



# /PERSPECTIVE

## *Youth & Good Environmental Governance*

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The OSCE Role  
in Strengthening  
Youth  
Involvement on  
Environmental  
Policy

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FES Regional Office for  
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## Introduction: Good Environmental Governance

The OSCE region is facing unprecedented environmental issues, accelerated by economic growth, consumerism, pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, and many more factors. Governance, defined as *"a complex set of values, norms, processes, and institutions by which society manages its development and resolves conflict, formally or informally"*<sup>1</sup> represents a crucial factor for addressing these environmental issues. In this regard, special attention should be given to the new ways of governance, such as good environmental governance.

The concept of good environmental governance refers to a set of rules, practices, policies, and institutions, which contribute towards shaping human interactions with the environment, and involve all stakeholders (governments, private sector, and civil society). It is of paramount importance because it ensures the effectiveness of conservation, environmental management and sustainable development. Moreover, *"it is an important instrument to reduce tensions within and between countries on the use of natural resources, thus contributing to building trust and confidence at all level and, as a consequence, to strengthening security. By promoting good environmental governance, the OSCE aims to support the participating States in strengthening national authorities and empowering civil society."*<sup>2</sup> However, the concept is mainly applied at the national level, and lacks a practical framework, such as the common guidelines and coordination within the OSCE region.

Today, a number of environmental risks and hazards inherited from earlier generations significantly affect young people. Moreover, youth have notable concerns and responsibilities towards the environment since they will continue to be the ones facing consequences of current actions and inactions. Even though the youth have the opportunity to be engaged in the decision-making processes on these matters (through volunteerism, community service, service-learning, youth committees in local Governments, umbrella organizations for youth organizations, university or school clubs, youth forums, conferences, etc<sup>3</sup>), many of them find it difficult to make their voice heard, and they still belong to our

societies' underrepresented groups especially when it comes to good environmental governance policies. Often, this might be caused by stereotypical perceptions regarding the youth's lack of experience.

The aim of this policy paper is to outline the role of the OSCE in strengthening youth involvement in good environmental governance, and propose recommendations for fostering youth engagement in decision-making processes on environmental matters. The policy paper has been developed as a result of the analysis of the OSCE Commitments in the Economic and Environmental Dimension, the study of relevant Ministerial Council Decisions, as well as numerous online interviews and discussions with OSCE officials and OSCE delegations from various participating States.

## Mandate and Role of the OSCE

Due to its direct impact on security<sup>4</sup>, good environmental governance has been part of the OSCE political commitments starting from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, when participating States stressed *"that their efforts to develop cooperation in the fields of trade, industry, science and technology, the environment and other areas of economic activity contribute to the reinforcement of peace and security in Europe and in the world"*.<sup>5</sup> Taking into account challenges and threats in the Economic and Environmental dimension, the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension was adopted

1 Wanxin Li, "Environmental Governance: Issues and Challenges," Environmental Law Reporter News and Analysis 36, no. 7 (July 2006): 10505-10525 & Lamont Hempel, Environmental Governance. The Global Challenge, Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996.

2 OSCE "Good Environmental Governance", accessed October 9, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/occea/446368>.

3 UN "Society and Decision Making Factsheet", accessed October 17, 2021, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/society-and-decision-making-factsheet.html>.

4 "Environmental degradation, including both natural and man-made disasters, and their possible impact on migratory pressures, could be a potential additional contributor to conflict. Climate change may magnify these environmental challenges", Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security, adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid, Spain, on the 30 November 2007, MC.DOC/4/07 ([osce.org](https://www.osce.org)).

5 Helsinki Final Act, signed at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki, Finland, 1975, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/c/39501.pdf>.

by the Ministerial Council in 2003, and participating States committed themselves to co-operate on economic, good governance, sustainable development and environmental protection issues. In the 2007 Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security, participating States reaffirmed their commitments *“to improve environmental governance, inter alia, by strengthening the sustainable management of natural resources, especially water, soil, forests and biodiversity”*<sup>6</sup> emphasizing the significance of good environmental governance.

In order to ensure the fulfillment of these commitments, and enhance security and stability in the region, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) carries out different activities<sup>7</sup>. These activities may be considered as a guide towards good environmental governance, and an instrument for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are part of the 2030 Agenda.

## Youth and Good Environmental Governance

*“We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”*<sup>8</sup>

Many national and international strategies, policies, projects and initiatives are designed to support good governance practices. They contribute to stronger democratic relationships between governments and citizens, enabling them to effectively participate in the decision-making processes, while also increasing transparency, accountability and integrity. Participating States should grant all stakeholders equal and fair opportunities to be informed and consulted, engaging them in all phases of the policy cycle. Specific efforts should be made to reach out to the most vulnerable, underrepresented, and marginalized groups, such as local communities, women, migrants, persons with disabilities, and the youth, as environmental degradation affects them disproportionately more than others. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to assure their active participation in climate adaptation and environmental policy.

As stressed by various OSCE participating States,

including Italy<sup>9</sup>, Spain<sup>10</sup> and Kyrgyzstan<sup>11</sup>, the importance of promoting the role of youth as future decision-makers is undeniable. The time has come to reshape the old-fashioned structure of governance, to establish new trends in environmental governance, and to empower young talents and networks of young professionals. However, advocating for youth interests and presenting their concerns during the policy-making processes is often complex and sensitive. That is why it is of crucial importance to provide the youth with the opportunity to express their needs, exchange best practices and share their perspectives and possible solutions related to the OSCE's second dimension. Yet, we must always have in mind that youth inclusion is not only about justice, but more significantly, about growth and economic development of every participating State.

<sup>6</sup> Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security, adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid, Spain, on the 30 November 2007, MC.DOC/4/07 ([osce.org](https://www.osce.org))

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the OCEEA activities visit <https://www.osce.org/ocea>

<sup>8</sup> This quote, along with some close variants, is sometimes labeled as an Native American proverb, or attributed to Antoine de St. Exupery, or to Ralph Waldo Emerson or to David Bower.

<sup>9</sup> OSCE “The role of youth in contributing to peace and security ranked high on the agenda during the OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan”, accessed October 17, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/406520>

<sup>10</sup> OSCE “Unlocking potential of youth focus of Third Mediterranean Partners for Co-Operation Group meeting”, accessed October 17, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/partners-for-cooperation/mediterranean/492724>

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic “The first meeting of the OSCE Group of friends on Youth and Security in the Troika format was held in Vienna”, accessed October 17, 2021, <https://mfa.gov.kg/en/Main-menu/Press-service/novosti/The-first-meeting-of-the-OSCE-Group-of-Friends-on-Youth-and-Security-in-the-Troika-format-was-held-in-Vienna-The-meeting-was-chaired-by-Spain-and-attended-by-the-co-chairs-of-the-Group-Kyrgyzstan-and-the-USA>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

As a group of students and young professionals taking part in the OSCE Perspectives 2030 Online Academy, we share the opinion that significant developments could be made if participating States take more actions in implementing the following recommendations:

### Increasing youth participation in the decision-making processes

Beyond being among the most affected groups by natural disasters, the youth is firmly committed to fighting environmental and climate change challenges, and playing an important role in their prevention, risk reduction and recovery phase. However, we believe that youth perceptions and added value might not be fully reflected in the relevant policies and practices at the local, national, and regional level if their active participation is not ensured by the OSCE participating States. Showing a growing interest in youth, the OSCE should, in our opinion, play the leading role in this process by encouraging participating States to cooperate and adopt innovative and youth-oriented policies, including the new Ministerial Council decision that would specifically address environmental challenges. We are aware that funds can present a limiting factor and priorities of participating States may differ, but reaching consensus on involving the youth in the decision-making processes would result in long-lasting relationships among different actors and enhanced security in the OSCE area. The Open Government Partnership<sup>12</sup> is a positive example of multilateral initiative established by government representatives and civil society who advocate together and use public consultation to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive, and accountable governance.

In order to foster dialogue between the youth and decision-makers, we recommend creating youth committees on environmental governance at both national and the OSCE level. At the national level, committees should gather representatives of government and youth (from various groups), while one government and one youth delegate from every national committee would be appointed by the participating State in order to participate in the gatherings

at the OSCE level. Youth delegates would act as a support to their government representatives, bringing youth ideas to the table, and sharing conclusions and practices from their national committees. In this way, the practice of consulting the youth when making important environmental decisions would be introduced to the OSCE system while contributing to the networking of different actors in shaping tomorrow's world.

### Promoting awareness-raising and capacity building activities for the youth

Since 2002, the OSCE has been promoting Aarhus Centres which focus on strengthening partnerships among civil society, governments, and other stakeholders in order to reinforce the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. This is done through raising public awareness on environmental issues, facilitating access to information and justice in environmental matters, as well as enhancing public participation in decision-making processes.<sup>13</sup> We believe that the OSCE should continue to support Aarhus Centres, and that it should pay additional attention to the youth component. By designing tailored youth activities and involving young people in the existing initiatives, both their environmental awareness and contributions to decision-making processes regarding environmental matters would increase. Moreover, this would favor society's social cohesion, contributing to building trust and reconciliation.

The ways in which the OSCE could contribute to raising awareness of young people are numerous: working directly with youth communities and citizen's associations in order to help them implement different activities, organize events, presentations and workshops for students, and enable youth participation in intergovernmental forums and conferences. This would foster connections with other stakeholders, encourage volunteerism, provide political support, help in conducting research, facilitate strategic planning, provide visibility, networking and training, and support students to start a career in the environ-

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on the Open Government Partnership visit <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

<sup>13</sup> OSCE "Good Environmental Governance", accessed October 9, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/occea/446368>

mental field through mentorship programmes, etc. The Environmental Legal Clinics Programme, implemented by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Aarhus Centre Sarajevo, represents a good practice example. Through this programme, law students are provided with the opportunity to enhance their knowledge on environmental law and strengthen their legal expertise in order to build a safe and sustainable future for their country.

Furthermore, we suggest creating the OSCE Environmental Youth Forum which will gather students, youth movements, and NGOs from across the OSCE region with the aim of discussing environmental challenges and bringing them to the attention of decision-makers. Topics that are of most interest to young people, such as climate change, environmental governance, gender equality and sustainability, would be the main points of discussion during the meetings that will be organized once a year in order to assure consistency and keep up with current trends and threats in the environmental dimension.

### **Introducing digital mechanisms for informing and consulting the youth**

Nowadays, youth are often referred to as digital natives. Social media, gaming and other forms of digital tools play a significant role in their lives from an early age. Thus, they tend to be the most interested to embrace technological developments and become pioneers of digital transformation. However, their environmental potential is yet to be used for facilitating the youth access to environmental information, fostering youth participation in the decision-making processes, promoting good environmental governance and reaching sustainable development. Youth should be perceived as leaders of digital governance.

Having in mind the correlation between good governance and the right to be informed, we find it important for the youth to have access to environmental data, practices and policies, including information related to activities of their interest, mentioned in the section “Promoting awareness-raising and capacity building activities”. The OSCE’s online learning platform<sup>14</sup> that offers free e-Learning courses on security issues, encompassing politico-military,

economic and environmental, and human aspects is an example that should be followed.

We recommend to the OSCE participating States to encourage and support dissemination of information through digital environmental platforms as continuous information flows between various actors could contribute to significant progress, not only in enhancing youth participation, but also in disaster risk prevention and reduction. We propose creating a digital platform that will gather the OSCE participating States, relevant international organizations (such as UNEP, UNDP, UNECE), civil society, private sector, youth movements and activists in order to discuss burning issues that our society is facing and will face in the future.

Moreover, we believe that it is very important to regularly introduce different forms of online public participation such as digital polls (to consult the youth when taking important decisions on environmental matters or when organizing activities and designing projects for them), online questionnaires (to get in touch with stakeholders), as well as newsletters (to inform the youth about opportunities on their disposal, developments in the field or emerging crises).

### **Commitment**

We strongly believe that our recommendations should be supported by other working groups of the OSCE Perspectives 2030 Online Academy, and members of the OSCE Ministerial Council, as the effects of environmental challenges tackle us all, making our future and the future of our descendants uncertain. We are committed to promoting this initiative within the OSCE, among participating States, and among other relevant stakeholders at the local, national, and regional level. We strongly believe that in this manner, we will increase the chances of implementing recommendations into practice. We are the voice of the future that lacks time to get to the agenda of decision-makers, and we have the obligation to encourage others to get on this crucial ride towards a brighter future with us, before it is too late.

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the OSCE’s online learning platform visit <https://elearning.osce.org/>



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<https://elearning.osce.org/>



### *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*

With 57 participating States in North America, Europe and Asia, the OSCE – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – is the world's largest regional security organization. The OSCE works to build and sustain stability, peace and democracy for more than one billion people, through political dialogue and projects on the ground. The OSCE is a forum for political dialogue on a wide range of security issues and a platform for joint action to improve the lives of individuals and communities. The Organization helps to bridge differences, build trust and foster co-operation within and between states. With its expert units, institutions and network of field operations, the OSCE addresses issues that have an impact on our common security such as arms control, terrorism, good governance, energy security, human trafficking, democratization, media freedom and national minorities.

The Secretariat, which includes the Conflict Prevention Centre, assists the OSCE Chair in its activities, provides operational and administrative support to field operations and, as appropriate, to other institutions.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Warsaw promotes democratic elections, respect for human rights, the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination, and the rights of Roma and Sinti communities.

The OSCE Academy in Bishkek provides a regional and international public forum for professionals and students in the spirit of co-operation in the fields of international relations, comprehensive security, democratization, the rule of law and human rights.

### **In cooperation with**



Organization for Security and  
Co-operation in Europe

## ***FES ROCPE in Vienna***

The goal of the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Vienna is to come to terms with the challenges to peace and security in Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago. These issues should be discussed primarily with the countries of Eastern Europe – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and with Russia, as well as with the countries of the EU and with the US. The security order of Europe, based until recently on the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Paris Charter (1990), is under threat. This is, among others, a result of different perceptions of the development of international relations and threats over the last 25 years, resulting in divergent interests among the various states.

For these reasons, ROCPE supports the revival of a peace and security dialogue and the development of new concepts in the spirit of a solution-oriented policy. The aim is to bring scholars and politicians from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US together to develop a common approach to tackle these challenges, to reduce tensions and to aim towards conflict resolution. It is our belief that organizations such as the FES have the responsibility to come up with new ideas and to integrate them into the political process in Europe.

We support the following activities:

- Regional and international meetings for developing new concepts on cooperation and peace in Europe;
- A regional network of young professionals in the field of cooperation and peace in Europe;
- Cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and the human.

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