



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

**16 - 18 April 2024  
United Nations Headquarters – New York**

## **PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT**

Over 1,000 participants gathered at the UN Headquarters in New York to attend the [ECOSOC Youth Forum](#) from 16 to 18 April 2024, including 36 Ministers, 43 high-level Government representatives from 83 countries, as well as 93 youth delegates who registered to participate at the Forum. Over thirteen thousand participants accessed the Forum remotely.

This year the Forum was held in-person under the theme of *"Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of crises."*

Plenary sessions addressed the SDGs under review at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), namely: SDG 1 - End poverty; SDG 2 - No hunger; SDG 13 - Climate action; SDG 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions; and SDG 17 - partnerships. While the focus of the deliberations remained on the SDGs for in-depth discussions at the HLPF, participants also devoted time to address

other issues of concern for youth, including artificial intelligence, sustainable cities and the future of work. The third day of the Forum was dedicated to discussions on issues of importance to young people in the Summit of the Future, with a view to contributing to its intergovernmental consultations.

Exchanges of views took place during sessions devoted to multilateral solutions, by cultivating intergenerational partnerships through meaningful youth engagement, working with youth as full-fledged partners addressing the future of work, as well as a dialogue on AI's potential to bridge the gender digital divide. Deliberations also focused on youth demands for the Pact for the Future and recommendations for the Summit of the Future, which included an intergenerational dialogue to bring young women's voices to the global decision-making processes.

Six regional breakout sessions addressed challenges, priorities, and actions of importance to young people from distinctive regional perspectives and realities.

Sixty-four side events organized by a broad variety of stakeholders during the three days of the Forum also provided additional opportunities to expand discussions.

The noticeable increase in interest to attend the Youth Forum this year by Member States, youth delegates, youth representatives and UN system entities, indicates that the Youth Forum has been successful as a unique platform for young people to engage with Member

States and other partners, to share their views, ideas, and vision, as well as to strengthen networking opportunities. A musical performance by a talented young singer from Chile opened the Youth Forum.

The 2024 ECOSOC Youth Forum was anchored in the desire to “think for the long term, to deliver more for young people and succeeding generations and to be better prepared for the challenges ahead.”<sup>1</sup>

The ECOSOC Youth Forum was convened with a shared understanding that young people are unique agents of change, for the benefit of current and future generations.

## Key Messages

Discussions at the Forum generated insightful, forward-looking, innovative ideas and recommendations as well as distinctive calls to action. These were supported by the collective efforts of partners from the UN Secretariat, youth-led and youth-focused organizations, and the UN system.

Addressing pressing challenges, ensuring a brighter future for generations to come, and committing to guarantee youth meaningful participation in global initiatives, including at intergovernmental and policy-making processes, clearly demonstrated that youth are determined to have a reserved seat at the table and be architects in crafting their present and future.

## PLENARY SESSIONS

### **SDG 1: No poverty**

- Eradicating poverty requires co-created solutions and accountable governance, achieved through meaningful youth participation in decision-making and collaboration between youth, governments, private sector and civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> Our Common Agenda.

- Under-represented youth groups such as refugees, migrants, and indigenous youth, need to be involved in this process. Eradicating poverty also requires closing the gender-poverty gap through gender-responsive policies, including social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. Prioritizing healthcare, education, and childcare facilitates young women's economic engagement.
- Empowering young leaders through education, capacity building, and advocacy for inclusive economic policies fosters sustainable and inclusive development.
- Designing targeted interventions and expanding social safety nets for youth, including through financial inclusion programmes, are essential to alleviate poverty and ensure equitable resource access.

### **SDG 2: Zero hunger**

- In past decades, the main expectation of food systems has been to produce enough food to feed the world. Today, as the world grows increasingly aware of the environmental and social costs of focusing exclusively on food security, much more is envisioned.
- Youth have been innovative agents in food systems for many years. Young people and their governments need to continue to partner to co-lead the change that is essential for people, the planet, and the present and future of food security.

### **SDG 13: Climate action**

- Embracing alternative economic and financial models that take into account principles of intergenerational equity, such as the circular economy and community-based economics, is crucial to promoting sustainability and green investment and in prioritizing long-term environmental and social well-being for all over short-term profits.
- Government, financial institutions and corporations should support and incentivize youth engagement and initiatives on climate and sustainability. Prioritizing youth tailored, flexible and accessible financial mechanisms would be essential to sustain their solutions in the long-run and create wealth and wellbeing in communities, especially in situations where young people face economic challenges and poverty.

### **SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions**

- Promoting inclusive institutions and youth-responsive services, along with a human rights-based approach, fosters meaningful youth participation in governance and elections, building trust in democratic institutions. Comprehensive strategies are needed to protect youth engaged in civic space, addressing diverse challenges while safeguarding their shrinking digital and civic spaces.
- The Summit of the Future and the Peacebuilding Architecture Review offer opportunities to enhance meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding, emphasizing cooperation and addressing governance gaps. Mitigating tokenistic engagement and increasing financing for youth-led organizations are crucial for advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda and accelerating SDG implementation.

## REGIONAL BREAKOUT SESSIONS

### **African states:**

- Business as usual will not deliver the SDGs. Disruptors that radically change the development trajectory, such as AI, are needed. This kind of disruption brings both opportunities and risks. AI needs to be harnessed as a transformative catalyst for Africa's development and youth empowerment, aiming to improve the efficiency of existing efforts in education, healthcare, energy, and agriculture. It also aims to build sustainable value chains within our countries to achieve the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063.
- Youth call on all partners to: a) Invest in capacity building at all levels to ensure that there is awareness and understanding of AI and how it may be deployed in a cost-effective fashion; b) Actively promote the availability of startup capital for local use of AI technologies to tackle sustainable development priorities through local development banks; c) Develop regulatory frameworks which enhance access while addressing risks; and d) Adapt national development plans to identify the most critical sectors where AI may be deployed.

### **Arab States:**

- Arab youth are calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the facilitation of humanitarian and medical aid. They are issuing a call to action on a number of structural matters. These include ensuring that the implementation of sound structural poverty reduction strategies (e.g., health, education) is done in an inclusive and comprehensive manner, focusing on youth. They also want structural impediments that perpetuate youth marginalization, such as discriminatory policies, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, the alarming gender gap in opportunities, and limited civic participation, to be effectively addressed. They want policies to be inclusive and to prioritize the needs and aspirations of Arab youth, as well as their meaningful participation in decision-making processes at all levels of society. This means ensuring substantive and commensurate representation of Arab youth at upcoming summits, such as the Summit of the Future.
- In terms of youth development, Arab youth are calling for skills training, mentorship and leadership development, to enhance their agency and ability to advocate for their rights and interests. They want investments in education and vocational training needed to succeed in the labor market to be prioritized. Arab youth emphasize the need for targeted post-conflict social protection strategies that keep youth out of poverty during recovery. They encourage ongoing dialogue and exchange with policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders as it will foster a better understanding of the challenges facing Arab youth and identify collaborative solutions.

**Asia Pacific States:**

- Youth poverty in the Asia Pacific Region must be reduced by, among others, addressing youth education shortcomings and unemployment, through policies and strategies that promote quality education and decent jobs, and leverage youth-led innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Food security and access to adequate and nutritious food need to be prioritized through increased agricultural productivity and support to young people engaged in agriculture.
- There is an urgent need to enhance youth participation in planning and decision-making processes related to climate change, disaster risk reduction and adaptation strategies and policies.
- Youth social, economic and political participation should be promoted, with the removal of obstacles limiting their full contribution to creating peaceful and inclusive societies and playing meaningful roles in partnerships for sustainable development.

**Europe, North America, and Other States:**

- There is need to advance human rights-based sustainable development and ensure intergenerational justice, especially in solidarity with the most marginalized and most affected by increasing geopolitical tensions, the impact of climate change, and exacerbated inequalities.
- Youth are calling for a focus on social, economic, environmental and intergenerational justice to achieve the SDGs under review by the High-Level Political Forum. They also emphasize the importance of ensuring that youth voices are amplified in the Summit of the Future. A Pact for the Future and a Declaration for Future Generations must place children and youth at the forefront.

**Latin America States:**

- Latin American youth confront intricate and unequal realities which undermine their development and well-being. Beyond economic hardship, they grapple with issues like inadequate nutrition, environmental hazards, and violence, hindering their security and rights. Despite these obstacles, youth actively engage in problem-solving, aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- They ask governments to prioritize equal opportunities, basic needs, and environmental safety. Their advocacy emphasizes inclusive decision-making and action, aiming to empower youth to craft innovative solutions, crucial for eradicating poverty comprehensively.

**The Caribbean States:**

- The Caribbean region faces significant challenges post-COVID-19, including above-average youth unemployment and poverty, misalignment of educational goals and employment prospects, rising youth violence, nutrition insecurities and climate change impacts, including violent natural hazards. These challenges are compounded by one-size-fits-all solutions that fail to account for the diverse ethnic, cultural, educational, and gender backgrounds of the youth population.

- Caribbean youth are calling for solutions to address these complex issues. Investing in education, skills training, and entrepreneurship initiatives are crucial. Taking urgent action to address food insecurity is also important, along with empowering young people to promote sustainable agriculture and community empowerment. Furthermore, there is a need for community-based adaptation, increased youth engagement in climate action and decision-making, and leveraging nature-based solutions to combat climate change.
- Youth-led initiatives should be encouraged, education and skill improvement prioritized, and collaboration among youth, governments, and civil society fostered to effectively tackle these regional challenges. Moreover, the region should consider empowering youth-led organizations to manage economic development policies, lead orange and blue economy projects, and devise national crime reduction strategies.

## YOUTH AND THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE

### **Multilateral solutions: Global dialogue on youth for a better tomorrow:**

- It is crucial to ensure the meaningful engagement of youth in policymaking and decision-making spaces at all levels, with dedicated resourcing everywhere around the world. The Summit of the Future is a unique opportunity for concrete and action-oriented commitments to be made to strengthen this work.
- The aspirations and needs of marginalized youth, including those with disabilities, refugees, young women, Indigenous youth and LGBTIQ+ individuals, must be addressed by removing structural barriers hindering their meaningful engagement. It is essential to understand and address the root causes of these structural barriers to fully ensure their meaningful youth engagement.

### **SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals - The future of work:**

- Multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaborative efforts between governments, the private sector, educational institutions, youth-led organizations, UN entities and civil society are key to address the challenges young people face in the labour market and to innovate solutions for the future of work. The global youth employment challenge requires a comprehensive, coordinated and whole-of-society approach.
- Ensuring young people are ready for the future of work requires both a balance of skilling, upskilling and reskilling youth to ensure they possess the skills demanded by the market as well as boosting job creation in emerging sectors. It is critical to ensure young people's rights at work are protected and promoted in the future of work, particularly those most marginalized, including young women, youth with disabilities, and forcibly displaced youth.
- Leveraging the UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth to scale up action and impact on youth employment and promote decent work for all young people is an important source of finance for development.

- 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.

**AI for an equitable future: A youth-led dialogue on AI’s potential to bridge the gender digital divide and empower young people:**

- Young people are calling for the dialogue around Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies to be more accessible; all young people have the right to understand and actively participate in this dialogue that will shape their future. AI will increase the likelihood of conflict in democratic practices and institutions; we need to enhance the digital capacities of youth, particularly young social activists, to enable peace, justice, and strong institutions.
- Current policies around AI and technology tend to aim at mitigating harms; young people have the desire to move beyond harm mitigation and towards policies for active and inclusive design (design justice). Inclusion should be encouraged at all levels of AI dialogue because diversity is beneficial to the development and co-design of Artificial Intelligence.
- Moving towards strengthening agency for marginalized communities in digital spaces should be stressed. Enhancing the opportunities and resources for all youth to participate equally in the digital world (digital accessibility) should be pursued, in particular digital literacy, digital security, freedom from violence and harassment, and internet privacy.

**Urban youth leading climate action, community resilience and sustaining peace:**

- The future is youth, the future is urban. Urbanization is rapidly reshaping demographics worldwide, with two-thirds of the global population expected to reside in cities by 2050, a trend led by a predominantly youthful urban population in the developing world.
- The need for inclusive and participatory approaches that prioritize the voices and experiences of youth, including those marginalized or even associated with armed groups, in decision-making processes at all levels.
- The importance of fostering partnerships and collaboration among governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to support youth-led initiatives and ensure the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda, New Agenda for Peace, and other relevant frameworks.
- The urgency of investing in engagement with youth who have been left behind, youth empowerment, education, and employment opportunities to unlock the full potential of young people as catalysts for sustainable development and peace.

**Insights & Recommendations: The Voices of Youth and meaningful youth engagement in the Summit of the Future:**

- The Pact for the Future must center young people’s rights and priorities and include a commitment to strengthening existing self-organized, rights-based mechanisms for youth engagement.
- The proposed global youth investment platform should be co-designed with youth.

- The Pact must emphasize inclusion of youth indicators across national plans and policies, including on climate and biodiversity, and other national level targets.
- The Pact should include a cross-cutting child responsive focus, separate from youth.
- Intergenerational dialogues to strengthen young women's opportunities for participation and engagement in decision-making policy should be prioritized, including promoting and supporting young female role models that could enhance girls and women's empowerment.
- Young people highlight the importance of mainstreaming sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the Pact, which must include free access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education both in and out-of-school settings. With marking the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) this year, the importance of upholding SRHR cannot be higher - and this language must be retained in the Pact and reflected in the Declaration on Future Generations.
- Recognizing the system-wide work of the UN on youth issues, alongside reference to the UN Youth Office, the Pact must recognize the role of the UN Inter Agency Network on Youth Development comprising 50+ UN agencies and programmes and regional Issue-Based Coalitions on youth in various UN regions.
- Young people call for open and inclusive spaces - no more tokenism and youth advisory boards or panels appointed without feedback mechanisms.
- Young people want representative structures that are universal, equitable and accountable.

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