



Report - Study Visit to Brussels

17-21 October 2022

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CONTEXT

The Overseas Countries and Territories Youth Network (OCT-YN) is an initiative launched by the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) in July 2022. The OCT-YN aims to increase the ties between young people living in OCTs and the European Union and enhance the knowledge and involvement of young people in the EU-OCT partnership.

The network's objectives are to:

- Connect young people from the 13 OCTs to each other and with EU institutions and decision makers;
- Project an OCT youth perspective to inform the EU-OCT partnership in a spirit of co-creation;
- Deepen understanding about the EU in the OCTs;
- Create links with other youth initiatives at regional and country level, including the EU and Member States.

The network is composed of 25 members aged between 20 and 28 years old, serving a one-year mandate. During their mandate, the members of the OCT-YN take part in a week-long study visit to Brussels to learn more about how the EU Institutions function, enroll in four webinars to deepen knowledge and competences about EU International Partnerships and attend various dialogue sessions with EU political leaders.

In its first edition, the OCT-YN members that were selected include representatives of the following OCTs: Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Saba, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Sint Maarten, Wallis and Futuna and Greenland.

The Study Visit to Brussels took place from October 17 to 21, and was attended by 20 OCT-YN representatives.

This report summarizes the main activities of the study visit and its final outcomes.



ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT

DAY 1: OCTOBER 17

WELCOME AND GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

The OCT-YN members were welcomed at the European Commission in the Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) by receiving an introduction to the EU-OCT partnership and the overall goals of the programme.

As all the previous activities of the OCT-YN were organised online, it was the first time the participants had a chance to all meet each other in person. Therefore, the team prepared several activities that supported the creation of a network spirit. In this framework, the representatives of the OCTs could share their experiences in person about their different geographical provenance, their professional lives, and their aspirations for the future. During the same session, participants were asked to share the aspirations and the conditions of young people in their own territories and their aims to be part of the OCT-YN.

The session was followed by creative team-building activities.



OCT YOUTH-LED EXCHANGE FAIR AND PEER-TO-PEER INPUT

The focus of this session was to exchange about the socio-economic situation of the individual OCTs and highlight the differences and similarities that could become the basis for future collaboration and cooperation. OCT-YN participants discussed common topics of interest, such as climate, economic activities, culture and youth in their territories. This exercise was prepared before the Study Visit: members had to meet and fill in a form with the main relevant facts and information about their OCTs. This exercise provided an opportunity to do some in-depth research and to get prepared for the Study Visit, as well as to formulate questions to be explored during the meetings.

The group went deeper in discussing the situation of young people in their territories during the World Cafe activity **about the education system; EU perception; and challenges** faced by youth.

Regarding **the education system**, some of the issues highlighted were, among others, high migration among young people who decide to continue their studies abroad because of limited possibilities at their home universities. Moreover, many of the young people who manage to study abroad do not return to their own home countries, creating a loss of intellectual patrimony. In many OCTs, youth do not have the possibility to study in their native language. There is a shortage of teachers in many subjects, especially science, and the quality of educational pathways suffers greatly from this.

The OCT-YN members revealed that they have little knowledge about **the opportunities offered by European Programmes**. Most information is related to Erasmus + or to specific projects about Climate Change or Disaster Management.

From the perspective of youth, more coordination and communication is desirable among the OCTs and the EU.

In general, young people in the OCTs face a **lot of challenges**, such as the brain drain, a lack of good study possibilities for most young people, contracting high student debt to complete their studies, the lack of work opportunities and a general feeling that the OCTs do not provide possibilities for personal and professional growth.

DAY 2: OCTOBER 18

VISIT TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The second day was dedicated to visiting the European Commission, organised by the Visitor Centre. OCT-YN members had the opportunity to better understand the role and the competencies of the European Union and its external relations; to get insights about the European Green Deal and energy transition, the EU diplomatic service and how EU Civil Protection Mechanism works specifically; to have an overview about EU youth programmes and gender equality programmes and actions.

The topics offered in the programme were chosen by the OCT-YN members during the preparatory phase of the study visit. The focus of their interest was on possibilities of cooperation between EU and OCTs in the field of environmental policies and the possibilities for youth to participate in EU Programmes. The topic of education was central to the discussion, as the OCT youth representatives were particularly interested in learning more about all the opportunities that Erasmus+ offers, including the possibilities for participation outside the formal educational sector. An interesting debate focused on the challenges that women face in the OCTs and how the EU programmes can offer opportunities for better gender balance and equality.



The sessions of the day were as follows:

- The European Commission: the political executive of the European Union, by Haydn Schofield (DG Communication)
- Climate Action, by Sevim Aktas (DG Climate Action)
- European Year of Youth and the EU youth programmes, by Miranda Zavrou (DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture)
- Gender equality in Education and Training, by Hristina Petkova (DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture)
- EU Civil Protection mechanism/disaster relief/examples in OCTs, by Geir Ellingsen (DG for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations)
- EU External Action, by Pietro de Matteis (European External Action Service)
- Gender Equality, by Bianca Faragau (DG Justice and Consumers)

DAY 3: OCTOBER 19

VISIT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

During the visit to the European Parliament, OCT-YN members had a chance to learn about the role and functions of this institution. Participants were introduced to the history of the European Parliament and its main functions and responsibilities. The voting system at the European level was explained in detail and the relationship between Brussels and Strasbourg assemblies. The discussion was dedicated to the role of the OCTs and the representation of their interests in the European Parliament. Meetings with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who strongly advocate for OCTs were planned for the following days of the Study visit.



MEETING WITH COMMISSIONER JUTTA URPIILAINEN AND HER CABINET

Following the Visit to the European Parliament, the OCT-YN members had the chance to meet with Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen and her cabinet.

In attendance at the meeting were:

- Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships
- Renaud Savignat, Member of Mrs. Urpilainen's cabinet
- Arto Virtanen, Member of Mrs. Urpilainen's cabinet
- Sylvie Millot, Head of Overseas Countries and Territories Unit (INTPA – B3)

Youth was highlighted as a top priority on the Commissioner's agenda: the new Youth Sounding Board (YSB) and the Special Adviser on Youth are important assets for the design and implementation of the newly released Youth Action Plan for External Action. The Commissioner highlighted the strategic importance of the EU-OCT partnership, and mentioned that she will be chairing the EU-OCT Forum in New Caledonia. The EU-OCT Forum is a high-level political meeting to take stock of the EU-OCT partnership. During the meeting, the Commissioner looked forward to collaboration between the OCT YN and YSB, and a strengthening of their future relationship.



NETWORK MEETING WITH DG INTPA - UNIT IN CHARGE OF RELATIONS WITH THE OCTS

The Directorate-General for International Partnerships is responsible for formulating the EU's international partnership and development policy, with the goal to reduce poverty, ensure sustainable development and promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law across third countries in the world. INTPA also has the portfolio of OCTs even though they are part of the territory of three Member States.

The OCT-YN members had a chance to meet the B3 unit of DG INTPA, working directly with the OCTs. Unit B3 presented its work and the cooperation between EU and OCTs, providing concrete examples of actions already implemented in the field with a specific focus on youth and the environment.

During the meeting, the importance of the relationship between the EU and OCTs was emphasized, building on its unique and longstanding relationship with deep historical roots, guaranteed by the Treaty of Rome since 1957. Although the OCTs are not part of the EU territory or the EU single market, it is important to remember that OCT nationals are EU citizens, with the right to vote in European Parliament elections. Moreover, the OCTs are politically important to the EU; they are strategic outposts spread out around the globe, putting forward European values and standards.

During the presentation, the B3 unit highlighted that the EU and the OCTs share common priorities and that this partnership meets the specific needs of the OCTs as well as contributes to EU priorities and policies, such as the Green Deal, employment, digitalisation, education and youth. In fact, the partnership between the EU and OCTs offers, among others, preferential commercial treatment, financial cooperation to meet specific territorial needs and access to numerous European programmes (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, COSME, LIFE, etc.) in which the participation of citizens, entrepreneurs, researchers and civil society is particularly encouraged.

A Q&A moment was opened and OCT-YN members had the possibility to get more involved in European affairs and learn more about the European institutions. Interesting debates were raised such as: voting rights in European Parliament elections; awareness about the possibility of OCT representation at European level. The OCT-YN members inquired about the concrete ways to enhance cooperation among EU member states and local governments and the decision-making level for the allocation of EU funding in the OCTs (in terms of priorities and budget).



DAY 4: OCTOBER 20

MEETING WITH GREENLAND AND DANISH PERMANENT REPRESENTATION TO THE EU

In the morning, OCT-YN members from Greenland had a meeting at the Permanent Representation of Greenland and Denmark to the EU to get an understanding of the role and function of the permanent representations, and their role vis-à-vis OCT interests. The OCT-YN had the opportunity to dialogue with the members of the Permanent Representation and to clarify the possibilities for advocacy and how the decision-making process regarding funding and policies functions at EU level.



FOLLOW UP: FOCUS ON EXISTING PROPOSALS

The OCT-YN work plan includes some webinars on topics of particular interest to the members, as well as networking and representation activities: the session aimed to gather specific topics and themes to be discussed in the following months in the online sessions.

Regarding **the webinars**, the OCT-YN identified as the main need a discussion on how to promote the network and the EU across the OCTs and how to raise awareness about EU opportunities in the OCTs. They expressed specific interest in topics such as digitalisation, water purification, youth empowerment, the green deal and brain drain.

Regarding ideas for further **OCT-YN events**, the importance of the following was discussed:

- take part in other international events such as EU-LAC meeting, World Bank event for youth;
- organise or be promoters of an event during Europe Day with presentation of EU-funded projects in OCTs;
- foster informative meetings at high school and university events to present opportunities in the EU and around the world.

Regarding **ideas for networking activities**: OCT-YN highlighted the importance of creating stronger links with existing networks such as YSB and to better disseminate the outcome and the role of OCT-YN.



FURTHER DEVELOPMENT WITHIN OCT-YN

The OCT-YN members reflected on two aspects of the added value of the network and the OCT youth priorities. Regarding the outcomes of this session, a steering group was responsible for writing the final declaration that was presented during the EU-OCT Forum in Noumea (in annex). The declaration is a call to recognise and tackle challenges that explicitly affect OCT Youth and especially highlights the importance of offering OCT youth opportunities and engaging them in decision-making processes that define their future. The document mentions education as the key to the future of youth, with better quality and equal opportunities afforded to all. The OCT-YN raises the importance of providing them with more equitable labour opportunities.

The discussions clearly highlighted that the network is of great value for the members as it provides opportunities and increases the awareness of the OCTs about the EU. In terms of main priorities, education has been mentioned as the most important one. In this field, there is a lack of educational opportunities and a need for after-school programmes and initiatives to empower youth. Moreover, there is a need to connect the study supply and labour demands and, in this sense, OCT-YN mentioned that it would be important to have practical work experience opportunities through traineeships / internships. Another priority mentioned and strongly connected with this last one is to prevent the brain drain in the OCTs by offering more opportunities to young people and providing more job opportunities



DAY 5: OCTOBER 21

MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

In the morning the group had a meeting with MEP Samira Rafaela and the team of MEP Stéphane Bijoux. The meetings aimed to clarify the role of the MEP for OCT territories.

The main questions that OCT-YN raised were about the role and activities of the European Parliament in connection with the OCTs and how to foster wider awareness about voting rights of OCT residents in EP elections. OCT-YN members do not know much about how to register to vote, as the procedure for voting for the European Parliament is not quite clear in the OCTs. The OCT-YN members were very interested about OCT youth eligibility for EU programmes and more specifically about access to EU traineeships: Blue Book (EC) and Schuman (EP).



MEETINGS WITH THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIONS OF FRANCE AND THE NETHERLANDS TO THE EU

In the afternoon, the OCT-YN members met with the Permanent Representations of the Netherlands and France. These meetings provided the opportunity to learn more about the specific role of the Member States' representations in EU-OCT relations. The meetings also offered the opportunity for the OCT-YN members to better understand the relationship between their territories and the Member state to which they are constitutionally linked.



MEETING WITH OCTA SECRETARIAT



To conclude the week, the OCT-YN members had the opportunity to meet the Coordinator of the Overseas Countries and Territories Association (OCTA) Secretariat.

The objective of the meeting was to have an open discussion to inform the OCT-YN members about the actions of OCTA gathering the 13 governments of the OCTs, in addition to the role and function of OCTA within the EU-OCT partnership. OCTA is a key actor since it provides a forum to develop effective working relationships with the EU and support the collective interests of its members in several cooperation areas of the EU-OCT association.



ANNEX

STUDY VISIT PROGRAMME

	October 17	October 18	October 19	October 20	October 21
A.M.	Welcome & Team-Building Preparation of meetings and visits	Visit to the European Commission Inputs on youth, development and cooperation, climate action and other topics.	Visit of the European	Meetings at the Permanent Representation of Greenland and Denmark to the EU	Meeting with MEP Samira Rafaela and with team of MEP Stéphane Bijoux
			Meeting with Cabinet of INTPA Commissioner		
P.M.	OCT youth-led exchange fair and peer-to-peer input		Network Meeting with DG INTPA - Unit in charge of relations with the OCTs	Planning follow-up steps of the OCT-YN + video shooting for EU-OCT Forum	Permanent Representation of the Netherlands and France
				Dinner - Brasserie Le Roy d'Espagne, Grande Place 1	Final evaluation and debriefing
					Meeting with OCTA Secretariat

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PRESS COVERAGE OF OCT-YN

Article published in
ARUBA DIARIO



« Nous préférons travailler avec l'UE, des gens que nous connaissons depuis cinquante ans, des amis, plutôt que la Chine ou les États-Unis, ce qui serait plus dangereux »,
Rabatet Lund, président de l'Association des pays et territoires d'outre-mer.

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transition énergétique

« On se sent un peu plus Européens »

Julie Cateau

Olivier Waltherp s'est senti un peu plus européen lors de sa visite à Bruxelles. Le président de l'Association des pays et territoires d'outre-mer (APTOM) a été accueilli par les représentants de l'Union européenne. C'est une première pour lui. « On se sent un peu plus européen », dit-il. « C'est une expérience unique. On a pu discuter avec des responsables européens. C'est très intéressant. »

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Olivier Waltherp, président de l'Association des pays et territoires d'outre-mer, avec des représentants de l'Union européenne.

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REPÈRES

Qu'est-ce que les PTOM ?

Les pays et territoires d'outre-mer (PTOM) dépendent constitutionnellement de la France. Ils ont des statuts particuliers. Ils sont représentés au Parlement français. Ils ont des relations particulières avec la France.

Qu'est-ce que l'Octa ?

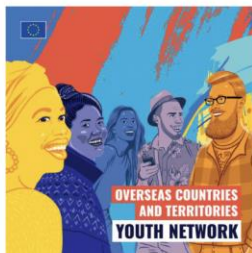
L'Octa est une association de pays et territoires d'outre-mer. Elle a pour but de promouvoir les échanges entre les PTOM.

Une conférence ministérielle annuelle

Les représentants de chaque gouvernement membre de l'Octa se réunissent une fois par an pour discuter des orientations politiques, approuver les budgets de l'association et prendre des décisions importantes.

Extract from “Dossier de Presse” in regards to the EU-OCT Forum

La jeunesse : « Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) Youth Network »



La Commission européenne a décidé de faire de 2022 « l'Année européenne de la jeunesse », dans le but de donner aux jeunes des opportunités plus nombreuses et meilleures pour l'avenir. L'engagement auprès des jeunes représente l'une des principales priorités de la Commission européenne qui souhaite s'associer à eux pour favoriser le développement durable, ainsi que reconnaître et mettre en valeur les contributions essentielles de la jeunesse à la poursuite de changements sociaux positifs dans le monde entier.

C'est dans ce contexte que la direction générale des partenariats internationaux (DG INTPA) de la Commission européenne a mis en place depuis mai 2022, « l'OCT Youth Network ». Il s'agit d'un réseau des jeunes des pays et territoires d'outre-mer qui a l'ambition de rassembler et créer des passerelles entre les jeunes en Europe et dans les PTOM, ainsi qu'entre les PTOM. Il offre aux jeunes une occasion passionnante de s'engager dans un parcours d'apprentissage, de découvrir le partenariat UE-PTOM et le fonctionnement des institutions européennes et de nouer des contacts avec des jeunes d'autres PTOM partageant les mêmes idées. Le programme d'une durée d'un an, comprend notamment une visite d'étude d'une semaine à Bruxelles, des sessions de formation en ligne et des moments de dialogue avec des dirigeants politiques de l'Union européenne.

« L'OCT Youth Network » est composé de 25 jeunes âgés de 20 à 28 ans représentant dix PTOM associés à l'UE : Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Polynésie française, Groenland, Nouvelle-Calédonie, Saba, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Sint Maarten et Wallis-et-Futuna. Le groupe présente une grande diversité de profils, d'origines, d'intérêts et de passions, reflétant ainsi la réalité des PTOM.

Les quatre représentants calédoniens du réseau des jeunes des PTOM seront présents lors du 19^e Forum UE-PTOM.



Ilona Mayerau-Lonné

Age: 20

'Passionate about international relations and security'



Malwenn Moreau

Age: 21

'Engaged for public health'



Shirley Tom

Age: 22

'Engaged in human relations with the aim of contributing to the influence of my country'



Ilhno Wathiepel

Age: 28

Større fokus på internationale relationer

To grønlandske studerende har været i Bruxelles for at lære om Grønlands relationer til EU – og besøget har gjort stort indtryk.

[Article on Sermitsiaq published on December 20, 2022](#)



Under mandatperioden i OCT-YN, vil mandaterne deltage i månedlige webinarer og dialoger med toppolitiske EU-ledere.

Privat

OCT-YN DECLARATION

The declaration was presented to the EU-OCT Forum in Nouméa

Dear OCT and EU representatives,

We, as the 25 members of the 13 EU Overseas Countries and Territories Youth Network, are given the exciting opportunity to embark on a journey to discover the EU-OCT partnership, to learn about the functioning of the European institutions and to connect with each other. We are hereby issuing this declaration to the political leaders and representatives involved in the EU-OCT partnership; to highlight, from our OCT Youth perspective, the main challenges and opportunities related to the specificities of our islands and to encourage further policy actions.

We are European citizens; however for most of our peers, the relationship with Europe remains distant, rather intangible, and often unclear. The OCT Youth Network gives us a chance to learn about EU programmes offered to us, a platform for high-level dialogue and opportunities that are so rarely found on our islands. We are finding value in the network by learning from one another. We are being recognized, heard, and given a voice, and we have so much to say.

A solid network is being built, an OCT Youth Family, recognizing that although we are oceans apart, we have a lot in common. We are pursuing knowledge, helping one another, raising awareness, and we feel empowered to actively contribute to real changes.

The existence and continuation of the OCT Youth Network is of utmost importance. It would continue to be an important asset to foster meaningful youth engagement and empowerment as part of the Youth Action Plan adopted recently by the Commission and the High Representative. This network is a building block for a future where the EU and OCTs are more associated, and a steppingstone to interconnect and exchange on joint priorities for the OCT Youth.

Therefore, we call upon you, OCT and EU leaders and representatives to recognize and tackle challenges that explicitly affect OCT Youth:

Empower us, grant us opportunities, give us a voice, and engage us in decision-making processes that define our future.

Education is a concern for all: take decisive action to ensure no children are left behind, create well-balanced schooling systems and provide more assistance and support to those embracing opportunities abroad.

Provide us with more equitable labour opportunities so we, as young adults, are not discriminated against in the labour market.

Tackle the youth mental health crisis by promoting discussion and de-stigmatization of mental health issues and increasing access to psychological support for all.

Finally, efforts towards tackling climate change and sustainable development must continue to be prioritized. Now more than ever, our islands and their inhabitants are affected by the consequences of climate change: natural disasters, sea level rise and global warming. These challenges are serious and an immediate threat that affects us all.

These islands are our home, and we are calling upon you to take more decisive action, to come forward and address these challenges in concrete terms.

We, as ambassadors of our islands' younger and future generations, are thankful for the opportunity given by the OCT Youth Network to be heard at the EU-OCT Forum via this declaration. We truly encourage giving OCT Youth opportunities and voices to further engage. We hope this network can inspire youth as a foundation in the future governance of our OCTs. We, from the OCTs, need more initiatives like the OCT Youth Network and the Youth Action Plan. We, Youth, are not only the future but also the present.

Yours Sincerely,

The OCT Youth Network, 22 November 2022