

# 2023 ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM SUMMARY





# Accelerating the COVID-19 recovery and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda with and for youth

25 – 27 April 2023



Held in a hybrid format for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2023 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum took place from 25 to 27 April and welcomed over 20,000 participants from around the world.

This year's forum leveraged the expertise of young people to generate key solutions needed for a fairer, greener and more resilient future for all. From all corners of the world, young people have called for the need to listen and work with them to tackle the complex and interconnected crises humanity is currently facing.

This year's Youth Forum was held during a period of challenging geopolitical tensions, a relentless climate crisis, rising poverty and inequalities as well as a slow and uneven recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth conveyed their strong concern regarding COVID's impact on their mental and physical health, their job prospects and educational opportunities. In addition, they identified a number of transformative actions needed to regain ground lost in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite their unique vulnerability to the long-term impacts of COVID-19, young people have repeatedly shown resilience and demonstrated they are crucial players in shaping a more sustainable world.



Sessions at the Youth Forum also addressed priorities, experiences, challenges and innovations in the areas of clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and partnerships for the goals (SDG17) that will be reviewed in the high-level political forum (HLPF), the pre-Summit of the SDGs in July 2023.

Young people also gathered to share overall recommendations and innovative ideas in preparation for the SDG Summit which will be held in September 2023 during the UN General Assembly. The Summit will provide a crucial opportunity to identify the ambitious actions needed to ensure that the world gets back on track to achieving all SDGs.

The 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum was chaired by H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, the President of the Economic and Social Council, and co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY) and co-convened by the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO).

# Opening Session



*Opening of the ECOSOC Youth Forum*

Opening the Youth Forum, H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, President of ECOSOC stressed that it was organized at a “pivotal moment for all of us.” She reminded all participants that “we are at the midpoint of our commitment to reach the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. We have only 7 years left. What we need is immediate, bold and transformative actions to reverse course and redirect our energy to accelerating the SDG implementation for and with young people.” She called for uplifting and amplifying youth voices around the world and creating opportunities for young people to come together and share their visions for change and impactful actions.

H.E. Mr. Csaba Korosi, President of the 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, highlighted that “Young people’s ideas are critical because our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is badly off-track.” He called on the youth to hold leaders accountable for promises made, and he reminded them that they can be drivers of real transformation and that their commitment, ideas and innovations can be game-changing.

H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations said young people play a critical role in the objectives of *Our Common Agenda*, his forward-looking, action-centred vision for a better, brighter, sustainable future for all. In that context, the policy brief calls on Member States to **recognize the importance of young people’s perspectives**. Youth, and “their energy” are needed to prepare the landmark SDG Summit in September, including in efforts to tackle poverty, he said. “Today, I urge you to **stand up for the SDGs**,” H.E. Mr. Guterres stressed. “Let’s shape a better future; **let’s do it together.**”

Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, stressed the disadvantaged situations faced by young people, who are “most often left behind, excluded, and marginalized,” as they confront complex global issues, including escalating geopolitical tensions, an ongoing climate crisis, and persistent poverty. She called for actions to “ensure that **all** young people are empowered to reach their full potential, have access to the resources needed and can contribute to decision making at **all** levels”. She further highlighted significant steps taken by the UN, such as the upcoming establishment of the UN Youth Office, the UN



system-wide Youth Strategy – Youth2030 – launched in 2018, and the policy brief on Meaningful Youth Engagement recently launched by the Secretary-General. Additionally, she urged decision-makers to make concrete commitments and take action to meet the demands of young people, while encouraging every young person to join forces and make a lasting impact for current and future generations.



*Mr. Jevanic Henry delivering his keynote address.*

In a keynote address, Mr. Jevanic Henry, member of the UN Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, said "We have **wasted the past decade**, talking about sustainability, but not truly walking to sustainability." While many **pandemic-era innovations came from young people**, "we cannot allow the creation of a post-COVID-19 cemetery of youth ideas which will put the 2030 Agenda in jeopardy." The entrepreneurial spirit of this generation and "**our capacity to rapidly take forward an idea** from paper to reality in the right enabling environment **is unmatched**," he

stressed.

Following the official opening, an interactive conversation took place moderated by Mr. Sherwin Bryce-Pease, Bureau Chief and Correspondent, South African Broadcasting Corp, United Nations. This interactive conversation brought together Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and young people from all corners of the world to present some key messages, including:

- Young people reiterated that they are not tomorrow's leaders, they are today's leaders. They do not want to only be heard; they also want to have a seat at the table. Their inclusion and their diversity are fundamentals to achieving the SDGs.
- There is a need to convince the world that the SDGs are not just some inspirational statements. They are perhaps the smartest tool we have to be able to continue to think and act together, recognizing our respective strengths rather than fuelling unnecessary division. Every day across the world, youth are advocating for a different way of thinking about development, which must involve joining forces and recognizing every community and every country.
- Young people are working tirelessly on the front lines, driving efforts towards job creation and infrastructure development. They are leveraging and harnessing digital technologies for social inclusion. They are challenging power imbalances and creating a paradigm shift towards a fair, inclusive and resilient recovery. They are advancing actions that transcend the limitations of thinking that is no longer fit for purpose, helping to chart a course toward a more sustainable future.



- It is important to create an enabling environment that allows young people to be equal partners in rebuilding economies and stimulating equitable and inclusive growth. Young people need to be considered as equal partners for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

- The lack of funding opportunities for meaningful child participation in the UN is a significant barrier to ensure that children's voices and perspectives are heard in decision-making processes. There is a need to strengthen the legal and policy frameworks at all levels of the UN and to develop a system-wide policy on child participation and practical guidelines.



Photo Joel Sheakoski

*Mr. Sherwin Bryce-Pease moderating the interactive discussion*

States, UN bodies and civil society should develop partnerships to empower and engage children as equal partners in efforts to shape policies and make decisions affecting them and future generations. This could be done through increased government contributions, private donations, and partnerships with charitable organisations; and also, through a special fund or grant programmes dedicated to child participation.

- Young people are critical thinkers, innovators, communicators, change makers and leaders for now and tomorrow. They are driving new ideas and solutions through effective awareness. Using their creativity, skills and platforms to empower others and inspire actions and behavioural change are keys for success.
- Leaving no one behind means considering the important role of young people in international political and economic systems. It also means mobilizing financial and logistical support for local and regional initiatives to channel grassroots efforts into these systems.

## **Young Leaders Spotlight Session on People and Planet**

The Youth Forum also included a captivating Spotlight Session on People and Planet, showcasing the Young Leaders for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In our intricate world today, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare humanity's vulnerabilities and prompted a profound re-evaluation of our relationship with nature and the planet. Climate change impacts extend beyond the realms of the natural world and permeate political conflicts,



migration, infrastructure, urban areas, agriculture, peace, security, and more. Women and girls emerge as the most vulnerable group as a result of these changes. Bearing this in mind, the spotlight session provided a dynamic platform for Young Leaders for the SDGs to share their perspectives and recommendations on the state of the planet, environmental issues, social inequalities, and the intersections among these challenges.

This session also highlighted the [Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report](#), which was released in March 2023 by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The report confirmed human-made impact global warming of 1.1 degree Celsius has led to unprecedented changes in our climate within recent human history, signalling a final warning on the climate crisis. Moreover, it underscored the urgent need for immediate, large-scale actions to mitigate climate change.

Throughout the session, three inspiring young leaders assumed the role of speakers. They shared their experiences, practices, and valuable lessons in combating climate change, seeking to ignite awareness and prompt young people to take action. Hailing from diverse regions

across the globe, these young leaders recounted their personal journeys in the climate sector, focusing on how young people can foster a more sustainable planet and enhancing the lives of all individuals. Furthermore, they emphasized the significance of leveraging artificial intelligence technologies to facilitate people's access to vast amounts of climate-related information and advocated for innovative approaches to climate change education.



Photo Joel Sheakoski

The session underscored the indispensability of youth leadership, recognizing that young people are not only future stakeholders, but also consumers and decision-makers of today. They possess the creativity, resilience, and determination necessary for transformative change. The recommendations put forth by these young leaders envision a future in which young people assume more active roles in the fight against climate change. By encouraging young people to reconsider their relationship with nature and urging them to act on the SDGs agenda for the betterment of people and the planet, the session successfully raised awareness among the youth, Ministers responsible for Youth Affairs, other high-level government representatives, and other stakeholders.

# Working with and for Youth in Accelerating COVID-19 Recovery and Achieving the 2030 Agenda – Ministerial Sessions

The “Working With and For Youth in Accelerating COVID-19 Recovery and Achieving the 2030 Agenda” session allowed for discussion on good practices, lessons learned, challenges, and opportunities for the monitoring and realization of the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on the SDGs under review at the 2023 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). This session was built on speeches from over 55 Ministers and other High-Level Member State Representatives, as well as 25 Youth Delegates and Youth Representatives.

During the Ministerial Roundtable, discussions reflected the complex landscape of challenges and opportunities facing youth from the perspective of six sub-segments: Meaningful Youth Engagement & Participation; SDG 6–Clean Water & Sanitation; SDG 7–Affordable & Clean Energy; SDG 9–Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure; SDG 11–Sustainable Cities & Communities; and SDG 17–Partnerships for the Goals.

Recommendations and key messages included, but were not limited to:

- Recognition of the power of youth to bring about positive change through their leadership, energy, determination, and innovation.
- Highlighting the need to ensure structures for meaningful youth engagement and participation in policy and decision-making processes. Structures like youth advisory boards, youth councils and technical consultative working groups, for instance, were shared as examples for youth engagement in policy development.
- Calling for intersectional collaboration, multistakeholder partnerships, including governments, civil society, private sector, and international organizations, including the United Nations, to be strengthened to address ongoing challenges disproportionately affecting youth – conflicts, poverty, age-based discrimination, gender inequality and youth unemployment, for example. In this process, decision-makers should promote diversity and inclusion, by centering the most marginalized and vulnerable youth groups.
- Working with and for young people in all their diversity, and ensuring no young person is left behind. Young people should be empowered to achieve their fullest potential in every aspect such as innovation, technology, health management, affordable and clean energy, through concrete investment and opportunities, participating in SDG implementation at all levels.



# Thematic Breakout Sessions

## CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION – SDG 6

Water is at the core of sustainable development and is critical for socioeconomic development, healthy ecosystems, the realisation of human rights, and for human survival itself. Water has been identified as particularly synergistic across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Yet millions still lack access, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Children and youth are overrepresented in areas of high, or extremely high, water vulnerability ([UNICEF, 2021](#)). The lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene

(WASH) facilities significantly impacts human rights, especially those of youth, and in particular young women, related to health, education, economic development, and social well-being. Additionally, lack of water security is one of the key drivers of migration ([Mach, 2017](#)) and growing pressure on freshwater resources often threatens peace by exacerbating tensions between the competing needs of communities, industries, and agriculture – and even between countries that share freshwaters or groundwater. Youth engagement is a powerful catalyst to make peacebuilding processes inclusive and sustainable, thus ensuring that agreements reached are considered by all relevant stakeholders ([SIWI, 2021](#)). Yet, recent data suggests that very few countries are committed to including youth in their decision-making processes ([SIWI, 2021](#)).

The session noted that solutions to these pressing water issues fall under the five levers of the [SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework](#): Financing, Capacity Building, Data and Information, Innovation and Governance. These highlight the important role youth can play as stakeholders, notably in data collection, innovative solutions, and governance. This is particularly important for groundwater management, where unreliable data is an enormous challenge for the sustainable stewardship of this crucial freshwater source. The momentum created by young innovators must be built upon and youth networks must be supported to create a positive ecosystem of partnerships, where youth ideas and initiatives are supported. These meaningful partnerships are crucial in advancing on water-related goals and targets. Further, youth must be engaged meaningfully in all water-related decision-making processes – including at the local, regional, national and international level. For youth to move from an advocacy to an advisory role in these processes, capacity building of decision makers on how to support and engage youth and youth networks in this regard must be prioritised. This includes learning how to reach





youth and include their perspectives, but also how youth expertise can be leveraged to ensure that policies are relevant and long-lasting. By adopting targeted, time-bound policies on meaningful youth engagement, parties can be held accountable for improved metrics.

In sum, youth have been left behind in the realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation, especially migrants, refugee populations, young women, and girls. Youth are also largely left out of water governance processes and mechanisms. The session concluded with the following key recommendations calling for governments, public and private actors to: Firstly, prioritise effective menstrual hygiene management, including dedicated finance, especially in humanitarian contexts. Secondly, build meaningful partnerships with young innovators and networks to support youth-led solutions in WASH at regional, national, and international level. Lastly, ensure 30 per cent representation of youth below 30 to be meaningfully engaged in water-related decision-making by 2030 through targeted policies.

## **AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY – SDG 7**

Energy is key to addressing some of the greatest challenges humanity is facing today. Indeed, access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is fundamental to human development and the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and a shift towards sustainable energy solutions is essential to the achievement of the Paris Agreement on climate change. The importance of energy is further emphasized by the multiple and interlinked global crises the world is currently facing – the COVID- 19 pandemic, the

climate crisis and the impacts of the conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere – which are putting the very viability of achieving the SDGs by 2030 at great risk. Notably, the current slowdown of global economic growth, growing impacts of climate change and soaring energy prices are hitting hardest those most in need: least developed countries and populations all over the world who are marginalized. Realizing the potential of the energy transition will require efforts at unprecedented levels by all relevant stakeholders worldwide to address multiple challenges, for example closing the gap in electricity access, improving energy efficiency, and increasing the use of renewable and clean energy. Youth will inherit the consequences of decisions taken today, therefore, they should be represented and, to the extent possible, contribute to energy transition debates to ensure a just transition.





The session on SDG 7 highlighted the contribution of youth action and youth-led initiatives in driving progress towards universal energy access, a just energy transition, and meeting the targets of SDG 7 in their local communities, regions, and countries. It also discussed best practices in connecting, engaging, supporting, and leveraging these actions and initiatives to meet the goals of SDG 7. Opportunities from different stakeholder groups on advancing the achievement of SDG 7 were also detailed. Finally, the session discussed the importance of raising awareness of how renewed commitment, political support, and accelerated action towards SDG 7 is essential for the COVID-19 recovery and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda with and for youth.

While youth are playing an important role in pushing the needle on SDG7, key challenges remain at the following levels: Amplifying the effort of youth globally; capturing the impact and contribution of youth in achieving SDG7; and creating enabling environments to maximise youth contributions. In this regard, several recommendations were made: Firstly, youth should have more access and opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways to decision-making processes, policy-making processes and frameworks related to SDG 7, at all levels. Secondly, provide trainings and mentorship support to equip youth with green skills to better prepare them for jobs in the energy transition. Thirdly, increase access to financial resources, as limited access to these resources is a key barrier for youth to meaningfully engage in the energy transition. It was also suggested that youth can participate in community-based energy projects and initiatives as a direct way to contribute to the achievement of SDG 7.

## **INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE – SDG 9**

Youth, who constitute most of the global working age population, have the potential to significantly contribute to and accelerate progress on all three pillars of SDG 9 – infrastructure, industry, and innovation, and are already doing so. However, a lack of relevant skills, and limited access to resources such as finance, technology, and infrastructure, impede youth in reaching this full potential and pursuing innovative ideas and solutions to advance SDG 9, which is a key enabler of sustainable economic development.



The session provided a platform for youth to showcase ideas, recommendations, innovations, youth-led solutions and actions to accelerate progress in SDG 9. It also discussed the key



enablers, policies and skills needed for youth to act as agents of change and progress in SDG 9, and the role of governments, support institutions and the international development community in this regard. The session also built on the outcomes of the Expert Group Meeting on SDG 9 convened by UNIDO and DESA in March 2023.

The session formulated several recommendations to empower youth as accelerators of SDG 9. Firstly, youth need greater access to education and training opportunities. This is crucial to building the necessary technical and soft skills for their economic empowerment and innovation capacities. Skills development and practical experiences are needed in areas such as engineering, manufacturing, the development and application of information and communication technologies, entrepreneurship, teamwork, as well as new digital technologies such as artificial intelligence. Secondly, youth also prioritized access to resources, technology, modern communication tools, and sustainable infrastructure to support their capacities for innovation and job and income creation. This includes financing and mentorship support, affordable and high-speed internet, and research and innovation centres, which can play a vital role in providing these opportunities. Furthermore, inclusive policies are needed support youth in acquiring the necessary skills and resources to participate in and drive youth-led solutions to sustainable industrialization, innovation, and resilient infrastructure. Governments, policymakers, and the international development community should support meaningful youth participation in policy-making processes. Involving youth in decision-making processes and providing tailor-made responses to their needs, depending on their regional, cultural, financial, and generational expectations, helps to ensure that no one is left behind. Lastly, speakers recommended to promote further collaboration and networking opportunities for youth, such as through workshops and seminars, and industry partnerships. This can support faster learning and knowledge-sharing, and reduce the gaps between youth from developed, developing and least developed countries.

## **SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES – SDG 11**

Young people living in cities face challenges in many spheres including vulnerability to crime and violence, lack of inclusion in local communities, unemployment and limited space for participation in urban governance and planning. COVID-19, devastating conflicts and the consequences of climate change exacerbated these challenges. Marginalized groups such as migrant and refugee youth, young people on the move, informal settlement





residents, persons with disabilities, indigenous youth, LGBTQ+ youth and many others are disproportionately affected. Furthermore, the rapid urbanization of developing countries is expected to have a significant impact on the social, economic, and environmental profiles of these spaces. Youth living in fast-growing cities will therefore play a crucial role in shaping the future of these urban areas. Young people, including young migrants, are essential sources of innovation in finding solutions for mitigation and adaptation, in wide-ranging issues including climate change, peacebuilding, and disaster recovery. They also contribute by testing and integrating technology and science to improve local conditions. However, this group is also vulnerable and requires special attention, especially as more young people move to cities and towns, including refugees and other forcibly displaced youth. Against the increase in urban-rural, conflict- and climate change-induced migration, it is critical that these challenges be addressed.

The session discussed effective youth inclusion in urban governance, integration of diverse urban communities, agency of youth in tackling the consequences of climate change, preventing violence and discrimination, and improving safety outcomes for all. Several recommendations were formulated: Firstly, to build sustainable cities and communities, we need to strengthen local systems and create an enabling environment for increased representation, participation, and meaningful inclusion of diverse youth in local governments and urban governance processes. To achieve this, we must combat ageism and other barriers to participation, make governance systems understandable and accessible to youth, and cultivate trust and connection among diverse youth, and between youth, law enforcement, governments, and society as a whole. It is also crucial to build the capacities and knowledge of youth to engage with and contribute to all levels of governance.

Secondly, efforts should be made to ensure the access of all youth, including migrant and refugee youth, people on the move, persons with disability and other groups to basic services and social systems, especially public health services that include mental health care, as well as access to adequate housing for all. Development partners and international donors play a significant role in ensuring inclusion and accessibility. Therefore, when funding accessibility projects for city or urban development, they should ensure meaningful participation of youth, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups. Additionally, we must co-create, together with governments and local authorities, safe and accessible spaces as well crime prevention and anti-corruption strategies that are contextually relevant. We also need to promote the localization of the SDGs which should be led by youth and could be effective in addressing climate change, reducing inequalities, and promoting sustainable urban development. This includes sufficient funding for youth-led initiatives.



# Regional Realities – Challenges, Priorities and Actions for Accelerating COVID-19 Recovery and Realizing the SDGs Decade of Action

## ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Youth across Asia and the Pacific are strongly committed to localizing and advancing the 2030 Agenda in their communities while expediting the region's recovery from COVID-19 to leave no one behind. The session highlighted the multiple ways youth contribute to the realization of the SDGs, especially those under review this year – from the deployment of new technology and robotics to monitor water supply networks to running initiatives to promote youth inclusion in urban governance, amongst others. Youth also continue to face enormous challenges: limited access to basic services such as quality education, housing, and sanitation; lack of decent jobs; financial constraints; climate-induced migration; and exclusion from decision-making processes. Moreover, the divide among rural and urban areas particularly affects young people, where traditional power structures and cultural norms further limit their participation.

The session highlighted the role of young people in championing resilience-building and the importance of investing in the creation of comprehensive, systemic partnerships and platforms with and for youth at all decision-making and governance levels. To achieve an inclusive and sustainable in the Asia-Pacific region, youth voices must be heard, and their needs recognized. In this regard, it is recommended to strengthen meaningful and systematic inclusion of young people in decision-making at all levels, by institutionalizing youth engagement and participation. It is also recommended to mainstream youth engagement in all aspects of development, including in intergovernmental processes and platforms, where young people must have a seat at the table.

Other key recommendations included: Firstly, unleash young people's creativity and innovation and promote policies that support youth in meeting their aspirations. Pave reliable pathways through education, training, and mentoring, to facilitate their labour market transitions and secure quality employment, including entrepreneurship and green jobs. Secondly, foster a culture of collaboration among youth and youth-led organisations, government, private sector and civil society to lead towards innovative solutions and create more opportunities for young people. Create safe spaces for *youth*-led and *youth*-focused organizations to interact and forge partnerships based on shared responsibility. Thirdly, leverage young people's energy, creativity, and ability to connect, and to create inclusive and sustainable communities. Invest in resilience-building in both urban and rural contexts and prioritize young people's needs. Finally, invest in the creation of integrated and equitable societies, with opportunities for full and equal social, civic, economic, and political participation to all, including youth with disabilities. Allow youth to contribute to the fullest extent of their abilities.



## ARAB STATES REGION

The session examined the Learning to Earning transition, a key priority for youth from the Arab States region. For the past two decades, unemployment rates among youth have been disproportionately high in this region, with young women being the most impacted. This challenge has prompted many young people to create innovative solutions and to bring this topic to the forefront of policy discussions. The session built on outcomes from recent events, including the 2022 Learning to Earning Regional Forum (ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF), which focused on youth's transition to decent work and concluded with the adoption by 16 Arab countries of a set of national voluntary commitments to advance the learning-to-earning agenda in the Arab region; the 2023 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) Youth Session; and the 2023 youth-led webinar on Life after Graduation, organized by the UAE-funded UNDP youth delegates programme.

Based on their own experiences and initiatives as well as successful projects, youth have identified four different sets of solutions and recommendations to overcome the impasse of the learning to earning transition. A first solution would be to utilize and build upon existing skills of youth, through a framework of upskilling and reskilling. This is particularly relevant considering the post-Covid work paradigm shift, and the evolution towards digital skills. In this regard, youth recommend rethinking education approaches to provide adaptable learning pathways that prepare them for the changing labour market. Youth called for closer relationships between educational institutions and employers to provide accessible and affordable training, including innovative approaches like virtual reality simulations.

A second solution proposes to explore alternative work pathways for youth, such as part-time employment, entrepreneurship, and freelancing. This variation enables youth to pursue their combined interests and are more likely to include young women, youth with disabilities, and those living in rural areas. Youth recommend an integrated policy mechanism for addressing unemployment, including maintaining coherence between the education system and labour market needs, encouraging investment, social responsibility of the private sector, effective media, and entrepreneurial initiatives.

Thirdly, youth believe governments can promote volunteerism and civic participation, an added value for youth and a competitive asset in the job market, by introducing it in the education curriculum, creating online platforms for volunteer opportunities, offering tax incentives, and creating yearly awards. Finally, youth stressed the importance of personal visibility on social media and the use of digital space to support the transition. With the growing importance of technology in the workplace, there was a recommendation for governments to consider including in the education system digital education to young people and for young new graduates to leverage their outreach and personal profile.

## AFRICA

Trade can stimulate Africa's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, especially by driving inclusive and sustainable development for women and youth. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can catalyse this



ambition to realize Africa's regional integration agenda and unified markets. If effectively implemented, the AfCFTA can increase productivity and income levels, lift people out of extreme poverty and, critically, offer substantial opportunities for including women and young people in Africa's trade liberalization. To achieve this, all stakeholders must collaborate and partner strategically.

The session explored how the AfCFTA could help African countries transform their economies from models based on natural resource extraction and export to new growth models that could deliver decent jobs, increase access to credit, reduce financing interest rates and promote income redistribution to build resilience to external shocks. It also discussed the importance of harnessing Africa's demographic dividend by investing in its young people through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, entrepreneurship, start-ups, digital technology and incubators.

Several recommendations concerning young people were formulated, targeting African Union Member States. Firstly, it is critical to include young people in the development of trade policies, thus harnessing their potential in the implementation of the AfCFTA. Secondly, they were urged to establish or strengthen systematic mechanisms for including youth in monitoring, measuring, and reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA. Thirdly, they were asked to adopt quota systems with the AfCFTA to ensure youth and women-led businesses access at least 30 percent of government procurement opportunities and a minimum of young employees in exporting business. Fourthly, Member States should integrate AfCFTA into their educational systems to adapt to new demands, especially in STEM fields, and support their young people in developing skills in agro-processing, automotive, pharmaceuticals, etc. Finally, they should support ideas and innovations of young people through rigorous legal frameworks on intellectual property rights and subsidize youth-led businesses to help them leverage economies of scale.

African Union Member States should also adopt and ratify the African Digital Transformation Strategy, providing countries with a regulatory framework to leapfrog technology adoption. They should also prioritise developing the infrastructure to support the trade and e-commerce ecosystems, including transportation, communication, manufacturing, sustainable and renewable energy, last-mile fibre connectivity and payment systems.

As for media stakeholders, they were urged to disseminate information on the AfCFTA in youth-friendly ways, including in local languages.

## **EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA AND OTHER STATES**

The session, titled "Youth-Responsive Resilience: Advancing Human Rights and Environmental Justice in the Europe, North America and Other States Region," explored an ambitious scope of topics impacting youth across this diverse geographic region, spanning from Albania to Kyrgyzstan to the United States. Youth leaders alongside representatives of the UN system and its Member States set the scene, shared lessons and identified actions to equitably improve four policy challenge areas: Confronting legacy environmental injustices; Addressing growing political divisiveness and backsliding on human rights; Creating economic opportunities and reducing youth unemployment; and Moving beyond entrenched extractive economies towards



sustainable COVID-19 recovery. For each of these areas, discussants drew upon their experiences and the work of their youth-led or youth-serving initiatives to share on-the-ground solutions and actions that could be scaled up to benefit young people across the region, showcasing the immense capacity of young people to bring about meaningful change in diverse national contexts.

Several recommendations emerged from the session's interactive discussions. Firstly, the UN and governments, when building and promoting new systems for youth engagement, must ensure that diverse voices are equitably represented, taking into consideration that youth experiences are shaped by various intersecting factors, and that the disparities in social/political power and the economic divide for marginalized youth can be particularly significant. Secondly, the UN and governments must seek the expertise of impacted groups, involving local communities and rights-holder groups, including children and youth, throughout the entire process of collecting data, generating knowledge, and preparing policy interventions. Thirdly, youth must be included as partners in strategies to combat disinformation and anti-rights rhetoric, considering that they belong to the most digital generation and possess the skills, creativity and understanding of online platforms necessary to devise engaging and impactful campaigns.

Other recommendations included expanding environmental monitoring in communities, especially those that have limited data coverage, to track specific impacts on children and youth and make age-disaggregated data openly accessible to all. It is also crucial to balance the distribution of power between communities and polluting industries, through governments allocating financial resources for community partnerships with scientists and experts to lead independent investigations on issues identified by communities as significant concerns. Furthermore, we must include the voices of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in the development of environmental justice and climate resilience policies, as environmental degradation and intensified climate-related disasters are already forcing people to leave their homes in search of safety and improved living conditions. In terms of economic opportunities and moving beyond entrenched extractive economies towards sustainable COVID-19 recovery, countries throughout the region should end the practice of unpaid internships and adopt youth-responsive employment and tax policies, such as Hungary's personal income tax exemption for people under the age of 25. Government and private grant making approaches must be made more responsive to the needs of youth, including targeting grant opportunities to grassroots youth projects and providing more flexible funding mechanisms with less administrative barriers. Finally, we must prepare youth for a just and green jobs transition in emerging career opportunities such as the circular economy, resilient urban planning and sustainable chemistry.

## **LATIN AMERICA**

The session was co-led by Children and Youth LAC Regional Caucus MEsLAC / MGCY, UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP LACRO), and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA LACRO). The session was an outcome of a six-month consultation process delivered with the support of ECLAC, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Inter Agency Network for Youth RPC LAC. Focusing on the SDGs under review in 2023, the process mobilized 500+ children and



youth (C&Y) from 20 countries of the region, through informative sessions, capacity building, youth dialogues, online surveys, a virtual consultation and an in-person forum at FAO's Regional Office in Santiago de Chile on 24 April 2023, prior to the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development 2023.

The outcomes of the consultation process were presented by six young people, among them regional young activists and young SDG Leaders, who shared their contexts and recommendations related to the SDGs under review and meaningful children and youth engagement for the recovery and advancement of the 2030 Agenda. They engaged in an intergenerational dialogue with representatives from UN entities and Member States (Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Brazil and Panama), and OIJ, who shared their work at the national level to engage young people in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and a mutual interest to leave no one behind.

The Latin American C&Y emphasised the need to create and enable safe environments for their meaningful participation, a key to advance the 2030 Agenda, including the most marginalised groups. They called upon Member States and other stakeholders to ensure accountability and mutual trust to collaborate, to consider the critical nature of financial resource mobilisation to ensure participation, recognize C&Y contributions, guarantee their human rights, and ensure the protection and security of C&Y activists.

The recommendations for the SDGs under review included: For SDG 6, guaranteeing the protection of C&Y through access to water and sanitation, mobilizing resources to ensure integrated water management, including local communities and C&Y in water governance, with intercultural approaches; For SDG 7, reducing investments in polluting energies, and ensuring a regional response to the energy transition to avoid generating energy dependence; For SDG 9, ensuring the access to technology in the region considering gender and intercultural approaches, as well as providing resilient infrastructure, a regional response to the advance of artificial intelligence and other technologies to ensure the respect of C&Y human rights and other agendas such as the future of work; For SDG 11, ensuring the right to decent housing through housing programs, counteracting gentrification, violence, and real estate speculation, at the national, local and municipal level; For SDG 17, ensuring intersectional, intergenerational, and intercultural youth engagement processes, free of corruption, tokenism and youth-washing, based on inclusion and solidarity.

## **THE CARIBBEAN**

During the session, Caribbean youth discussed possible solutions and development pathways that consider the region's challenges such as lack of access to clean water, dependence on fossil fuels, and its susceptibility to climate hazards, while also considering its vast diversity. For example, Haiti is considered the poorest country in the Western hemisphere; while there is a massive infrastructure transformation fast tracked by oil and gas dollars in Guyana, and other countries with small populations and limited human resources face challenges to propel their development. Caribbean development pathways need to demonstrate that the region is learning from past and failed attempts at driving change. Key lessons show that the most vulnerable groups (youth, Indigenous groups, women, and girls) are still excluded from spaces of



governance. Policies are slow to change, inflexible, and oftentimes outdated. High debt burdens exacerbated by frequent natural hazards dictate the need for better investment decisions, and smarter and more strategic policy decisions and advocacy.

Youth have a very central role, particularly post COVID-19, in achieving sustainable development in the region, and the way forward is a Caribbean Youth Mobilization Plan that is evidence-driven and dynamic to keep up with progress in technology and innovation. This plan will entail a roadmap for how young people can position themselves within the transformation of a new era of sustainability. There are several critical considerations that this plan must include.

Firstly, it should ensure youth-driven data collection and holistic capacity development to support young people in this area, create an agile learning culture that can handle an evolving environment, make resources available to youth and connect stakeholders willing to work with youth. Secondly, it must consider Caribbean youth as intersectional and dynamic across islands and genders. Programmatic solutions and development strategies must be inclusive and developed to target and engage a diversity of young people, including the most vulnerable, at all stages. These include the poorest, those who are hardest to reach, not represented in political forums, in the worst living conditions, without internet access or with limited access to digital spaces. The Caribbean youth diaspora must also be included. Thirdly, it is crucial to strengthen regional partnerships and build new partnerships. CARICOM is the longest surviving regional integration movement and has had many successes. However, youth can be further engaged in shaping its work, namely at the level of the Council on Trade and Economic Development, whose responsibilities align with many of the SDGs. Fourthly, we need better mobilization and engagement. Provision of youth spaces on national, regional and international platforms for sustainable development is critical, for example with the creation of opportunities and resources for young professionals to collaborate across the region through professional associations in architecture, engineering, urban planning, etc. and allowing for youth leadership within these bodies. Finally, youth councils, youth organisations and youth divisions within governments should focus their advocacy, actions plans and calls for funding on the most important problems impacting young people, and on solutions which address multiple SDG targets and which have the largest potential to raise the standard of development across the region.

## **Young Leaders Spotlight Session on Peace and Prosperity**

On April 26th, a Spotlight Session on Peace and Prosperity featuring the Young Leaders for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was organized as part of the annual Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum.

The spotlight session provided an engaging platform for the Young Leaders to share their views and recommendations on the interlinkages of peace, prosperity, and SDG 17, which focuses on partnerships. The session built upon the existing architecture of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda (YPS agenda). Initially emerging in 2015 with the adoption of [UNSC resolution 2250](#) by the UN Security Council, the YPS agenda has continued to evolve over time. To date, there have



been three UNSC resolutions dedicated to youth, peace, and security, accompanied by numerous policy documents, strategies and tools aimed at advancing the agenda. Notably, young people have taken the lead in advocating for the implementation of the youth peace and security agenda at the national level.

While progress has been made to advance the YPS agenda, there is still more work to be done to ensure the inclusive participation of youth in implementing sustainable peace and security worldwide. In response to these emerging trends that risk global peace and prosperity, the UN Secretary-General has called for the preparation of a "[New Agenda for Peace.](#)" This strategic document will be developed through close consultations with Member States, the UN system and civil society.

The spotlight session on peace and prosperity aimed to empower the Young Leaders for SDGs to meaningfully engage in the topic of peace and prosperity, with a particular focus on SDG 17 and partnerships. It also sought to raise awareness among the audience, which comprised Member States, youth, civil society, and the UN system, about the youth, peace, and security agenda.

The session took the format of a fishbowl discussion, enabling the Young Leaders to have dynamic conversations and share key recommendations. Three SDG Young Leaders served as speakers, while one Young Leader facilitated the session. Each participant was asked to provide their perspectives and experiences on the question: "How does youth, peace, and security look like in the future (2033)? How have you been contributing to it? And how do we work towards it together?" The session fostered interactive discussions on the futuristic landscape of youth, peace, and security.

Throughout the session, the Young Leaders presented key recommendations for shaping the future of youth, peace, and security. They emphasized the importance of meaningful youth engagement and participation at all decision-making levels in peacebuilding efforts. The Young Leaders highlighted the need for safe spaces, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and the utilization of technology to address complex challenges. They also stressed the significance of quality education, skills development, and socioeconomic empowerment programs to empower young people in promoting peace and security. The recommendations further underscored the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, promoting gender equality, and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups.

The Young Leaders' recommendations envision a future where young people play active roles, are empowered, and equipped to contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous society. The session effectively raised awareness of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda among the audience, further amplifying the importance of youth involvement in advancing sustainable peace and security.

The key recommendations for the future of Youth, Peace and Security from the [Young Leaders for the SDGs](#) can be found [here](#).



# Special Session – Financing Our Future (SDG 17) – Ministerial Session



Looking at SDG 17 through the lens of “youth-led innovations for decent jobs for youth” recognizes that youth are eager to co-create for a sustainable and resilient recovery from the crisis; that their innovations are already driving progress and stimulating partnerships for the global goals; and that having access to a stable, decent job enables them to be creative, equal partners today and in the long-run. With this premise, the special session aimed at:

1. Sharing innovations and promoting mutual learning on job creation and skills development strategies designed and implemented by, with and for youth.
2. Discussing good practices and multi-stakeholder actions that promote an enabling environment for youth-led innovations.
3. Identifying effective partnerships and means of implementation to accelerate youth employment and progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Our Common Agenda, and the UN [Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#) in a context of intergenerational equity.

The session featured an inter-ministerial and -generational dialogue that showcased both: (i) the journeys of young innovators and youth-led organizations in designing and implementing solutions that boost decent jobs for youth and foster inclusion; and (ii) the experiences from Member States, private sector and UN representatives supporting youth employment solutions that leverage the expertise and creativity of youth and yield positive labour market, innovation and Research & Development outcomes.



The session stressed the need for targeted and urgent investments in youth employment to address the disproportionate and negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market outcomes of young people. Member States shared some of their efforts in fostering an enabling environment for job creation while supporting an array of initiatives to boost employability, entrepreneurship promotion and civic and political participation of youth.

The creative innovations spearheaded by young people across diverse sectors and disciplines are shaping communities and playing a pivotal role in boosting youth employment. These innovations are strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing partnerships under SDG 17. They not only need to be encouraged and supported but also scaled up and replicated to have tangible impacts on public policies and efforts of international organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

Young people urged Member States to foster an enabling environment for youth-led innovations and invited other stakeholders to genuinely integrate the voices and ideas of young people in their actions towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Session attendees highlighted the significance of promoting inter-generational equity, acknowledged the intergovernmental efforts made in developing the Declaration on Future Generations, and encouraged continued action by young people, Member States, and other stakeholders to advance youth employment under the auspices of the UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth. The financing of our future requires the dynamism and innovation of young people, as well as their access to productive employment and decent work.

## **Achieving the SDGs with and for Youth: Youth2030, the UN Youth Strategy, as catalyst for transformation**

The third day of the ECOSOC Youth Forum focused on “Youth and the SDG Summit 2023”, started with the “Achieving the SDGs with and for Youth: Youth2030, the UN Youth Strategy, as catalyst for transformation” plenary. [Youth2030](#), the first-ever United Nations system-wide Youth Strategy was launched in 2018 by the UN Secretary-General with the ambitious aim of transforming the organization’s work for and with youth and acting as a catalyst to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Implemented across 131 UN Country Teams and 55 UN entities, and with seven years left to reach the 2030 goals, Youth2030 is now at a strategic moment for reflection, to understand how the UN system has taken the strategy forward, learn lessons from the initial implementation experience and make course corrections.

The plenary, which included opening video remarks from Ms. Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy-Secretary-General, engaged Ministers of Youth, young people and UN leadership – from country teams and entities – in an intergenerational dialogue. It was moderated by the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake and two youth representatives, with the aim to share promising practices on Youth2030 and identify key strategies for accelerating its implementation as a catalyst to achieving the SDGs.

Key recommendations included:



- Leveraging opportunities optimally to achieve the 2030 Agenda requires working in partnership with young people, particularly those left behind. Accelerating the implementation of Youth2030, the UN Youth Strategy, is key to ensuring that the UN continues to support key stakeholders, governments and young people, to work jointly to reach the 2030 goals. The issues addressed in the session are informing the ongoing Youth2030 interim review, aiming to learn from the Strategy's initial four years of implementation and adapt the strategy for the remaining seven years. Building on this, the Youth2030 Progress Report launch in the High-level Political Forum 2023 will also represent an important moment to use the self-reported data from 131 UN Country Teams and 44 UN entities on Youth2030 to identify gaps and make further recommendations for acceleration.
- Achieving the SDGs through an intergenerational partnership requires meaningful youth engagement in decision-making processes at all levels. This is at the core of Youth2030 implementation across the UN System, as well as in intergovernmental work, in line with *"Our Common Agenda Policy Brief, Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes"*.

## Young Leaders Spotlight Session on Partnerships

Achieving the SDGs by 2030 requires a multi-stakeholder approach and partnerships, including partnerships that are led with and for youth. Around the world, young people have mobilized as actors, leaders and, most importantly, as partners mobilizing sustainable development actions in their communities. As rights holders, being meaningfully engaged is fundamental to supporting young people's rights and active participation. It is therefore important for the engagement of young people as partners and as drivers of multistakeholder partnerships to be meaningful. The latest policy brief on ["Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policy and Decision-making Processes"](#) put forward by the UN Secretary-General addresses the need for both global cooperation as well as meaningful youth engagement at all levels to hypercharge SDG efforts. The Young Leaders Spotlight Session on Partnership at the ECOSOC Youth Forum highlighted the interlinkages of meaningful engagement in partnering with young people through intergenerational dialogue.

The intergenerational spotlight session on partnership featured an interactive dialogue between five Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals class of 2022 who have been leading on partnership efforts across the SDGs and high-level UN leadership, specifically the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Mr. Guy Ryder, who leads the delivery of the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda recommendations. The interactive dialogue took on the "Pass the Mic" format, where participants of the dialogue will interchangeably interview each other as equal partners in this matter.



Young Leaders shared the examples of youth leadership in mobilizing partnership for the Agenda 2030, including through convening multistakeholder partnership on the ground. In addition to sharing examples on the ground, youth speakers shared lessons learned and helpful tips to convene partnership, which includes keeping diversity at the front and center of partnership efforts and trusting the power of youth voices. Speakers also shared



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their insights on barriers: one of the key challenges that young people continue to face is being recognized as equal partners and acknowledgement of their expertise. Moreover, young people are continuously experiencing challenges in obtaining meaningful support that could help them mobilize actions through partnership. In this spotlight session, speakers shared the call-to-action young people have advocated for, which include:

1. Moving beyond meaningful youth engagement, to engaging youth in programme delivery and implementation
2. Making sure youth-friendly services are readily available, accessible and affordable or free
3. Ensuring funding and meaningful resources are available to support youth-led partnerships and actions.

The dialogue highlighted the recently launched Secretary-General policy brief on “Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes” – the third in a series of briefs he is releasing in the lead up to the Summit of the Future in September 2024, to provide more detail on select proposals contained in Our Common Agenda. The speaker highlighted how the brief presents a series of bold proposals from the Secretary-General with a view towards ensuring more meaningful, diverse and effective youth participation across intergovernmental decision-making processes at all levels. The dialogue also acknowledged that if the multilateral system is to be fit to deliver a present and future that works for all, then meaningful youth engagement must become the norm rather than the exception and stakeholders must ensure that youth participation is effectively resourced.

Finally, the dialogue also encouraged young people to use the policy brief as an advocacy tool to support their youth-led advocacy and activism in the coming months, to ensure that a commitment to meaningful youth engagement is front and center at the Summit of the Future in 2024.



# Strengthening the Trust of Youth in Multilateralism: Exploring Intergenerational and Peer-to-Peer Dialogue

The last few years have revealed the growing mistrust of young people towards the current global environment and its institutions, and particularly multilateral organizations. In this context, the plenary aimed to provide a space for 13 young experts to exchange on the inclusion and meaningful participation of young people in multilateral processes so that their unique perspectives contribute to addressing global issues. This plenary built on various reports and activities, including a side-event organized by DESA on 14 February 2023, on the margins of the 61<sup>st</sup> Commission for Social Development on “Advancing Youth Inclusion in Multilateral Spheres: Exploring the Impact of Ageism and Sexism”.

With a view to generate concrete recommendations that can help transform the multilateral system through the inclusion of young people, the plenary first examined the impact of ageism, sexism and other forms of discrimination on young peoples’ views of multilateralism. The second segment focused on the potential of intergenerational and peer-to-peer approaches to build an inclusive, accountable and effective multilateral system. The last segment focused on generating recommendations based on the input of the young experts and input from the audience.

Based on the comments from the young experts, as well as input from the in-person and on-line audience gathered via Slido, the following recommendations were developed:

- Advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda must be done through inclusive, intersectional, interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and gender-transformative processes. Meaningful youth and adolescent engagement involves ensuring sustained follow-up of youth consultations, creating transparent mechanisms through which youth can hold policy-makers accountable, and institutionalising youth-led decision-making mechanisms at all levels. All stakeholders should invest in youth and adolescent-led initiatives and support youth leadership in driving change on the ground, leverage the power of technology to promote innovative solutions to modern challenges, and build the capacity of youth and adolescents to maximise their impact and foster long-term solidarity.
- Sustaining multilateralism in global governance requires restoring trust in global institutions, democratising UN processes, and creating an enabling environment where young people are recognised as key partners in the co-creation of solutions. Peer-to-peer engagement strategies should be adopted to ensure ownership and agency among youth and adolescents. The full participation of young people and adolescents in all their diversity, including, inter alia, those from vulnerable, marginalised, and under-represented backgrounds and communities, is key to transforming ambition into future-oriented action.



## Youth & the SDGs: Youth insights and recommendations in the lead up to the SDG Summit 2023

The last plenary session, titled “Youth & the SDGs: Youth insights and recommendations in the lead up to the SDG Summit 2023” represented an important opportunity to focus on young people’s assessment, vision and recommendations for Member States’ consideration ahead of the SDG Summit in September 2023. The session offered a multi-stakeholder avenue in which

key priorities and recommendations by youth were highlighted and discussed. A diverse panel of young leaders representing various constituencies shared their vision for the achievement of the 2030 Development Agenda. They highlighted that young people must be placed at the heart of all



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mobilization efforts to allow them to shape policies, projects and programmes. This can be achieved through the creation of inclusive, open, and safe intergenerational platforms that bring together diverse youth-led and youth-focused organizations, networks and movements. Addressing structural barriers to youth civic engagement and political participation and promoting meaningful youth involvement in decision-making is fundamental.

Young panelists also highlighted that the SDG Summit in September 2023 should be a moment in which the international community “renews its vows” to the 2030 Agenda. September is not the end of the road, but it is a hugely significant meeting. *“While SDG implementation is off-track, the agenda remains our North Star”* said one of the young leaders. Some of the key messages that have been shared during the session were that young people are the human faces of the 2030 Agenda and only if we truly invest in youth leadership will we stand a chance at achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Youth activism and youth meaningful engagement are key in this process. Young people should continue to set the bar high, hold Governments accountable and demand better – be it on climate action, education, or any of the issues in sustainable development.

A key outcome was the launch of the [‘insights paper’](#) which summarizes inputs gathered at the global consultation, organized by UNDP, UNFPA, MGCY, the Office of the UNSG’s Envoy on Youth and the UN Foundation prior to the ECOSOC Youth Forum. Young people are contributing to SDG implementation and to the SDG Summit preparation process. In addition to the recent



global consultation, young people are already coming together to prepare the Youth Sectoral Paper as the input to HLPF; the “Voices of Youth Report – from ECOSOC to HLPF and the SDG Summit” and a youth position paper for the SDG Summit.

## Closing Session



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*Ms. Chido Mpemba delivering the closing keynote address*

Urging leaders not to make decisions that hinder the progress of the youth, Ms. Chido Mpemba, African Union Youth Envoy reminded all participants that “we only have 7 years to achieve the SDGs and we are running out of time.” “We have to join hands,” she said. Ms. Mpemba stressed that the issues young people face are not isolated in nature nor are they restricted to a particular color or class; they are intertwined and interdependent. Ms. Mpemba called on youth leaders “to speak up, act up, do more and take up your seat for the world now.”

UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, praised the resilience, innovation, expertise and unwavering drive of young people to make positive transformational change, which is “not only for themselves and their communities, but also for future generations.” She also drew attention to the pressing global challenges that young people face, such as inequalities, human rights violations and environmental issues. She called on everyone, and particularly those currently holding power, “to think and act for people and the planet, rather than for greed and profit,” and stressed that “tokenism of youth is not the answer.” To



demonstrate the UN's commitment, she cited initiatives like Youth2030 (the UN system-wide Youth Strategy), the establishment of the UN Youth Office, and the policy brief on Meaningful Youth Engagement launched by the Secretary-General. She underscored the importance of global collaboration and leaving no young person behind. At the end of her speech, she expressed gratitude to all the organizers, Member States and the over 20,000 participants for their valuable support to make the ECOSOC Youth Forum possible.

Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs reminded participants that “The theme of this year’s Forum comes at a critical juncture. Efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda are faltering in the wake of cascading global crises.” He stressed that the SDG Summit must serve as a turning point to get the 2030 Agenda back on track, and that governments, businesses and the international community must use the Summit to share new and impactful approaches to development. “The insights and vision of young people will be crucial in shaping and energizing these global discussions,” said Mr. Junhua.

The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs also shared his thoughts on how the Youth Forum can be more impactful and influential in the years ahead. First, he called on all partners working on the next editions of the ECOSOC Youth Forum to adopt an inclusive approach and an intersectional perspective, ensuring that the Forum open its doors to all young people. Second, he reiterated the Secretary-General’s request to Member States to grant formal status and a stronger mandate to the Youth Forum. “By formalizing the ECOSOC Youth Forum, it can serve as the official entry-point for youth engagement across the annual cycle of the Economic and Social Council,” he stated.

Concluding the Youth Forum 2023, H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, President of ECOSOC, stressed that “This year’s Youth Forum has shown us that progress and change cannot happen without youth.” She called on young people to “keep holding us accountable to our promises and commitments!” She encouraged them to keep engaging and inspiring their communities and to uplift their voices. She also encouraged young people to remain as optimistic as she was after witnessing their resilience, tenacity and determination for a better future. “You are integral to the success we hope to have in achieving the Agenda 2030 and SDG implementation,” she said.



**THANK  
YOU!**

