic: Territory of Dialogue', introduced the Youth Day as part of their

²⁰ Chaskin, R.J., McGregor, C. and Brady, B. (2018) Supporting Youth Civic and Political Engagement: Supranational and National Policy Frameworks in Comparative Perspective. Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway: <http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/media/unescochildandfamilyresearchcentre/Full-Report-1.pdf>

agenda. In 2014, the Arctic Encounter Symposium (AES), the largest annual Arctic policy event in the US, founded the Arctic Youth Initiative. The initiative aims at facilitating dialogue between the Arctic youth and the national and international Arctic policy leaders.

Another form of direct youth engagement is communication and outreach activities. Since social media and digital technologies have become an essential mode of youth communication, new multimedia platforms can enhance youth engagement and have a positive influence on political knowledge and activity of the youth.²¹ - The Youth are pioneers of using new technological tools for cooperation, distance learning, research and dialogues which supports and can benefit the work of the Arctic Council.

In the Arctic Council context the direct engagement could be reached through providing an extra seat in each delegation reserved for a young person in each official delegation; to set up a parallel Youth Arctic Council or youth board; allow the youth organizations to apply for the Observer status; increase and widen the projects led by the AC working groups to achieve a meaningful youth engagement through increasing the youth led projects or youth representatives in the working groups.

4. Conclusion

Overall, there is a variety of processes and initiatives of youth engagement in several forms across the Arctic. Many international forums and organizations are going through a process of finding ways to engage the youth in their work. Meaningful youth engagement is beneficial for the Arctic Council's future work to support the growth of future Arctic leaders and experts.

²¹ Gretschel et al. 2014. Youth Participation: Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/images/julkaisuja/youthparticipation_goodpractices.pdf; Chen, Da et al. 2019