

"Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of crises"

Engaging Youth and Member States Representatives

16 - 18 April 2024

CONCEPT NOTE

Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

Background

Amidst a world challenged by escalating geopolitical tensions, a worsening climate crisis, and rising poverty, the largest UN annual gathering of young people will take place at the United Nations from 16 to 18 April.

Convened by the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN ECOSOC Youth Forum is an opportunity for young people to speak up on how to transform the world into a fairer place and on how to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In that context, the Forum is the platform for young people from around the world to engage with UN Member States and other stakeholders on solutions contributing to the realization of the SDGs Decade of Action.

The theme of the 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum will align with that of the 2024 High-level Political Forum on **"Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions"**. Ahead of the Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024, young people will have the opportunity to present to Member States their views, ideas, and vision.

The 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum is co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the UN Youth Office, in collaboration with the United Nations Inter Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) and co-convened by the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO), with technical input from youth organizations relevant to the theme of the forum.

Context and Substantive Scope

As it faces multiple global crises, the world needs to come together as a collective in solidarity and in support of the most vulnerable, while leaving no one behind. In this challenging context, young people play a critical role as innovators and agents of change. Young people's eagerness, ideas, actions, and courage demonstrate they are ready to tackle any roadblocks to the implementation of the SDGs.

In his report "Our Common Agenda", the UN Secretary-General stressed that it is "time to think for the long term, to deliver more for young people and succeeding generations and to be better prepared for the challenges ahead." He called for a meaningful, diverse and effective youth engagement both within and outside the United Nations. Building on the SDG Summit of 2023, the Summit of the Future will have the primary purpose of strengthening international cooperation, responding effectively to new threats and opportunities for present and future generations, and restoring trust in multilateralism and in each other.

From poverty eradication to ending hunger to combatting climate action and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies to strengthening global partnerships, young people represent unique agents of change, for current and future generations.

SDG 1: End poverty

According to the latest SDG report, if current trends persist, 575 million people, equivalent to 7 per cent of the global population, will continue to endure extreme poverty, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index reveals that out of 1.1 billion poor people, 566 million are children and adolescents under 18. Despite progress in reducing extreme poverty from 10.8 per cent in 2015 to 8.4 per cent in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this positive trend. Therefore, by 2030, only one-third of countries are projected to halve their national poverty levels.

Multidimensional poverty is often associated with hunger, homelessness, health disparities, and educational challenges, which have a long-lasting impact on children and youth worldwide. Inadequate coverage of social protection programs disproportionately affects the younger generation. Conflicts, disrupted global trade, and climate change also exacerbate living costs, negatively affecting young people, who are three times more likely to experience unemployment. Young people often inherit poverty and have few opportunities to break this intergenerational poverty cycle. Recognizing and leveraging the skills, experience and immense potential of young people is imperative for advancing SDG 1 globally.

SGD 2: No hunger

An estimated 29.6 per cent of the global population – 2.4 billion people – are moderately or severely food insecure, meaning they did not have access to adequate food. This number has been increasing since 2015, and conflicts, climate change and growing inequalities are exacerbating the situation. In 2022, about 9.2 per cent of the world population was facing chronic hunger, equivalent to about 735 million people – 122 million more than in 2019. It is projected that

more than 600 million people worldwide will be facing hunger in 2030, highlighting the immense challenge of achieving the zero hunger target.

Children who experienced diseases and nutrient-poor diets, have grown into young people suffering from health and the results of developmental challenges. In addition, as young people aged 15–24 continue to face severe difficulties in securing decent employment, that have limited means to secure food as prices are already high and continue to increase. Variables such as transport costs, supply chain disruptions, adverse weather, production shortfalls and trade policy changes are contributing to increasing food prices. Young women entering motherhood are also affected by food shortages such as anemia which is quite prevalent among young women and represents a risk factor for adverse maternal and perinatal outcomes.

SDG 13: Climate action

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that human activities has caused global warming of 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. This has led to a surge in extreme weather and climate events in every region, which is now the everyday face of climate change. Vulnerable communities such as young people, despite having contributed the least to climate change, are disproportionately affected. Adverse impacts of climate change have caused substantial damages and increasingly irreparable losses to ecosystems and human lives, triggering food shortages, loss of housing and infrastructure, migration of populations, and more. With further temperature increases, these extreme events will worsen and become harder to manage.

However, young people are taking action and advocating for the world to accelerate its efforts regarding the green transition. The shift towards an environmentally sustainable and climate-friendly world is critical not only for responding to the global climate crisis but also for achieving the SDGs. A successful transition towards a greener world will depend on the development of green skills in the population. In the Our Common Agenda report, the Secretary-General emphasized the critical role of education and skills development to support people's capacity to navigate societal transitions throughout their lives. The green transition is shaping the experience of today's youth in education and work. More should be done to further leverage, and learn from, young people's efforts to lead the transition to a greener future.

SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

Structural injustices, inequalities and emerging human rights challenges are putting peaceful and inclusive societies further out of reach. To meet Goal 16 by 2030, action is needed to restore trust and to strengthen the capacity of institutions to secure justice for all and facilitate peaceful transitions to sustainable development. To achieve this objective, young people need to be adequately represented across all types and levels of decision-making processes.

However, the number of young people engaged in national-level decision-processes such as parliaments remains low. In every region of the world except Europe, people under the age of 45 are significantly underrepresented in parliament, relative to their share of national populations. Although the average eligible age to serve in parliament is 23 years, the proportion of members of

parliament (MPs) aged 30 and under has remained at about 2.0 - 2.6 per cent for the past five years. While the global median age is just over 30 years, the average age of an MP is 51 years. Young MPs hold limited leadership positions, with less than 9 per cent serving as speaker and 17.4 per cent as committee chairs. To increase the participation of younger parliamentarians, efforts must include introducing quotas or lowering the age of eligibility. Given this reality, as well as challenges related to protection of youth engaged in various political and peace processes, young people have turned to the digital world to express their voices and generate an impact.

SDG 17: Revitalize the global partnerships for sustainable development

SDG 17 emphasizes the critical importance of fostering innovation and nurturing robust multi-stakeholder partnerships, including and especially with young people, to achieve the 2030 Agenda. In a world characterized by multiple crises, rapid technological advancements, climate change, and demographic and migration shifts, young people are set to face significant impacts.

The widening gap between the skills young people have and those demanded by the job market is compounded by unequal access to education, training, digital technologies, decent jobs, and social protection. As societies and economies transform, new jobs may be created while others may disappear. In the absence of effective policy responses, these issues could deepen societal and economic disparities among young people and leave them unprepared for the evolving world of work. Recognizing the urgent need to adapt to these changes, it is crucial to harness the power of partnerships and collaborative efforts to promote a youth-inclusive, sustainable and resilient future of work.

As the vanguards of tomorrow, the voices and priorities of young people are invaluable to ensure everyone has access to decent jobs. Young people must be treated as equal partners and meaningfully engaged in strategies and solutions designed to shape the future of work and promote shared prosperity. By embracing diversity, fostering positive change, and implementing actionable solutions, we can create a brighter future for all.

Regional Dimension

The ECOSOC Youth Forum will serve as a platform for discussions on the regional impact of the SDGs and preparations for the Summit of the Future. In that context, the regional breakout sessions will be organized by the regional commissions, together with regional youth entities and platforms, to delve into the regional challenges and opportunities.

To ensure broad and diverse participation of regional youth-led and youth-focused organizations, as well as government representatives, various preparatory events will be organized during the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development. These events will promote intergovernmental discussions leading up to the Youth Forum.

Objectives

The 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum will:

- **Provide** a platform for young people to meaningfully engage in a dialogue with UN Member States and UN entities on transformative pathways for realizing sustainable development.
- **Share** knowledge, skills, and lessons learned in achieving the rights and well-being of youth by promoting the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and ensuring the meaningful participation and engagement of young people in policymaking and implementation.
- **Present** ideas and solutions -- and showcase innovative initiatives and individual and collective action by youth and others -- to advance the SDGs based on national, regional and global experiences.
- **Activate** youth engagement for the SDGs and upcoming major events: the HLPF in July and the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

Format

The ECOSOC Youth Forum will be a three-day event with the last day dedicated to the preparation of the 2024 Summit of the Future. The event will be held in-person at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The Forum will include opening and closing plenary sessions with representatives from youth organizations as well as high-level and keynote speakers. Accomplished youth speakers will also deliver short presentations between sessions, sharing personal stories and innovative solutions related to the SDGs.

The thematic plenary sessions will address the SDGs under review at the HLPF 2024, along with more in-depth discussions on various related topics. The regional breakout sessions will bring together young people and Member States to explore challenges, solutions and best practices at the regional level for achieving the SDGs.

Moderators will play an important role in maintaining focused, interactive, and dynamic discussions during the sessions by actively engaging the audience.

Member States will participate throughout the programme, presenting their national reviews of progress on youth development and engagement within the context of the 2030 Agenda.

The event will be broadcasted live via webcast and on social media channels, Facebook and Twitter, using the hashtag #Youth2030.

Participation

Participants of the Youth Forum will include:

- High-level Government representatives, including Ministers of Youth and other Ministries responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Youth Strategy at national level;
- High-level representatives of national youth institutions and representatives of National Youth Councils;
- Official country youth delegates;
- Representatives of regional and multilateral organizations;
- Youth-led and youth-focused entities, organizations, and groups from all regions, in particular those representing marginalized and vulnerable young people; and
- Youth organizations and representatives working at the grassroots, national, regional and international levels.

Side Events

Due to the limited space at UN Headquarters, side events will be held virtually during the duration of the Youth Forum. They will be organized only during the times that the Youth Forum is not in session. The main objectives of the side events are to enrich the discussions at the forum, offer dedicated opportunities for exchanges of views and expand networking spaces. Guidelines for organizing side events will be posted on the ECOSOC Youth Forum's website in advance of the Forum.

Outcome

The outcome of the Forum will be an informal summary of the proceedings by the President of ECOSOC, a document capturing key messages and findings of the different sessions and a Presidential Statement as inputs to the High-level Political Forum, the High-level Segment of the Council in July 2024 and the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

In addition, youth networks will bring together youth entities/organizations to prepare the "Voices of Youth" at the ECOSOC Youth Forum. This document would be a complement to the formal Major Group on Children and Youth Sectoral Position Paper, to be prepared for the HLPF in July and also available for the Summit of the Future in September. It would be a direct call to action from young people on the current challenges they are facing and their expectations vis-à-vis the international community.