



"Youth at the Forefront: Leveraging Science and Social Inclusion for Sustainable Development"

15 to 17 April 2025

PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

KEY MESSAGES

- **The 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum took place from 15-17 April, 2025 at the UN Headquarters in New York, under the theme "Youth at the Forefront: Leveraging Science and Social Inclusion for Sustainable Development."**
- **This year's forum was the largest to date, with the participation of ministers, senior government representatives, and close to 1,000 youth leaders and activists from around the world.**
- **Plenary and regional sessions provided young changemakers with a platform to discuss progress, identify gaps and challenges, and make recommendations on the five SDGs (3,5,8,14,17) under review at this year's High-Level Political Forum.**
- **In a time of multiple global crises, young people are showing exceptional leadership, expertise and honing partnerships to tackle issues such as youth unemployment, unequal access to digital tools and skills, climate change, gender inequality, and meaningful youth participation in policy- and decision-making processes.**
- **Intergenerational dialogue, a central feature of the Youth Forum, must persist to champion inclusive multilateralism and global solidarity and advance progress on the 2030 Agenda.**

The 2025 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum took place from 15 to 17 April at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, under the theme "Youth at the Forefront: Leveraging Science and Social Inclusion for Sustainable Development".

Serving as the flagship platform for meaningful youth engagement in intergovernmental processes, the ECOSOC Youth Forum set the record again in 2025 as the largest and most diverse gathering of youth at the United Nations. It brought together close to 1,000 in-person youth leaders and activists, 60 Ministers, 37 high-level government representatives, 15 Members of Parliament and Members of Congress, 18 representatives

of National Youth Councils and 107 Youth Delegates from 40 countries. 123 side events took place on the margins of the Forum, which further enriched the discussions and provided additional networking opportunities. The proceedings of the Forum have reached up to 16,000 live, on-demand and YouTube views thus far.

I would like to thank the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the UN Youth Office, the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), the United Nations Inter Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO) and, for their support in co-creating the Forum with the ECOSOC Presidency.

The discussions at the Youth Forum focused on exploring efforts and solutions to achieve the SDGs that will be under review at the 2025 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July, namely, **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)**, **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)**, **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**, **SDG 14 (Life below Water)**, and **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)**. The forum also included six regional breakout sessions that were co-designed and co-organized in collaboration with youth-led and youth-focused organizations, the Regional Commissions, and other UN entities.

As the United Nations prepares for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in June 2025, the ECOSOC High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2025, and the Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) in November 2025, the ECOSOC Youth Forum brought together timely inputs from diverse young voices, showcasing ideas, highlighting concerns, and offering recommendations for the way forward.

Youth identified several global challenges, including ongoing conflicts, digital divide, setbacks in gender equality, and persistent regional disparities. Despite these issues, youth remain confident in their ability to drive meaningful change as innovators and changemakers and remain committed in actively engaging in policy design, implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review to shape a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.

The following concrete actions and recommendations were identified during the thematic discussions:

- During the discussions on **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)**, participants highlighted the growing impact of digital determinants on young people's health. These range from technology-facilitated gender-based violence to increasing reliance on unregulated platforms for health-related information. These challenges are further exacerbated by mis- and disinformation, weak digital safeguards, and unequal access to digital health services. In response, participants emphasized the need for Member States to lead, fund, and support institutions such as WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNODC, UNAIDS, and other global health actors in building capacity and fostering collaboration to shape inclusive digital health governance. This includes supporting participatory AI governance, promoting lifelong digital literacy, and ensuring youth-led accountability. They also stressed that health systems must be co-created with youth, reflecting their voices and prioritizing their needs. By enhancing intergenerational collaboration and supporting grassroots initiatives led by youth organizations, health systems can

become more responsive, productive, and rooted in dignity, equity, and well-being for all.

- Participants in the session on **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** expressed deep concerns about the structural barriers that continue to hinder the meaningful participation of young women and girls in decision-making and peacebuilding—especially in conflict-affected and marginalized communities. These barriers include gender-based violence, discriminatory laws, inaccessible justice systems, and tokenistic youth engagement. Youth emphasized that systemic discrimination, inadequate data collection, and the absence of intersectional approaches further weaken efforts to achieve genuine equality and accountability. To address these challenges, participants called for institutionalized youth- and gender-responsive mechanisms across justice, security, peace, and governance frameworks—bolstered by strong political commitment, sustainable financing, and systematic collection of disaggregated data. They also urged the prioritization of intersectional youth and gender-responsive analysis in policy development and implementation, along with proactive efforts to protect and promote young women’s and girls’ leadership to ensure their voices shape inclusive and accessible institutions.
- During the session on **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**, participants emphasized that far too many young people continue to face significant barriers to accessing decent work. These include high levels of informality, limited access to quality employment, skills mismatches, weak labour market institutions, and the absence of adequate social protection, all of which hinder their full and fair participation in the workforce. Particular concern was raised about the exclusion and segregation experienced by vulnerable groups such as young women and young refugees. Without urgent and coordinated action, these challenges risk undermining the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants called for job creation to be placed at the heart of economic strategies, underpinned by targeted skills development, stronger institutions, and enabling environments for entrepreneurship and business growth. The discussions further highlighted the value of multi-stakeholder platforms—such as the UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth—which provide scalable, impactful frameworks to ensure young people are meaningfully engaged in shaping inclusive, sustainable solutions for more and better jobs.
- During the session on **SDG 14 (Life Below Water)** young people sounded the alarm, declaring that the health of the world’s oceans is in crisis. While youth are leading bold, local actions to restore marine ecosystems and build sustainable blue economies across the globe, their efforts are not being matched by global political will or meaningful solutions. Delegates called for bold international leadership to step up and take urgent action, urging that ocean governance be placed at the center of international climate and development agendas, with meaningful youth representation in decision-making processes. Participants also emphasized the need to strengthen ocean literacy, scientific research, intergenerational partnerships, and robust platforms to amplify youth-led actions and scale impact globally.
- Discussions on **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)** highlighted that the green economy offers a pathway to a sustainable future, creating opportunities for youth in green jobs and entrepreneurship. Participants emphasized that achieving

this goal requires robust, youth-inclusive partnerships and policies that prioritize a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies, while strengthening connections to both global and local financing mechanisms. Efforts like the Green Jobs for Youth Pact (ILO, UNEP, UNICEF) and its Youth Advisory Group were welcomed. Participants also noted that the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) should increase investments in youth to promote their inclusion in the green economy. This includes creating decent jobs for youth, facilitating access to affordable finance for youth-owned businesses, and enhancing education and skills development.

- The session on **Meaningful Youth Participation in Policymaking and Decision Making** emphasized the importance of meaningful youth involvement in intergovernmental processes and across the United Nations, aligning with commitments under the Pact for the Future. Effective implementation requires transparency, accountability, intersectionality, accessibility, empowerment, intergenerational dialogue, and inclusivity, particularly for the most marginalized and underrepresented youth. Participants highlighted that moving beyond tokenism demands genuine partnerships where all youth voices, especially those historically excluded, have a real influence on decisions that will impact their present and future. It was recommended that Member States institutionalize youth participation by embedding youth roles in governance, creating engagement frameworks, and allocating greater resources to this cause. Sustainable funding should involve partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and philanthropy. Other proposals included structured follow-up, continuous dialogue, and accountability mechanisms. Successful models discussed included national youth councils, participatory budgeting, and youth-led consultations that shape global agreements.
- At the discussion on **Empowering and Engaging Young People: The Evolving Role of Science and Technology**, participants noted that while 68 percent of the world's population is now online, a digital divide still exists, particularly among young people in low-income countries. Digital exclusion arises from factors such as poor connectivity, illiteracy, and limited access to technology. To bridge this gap, it is essential to focus on providing connectivity, digital literacy, soft skills, and media and information literacy (MIL) to empower youth. The conversation further highlighted that addressing challenges such as cybersecurity and privacy becomes crucial, as the demand for digital content and technologies like AI and quantum computing continues to grow.. A collaborative innovation ecosystem, with access to knowledge, resources, funding, technology, and mentorship, is necessary to help young people thrive in the digital economy and prepare them for the future.
- The session on **Social Development: Youth Solutions for an Inclusive Future** began with a reminder that, in a world where multilateral spaces are shrinking, social transformation must include those on the frontlines—including youth with disabilities, young women, young Afro-descendants, youth from Indigenous communities, youth from Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD), and other young people historically excluded from decision-making processes. Participants called on the UN system to strengthen and expand existing universal platforms that allow young people to contribute to social development processes. Regarding the upcoming Second World Summit for Social

Development (WSSD2) in November 2025, participants emphasized that the meaningful engagement of youth and civil society must be ensured. This includes providing opportunities for direct input into the Summit's outcome document and co-designing inclusive and equitable follow-up mechanisms. Young participants expressed their readiness to advance a meaningful partnership with the host country of the WSSD2 to ensure robust youth engagement. They suggested that this should include a designated two-day youth forum held alongside the Summit, the inclusion of youth speakers throughout the Summit's program, and decentralized consultations leading up to the event.

At the regional breakout sessions, participants from diverse regional constituencies identified the following challenges and opportunities:

- **Africa's** growing youth population presents a powerful opportunity for global development. By 2030, African youth will represent 42 per cent of the world's population, with the 15–34 age group expected to grow by 73 per cent by 2050—vastly outpacing global averages. This demographic dividend, combined with Africa's rich natural resources and 60 per cent of the world's arable land, offers immense potential. However, challenges remain: only 3 million jobs are created annually for nearly 18 million new job seekers, and climate change continues to cost Africa up to 5 per cent of GDP, despite its minimal emissions. Investing in science, technology, and innovation (STI), expanding access to finance, and supporting youth through STEM education and decent work are critical. Platforms like the African Continental Free Trade Area and strong public-private partnerships can build resilient and inclusive economies. Africa's youth are not only key to the continent's transformation—but essential to achieving global sustainable development and the Agenda 2063.
- In the **Arab States** region, meaningful engagement means investing in legal literacy, policy training, Arabic-accessible frameworks and restoring institutional trust. Digital tools and innovation are key enablers for youth to lead climate action. Equipping youth with right platforms and skills transforms them into co-creators of sustainable future. Supporting young people requires moving from fragmented and single point solutions to integrated, systemic strategies with long-term impact in mind. Empowering youth to become active participants in shaping sustainable futures across various sectors including health, policy, design, and technology should be a priority.
- In the **Asia-Pacific** region, the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating conflicts, and the growing climate crisis have severely hindered SDG progress. Of the 117 targets with available data, only 16 are on track to be achieved by 2030, while 18 show a negative trend, primarily related to climate and disaster risks, highlighting the urgent need for action. Young people, recognized as agents of change, must be empowered with the right skills and platforms to drive innovative solutions. To accelerate SDG 3, countries must address health inequities and integrate climate adaptation into health planning, requiring stronger collaboration among governments, UN agencies, and civil society. Gender-sensitive and human rights-based approaches are essential for reducing inequalities and building equitable health systems. Supporting youth movements and investing in their participation in national and multilateral spaces will promote and accelerate SDG implementation. Young people also called for intergenerational dialogues and

partnerships, while recognizing that digital partnerships and accountability play a crucial role in advancing climate actions and public health systems.

- In **Europe, North America and Other States**, there is a need to support individuals in choosing their own career and personal life paths, beyond traditional roles. This is to be achieved by providing better support systems, ensuring transparency and respect in how those individuals are treated, and increasing funding to youth-led initiatives that address related challenges. Young people are calling for a significant reduction in pollution from all economic sectors and carefully monitoring the sustainable development of energy sources. That should include respect for other species, guaranteed access to healthy environments for everyone, and additional support for those with specific health needs.
- In **Latin America**, the pursuit of gender equality, safe healthcare, sustainable economic growth, and preservation of coastal and marine ecosystems requires dismantling the structural barriers youth face in a variety of contexts. These challenges disproportionately impact marginalized groups such as Indigenous youth, migrants, Afro-descendants, youth with disabilities, and those living with HIV. With less than five years remaining until 2030, key stakeholders need to demonstrate a genuine commitment by taking concrete global and regional actions. Youth insisted on full and meaningful participation in creating a fairer, more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable region.
- **Caribbean** youth face urgent challenges threatening their development, from economic vulnerabilities and climate change to mental health issues and inequality. Despite this, youth remain resilient, leading ocean conservation efforts, advocating for the blue economy, and calling for inclusive, youth-centered policies. Youth urge Caribbean SIDS to sign the BBNJ Agreement (Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction) and invest in youth-led innovation and sustainability. Youth's cultural and natural heritage, especially the oceans, must be protected. Participants stated that through regional cooperation, strengthened youth networks, and global solidarity, youth are not only beneficiaries – they are co-creators of a sustainable, just future for the region.

The high level of participation in this year's Youth Forum clearly demonstrated that young people are actively engaged and committed to advancing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Let us build on the dialogues at the 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum and continue to champion inclusive multilateralism and global solidarity.

Let us continue to ensure that young people are heard and meaningfully engaged at all levels.

Let us move beyond talk and into concrete action - for the sake of our future.