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YOUTH FORUM

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YOUTH FORUM

15 - 17 APRIL 2025

SUMMARY



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

15-17 April 2025



The thirteenth annual Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum took place from 15-17 April 2025 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York under the overarching theme: “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind.” Chaired by H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations and President of the ECOSOC, the Youth Forum attracted record participation with close to 1,000 in-person youth participants, 60 Ministers, 37 high-level government representatives, 15 parliamentarians, 18 representatives of National Youth Councils and 107 youth delegates from 40 countries.

The 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum was organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in close collaboration with the UN Youth Office and 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 .



This year's Forum provided a platform for young people to engage in a dialogue with Member States and other stakeholders on advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implementing the Pact for the Future. The outcomes of the discussions will contribute to various intergovernmental processes taking place in 2025, including the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and the Second World Summit for Social Development.

A series of thematic breakout sessions were organized, focusing on the sustainable development goals (SDGs) that are under review at the 2025 session of the High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), namely Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Life Below Water (SDG 14), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). The six regional breakout sessions highlighted the unique challenges and opportunities faced by young people in different regions of the world.

Over the three days of the Forum, 123 side events were organized by a broad range of stakeholders, providing additional opportunities to address key topics on strengthening the youth agenda at the United Nations and beyond.

Opening

H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, President of ECOSOC, opened the 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum by emphasizing the urgency of addressing global crises such as climate change, conflict, poverty, inequality, and hunger. Young people have played an essential role in advancing the SDGs and leveraging technology and innovation as powerful tools for progress and positive change. However, the persistent digital divide—particularly affecting youth in low-income and marginalized communities—continues to be a major barrier in access to technology, along with gender-related disparities. The President of the Council further advocated for meaningful intergenerational dialogue and emphasized the need for young people to be genuinely present in decision-making spaces, highlighting the Permanent Mission of Canada's recent establishment of a Youth Advisory Board as an example of such integration. In conclusion, he encouraged participants to move from dialogue to implementation, emphasizing the importance of recognizing youth not just as future leaders, but as leaders of today who are essential to shaping an inclusive, just, and sustainable future where no one is left behind.

H.E. Mr. Philemon Yang, President of the 79th Session of the General Assembly, stressed the vital role of youth in driving positive change, particularly in climate action, social inclusion, and innovation. Acknowledging the growing digital divide, especially in developing countries and among women and girls, he urged equal access to digital tools, education, and job opportunities to ensure inclusive progress. He further committed to ongoing support for



youth empowerment, particularly in Africa, through digitalization, and reiterated his dedication to gender equality.

Dr. Felipe Paullier, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, speaking on behalf of **H. E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations**, highlighted that youth voices must co-create intersectional solutions. Their engagement is essential, especially as the world faces unprecedented levels of conflict, environmental degradation, institutional distrust, and stalled progress on the SDGs. He called on governments to honor the commitments made in the *Pact for the Future*, noting that it represents a renewed promise to integrate youth meaningfully into decision-making processes. Dr. Paullier urged institutions, including the UN, to evolve, by allocating resources and proving their commitment to youth engagement through concrete action. He concluded with a reminder that the decisions made today will shape the future of generations to come.

In her keynote address, **Ms. Oumaima Makhlouk, Data Thematic Focal Point, Science Policy Interface (SPI) Youth Platform, Major group on Children and Youth (MGCY)** underscored that access to safe healthcare must be a universal right. Condemning the disproportionate global investment in warfare over human development, she called instead for a shift toward investing in youth potential.



She emphasized that youth around the world are already creating impactful solutions—through science, innovation, and activism—but face structural inequities that must be addressed. Ms. Makhlouk called on global leaders to treat youth as full partners, not just symbolic participants, in shaping policy. She outlined four key steps to do so: strengthening of the ECOSOC Youth Forum as a space for youth-led action; creating a global fund for grassroots initiatives; ensuring that youth are embedded in decision-making bodies; and establishing a year-round follow-up platform.

She concluded with a moving poetic reflection, reminding the world that sustainable development must be centered on dignity, love, and inclusion. The message was clear: youth are not just the future—they are the force driving change now.

Interactive Discussion

Following the official opening, an interactive conversation took place which offered the following recommendations:

1. Institutions must strengthen trust by working alongside young people, challenging outdated beliefs about their ability to lead, and providing flexible,



adequate funding to support their participation.

2. It is essential to bridge the digital divide, resist the defunding of scientific research, and guarantee equitable access to quality education for all.
3. The ethical and responsible use of AI must preserve human dignity and agency, with youth involved in shaping how technology serves their communities.
4. Greater impact can be achieved through collaboration and integration across development goals, particularly in global health, by leveraging digital innovation.
5. Shifting from a development model focused solely on survival to one rooted in liberation requires systemic change, including advancing tax justice and empowering youth leadership.
6. True inclusion means giving young people structural power now—not later—while acting with long-term responsibility toward future generations.



Thematic Sessions

SDG 3: Navigating Health-Adolescents and Youth in a Digital World

This session addressed the growing impact of digital environments on youth health, with a focus on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and overall well-being. It explored how digital determinants—such as algorithm-driven content, targeted marketing, online harassment, and misinformation—are shaping health support and resources. The discussions highlighted the disproportionate impact on marginalized youth and emphasized the urgent need for regulatory innovation, algorithmic transparency, and equity-driven digital design.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Speakers discussed solutions ranging from improved content regulation and ethical AI to digital literacy and youth-led innovation. Youth initiatives including peer mental health apps and SRHR advocacy campaigns were showcased as models of digital empowerment. The session also emphasized the importance of co-creating digital health policies with youth engagement and fostering intergenerational dialogues across sectors.

Key recommendations:

1. Strengthening governance and accountability mechanisms is essential, alongside safeguarding health data privacy and ensuring inclusive access to digital tools for all populations.
2. Member States must support, empower, and invest, where appropriate, in global institutions like WHO, UNFPA, UNODC, UNAIDS, and UNICEF in building capacity for youth-centered digital health governance, ensuring that youth are not only protected in digital spaces, but also meaningfully engaged as co-creators of healthier digital futures.

SDG 5: Strengthening Institutions for Gender Equality and Youth Participation in Sustainable Development and Peacebuilding

This session explored systemic barriers that are hindering meaningful participation of young women in sustainable development, peacebuilding, and rule-of-law institutions. Persistent challenges, particularly in conflict-affected and marginalized communities, included gender-based violence, discriminatory laws, insufficient disaggregated data, inaccessible justice systems, inadequate healthcare and education, and exclusion from decision-making in male-dominated security sectors.



Key recommendations:

1. It is critical to strengthen the institutionalization of youth-led, gender-responsive mechanisms that ensure formal youth participation in governance, peace, justice, and security institutions, supported by sustainable and long-term funding.
2. Prioritizing the systematic collection of disaggregated data, the development of barrier assessment tools, and gender-responsive policy analysis is essential to drive-based reforms.
3. Efforts must move beyond symbolic inclusion towards actionable commitments that guarantee the leadership of young women and their meaningful participation at all levels of governance and peacebuilding.
4. Institutional accountability should be reinforced through youth-led evaluations and the implementation of safeguarding protocols.
5. Cross-sector collaboration is vital to effectively integrating gender equality into broader justice, security and peace frameworks.

5 GENDER EQUALITY



SDG 8: Ensuring Decent Work and Economic Opportunities for Youth

This session brought together a diverse, intergenerational group of youth leaders, Member States' representatives, and private sector actors to discuss concrete strategies for promoting youth employment. With one in five young people classified as NEETs and decent work deficits persisting among young women and marginalized groups, the session highlighted the urgency of scaling up investments to promote decent jobs for youth.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Discussions were structured around three key themes: supporting youth transitions into decent work; advancing human capital and skills development; and forging impactful multi-stakeholder partnerships. Speakers emphasized the role of governments in boosting job creation for youth, the role of the private sector in hiring and training young talent, and youth-led entrepreneurship and innovations in green and digital economies. The session highlighted youth as key agents of change and called for their meaningful engagement in co-creating solutions.



Key recommendations:

1. The importance of coordinated, collaborative and youth-inclusive actions to advance SDG 8 must be reaffirmed, while also identifying promising practices and partnerships.
2. Platforms such as the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth should be leveraged to scale up action and impact on youth employment, ensuring that no young person is left behind.

SDG 14: Youth for Sustainable Oceans – Mobilization and Actions

The session on SDG 14 focused on youth mobilization and innovation for sustainable oceans, highlighting the critical role of young leaders in addressing global ocean challenges. Key points included the importance of meaningful youth engagement in global ocean governance, including in the upcoming third UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France. Various youth-led initiatives and community-based efforts were showcased, such as beach cleanups, technological innovations, marine conservation projects, and educational programs.



Key recommendations:

1. There is an urgent need to address overfishing, plastic pollution, and the growing impacts of climate change on oceans.
2. Increasing resources and financial support for youth-led ocean sustainability initiatives, promoting ocean literacy, and fostering intergenerational collaboration are essential to achieving SDG 14.

SDG 17: Partnerships and Financing for Youth—Unlocking the Potential of the Green Economy

This panel explored how fostering cross-sector collaboration and innovative financing mechanisms can bridge existing gaps in education, training, and access to green jobs, while influencing global funding platforms and processes with and for youth. The session featured actions by the Green Jobs for Youth Pact and its Youth Advisory Group (YAG), the Financing for Development CSO Youth Constituency, and the Global Youth Caucus for Decent Work and Sustainable Economies.



Key recommendations:

1. Successful multi-stakeholder initiatives that empower young people to create innovative and human rights-based solutions and build resilience in their communities must be strengthened and expanded.
2. Continue supporting for and replication of effective partnerships is crucial to catalyze action, ensuring that young people are not only beneficiaries but also leaders and co-creators in shaping a greener and more equitable future.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



#YouthLead - From Local to Global: Meaningful Youth Participation in Policymaking and Decision-Making

Segment 1: Core Principles of Meaningful Youth Participation

Grounded in the implementation of *the Pact for the Future*, the discussions in this segment emphasized that youth engagement must move beyond symbolic gestures toward institutionalization across sectors. There is urgency in transforming hope into action amid global crises.

Participants stressed that current systems often limit young people's participation to consultative roles, instead of granting them real decision-making power. Global and regional experiences, from Honduras, Austria and India were showcased, demonstrating how youth-led initiatives, digital tools, education reforms, and intergenerational dialogue can drive inclusive participation. Key themes discussed included equitable access to technology, the importance of mental health, gender justice, and localized leadership as well as the need to invest in youth to achieve a more just, resilient, and innovative future.

Key recommendations:

1. Increasing power-sharing, respecting youth expertise, and ending tokenistic approaches are important steps towards meaningful youth engagement.
2. Cross-cutting challenges, such as patriarchal systems, limited access to civic education, and weak institutional accountability, must be addressed to create more inclusive and equitable governance structures.
3. Youth must be recognized not only as beneficiaries of policies but also as co-creators actively shaping the decisions that affect their lives.



Segment 2: Meaningful Youth Participation in Practice

Discussions in this segment focused on showcasing good practices of youth engagement in policymaking at various levels. Speakers, youth advocates and delegates across all regions emphasized that meaningful youth engagement must be institutionalized, inclusive, and resourced.

Youth advocates expressed that they are too often invited to participate without being heard—an experience that reinforces tokenism. In response, Member States and organizations shared concrete efforts to integrate youth in climate action, democratic processes, and innovation ecosystems. These efforts ranged from legal reforms to protect youth rights, to national policies lowering voting ages and increased funding for youth-led initiatives.

Key recommendations:

1. Opportunities for co-creation, mentorship, capacity building, and the recognition of youth as equal partners in decision-making must be increased. Young parliamentarians, civil society activists, and youth delegates underlined the need to include young people throughout the policy cycle, not simply in isolated consultations.
2. Promoting intersectional inclusion is essential, particularly for marginalized groups such as LGBTQI+ youth, Indigenous youth, and young refugees and young people living in conflict zones.
3. Fostering youth leadership requires urgent and structural change to ensure meaningful and sustained engagement.

Empowering and Engaging Young People: The Evolving Role of Science and Technology

The session emphasized that young people are not only users and beneficiaries of technology but also critical agents in advancing significant technological change. The session also highlighted success stories of youth-led initiatives in crosscutting sectors like energy and education, particularly in underserved regions.

Key recommendations:

1. Regional youth-led knowledge exchange and collaboration must be strengthened, including South-South collaboration in technological innovation and increased youth involvement in decision-making processes related to digital governance.
2. Bridging the urban-rural digital divide is vital, alongside increasing funding and mentorship for youth. This includes support for educational programs at both school and university levels, coding bootcamps, and youth-led startups.



3. Cross-cutting challenges must be addressed, including the digital divide, online safety, and the enhancement of media and information literacy skills. Intergenerational collaboration in tech governance should also be actively fostered.
4. Youth perspectives must be integrated into global digital frameworks, with greater support for youth innovation ecosystems and increased funding for youth-led initiatives.

Social Development: Youth Solutions for an Inclusive Future

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development envisioned global equity and inclusion, but many of its promises have remained unmet—especially for youth. Today’s young people face growing challenges, including limited access to education and employment, mental health crises, digital violence, and systemic exclusion, particularly among those in the Global South, Indigenous, and displaced communities. The discussions in this session highlighted how racism, colonial legacies, and top-down policymaking continue to marginalize youth, who are instead calling for inclusive, equitable, community-driven social development.

Speakers shared examples of how governments are increasingly recognizing youth as co-creators of solutions and are institutionalizing participation through youth councils, ministries, and intergenerational dialogues.

Key recommendations:

1. The United Nations should expand youth access to multilateral platforms and mechanisms for co-design, ensuring that youth voices inform both the process and outcomes of the Second World Summit for Social Development.
2. The Summit must result in the adoption of ambitious, time-bound commitments backed by adequate financing and rooted in strong accountability frameworks.
3. The Second World Summit for Social Development should directly address urgent issues such as the shrinking of civic space, the deterioration of democratic institutions, and the chronic underfunding of social programming.



Regional Sessions – Youth Perspectives on Regional Development – Challenges, Priorities and Actions for the SDGs

Asia and The Pacific

The *Call to Action* of the 2025 Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD) Youth Forum was formally launched during the Asia-Pacific regional breakout session, with youth advocates stressing the need to have a central role in addressing the challenges shaping their lives, including inequality, conflicts, natural disasters and climate change.

Discussions identified health (especially mental health and sexual and reproductive health), gender equality and the nexus of employment and training as priority areas for the region where youth development could benefit from better tailored policies and interventions. Asia-Pacific youth stand ready, with a wealth of creative capacity, to engage in meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships to accelerate achievement of the SDGs.

Arab States Region

The Arab States regional session amplified the call of youth for their governments, the UN, and other stakeholders to urgently transform youth participation into a lived reality – as mandated by the *Pact for the Future* – rather than allowing it to remain a long-standing symbolic gesture. Youth strongly affirmed that participation is their right, not merely a privilege. Furthermore, discussions highlighted that youth from diverse backgrounds are uniquely positioned to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs in many Arab countries and are well-equipped to serve as partners in decision-making processes. This is especially important for advancing peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies as emphasized in SDG16.

The session underscored the evidence-based costs of social, economic, and political exclusion of youth, highlighting the urgent need for institutionalized youth participation mechanisms grounded in clear operational standards and long-term solutions, rather than fragmented, ad hoc approaches. Discussions demonstrated that meaningful youth engagement can drive economic growth, social cohesion and innovation in AI, good governance and environmental sustainability. It can also increase trust in public institutions, support conflict prevention and strengthen resilience. There were calls for young people to serve as active partners in shaping policies and solutions for a more sustainable and equitable future in the region. Central to the debate was a request for governments to give equal priority to marginalized and disadvantaged youth across the Arab region.



Latin America

The session showcased the findings from the youth consultations held prior to the ECOSOC Youth Forum. Over 700 young people from 17 countries participated in the consultations, which resulted in the *Children, Adolescent and Youth Declaration*. The *Declaration* underscored demands for universal access to quality health care, decent work, marine conservation, youth leadership and the eradication of gender-based violence.

Discussions emphasized the structural inequalities—rooted in racism, colonial legacies, and systemic discrimination—continue to limit opportunities for youth from Indigenous, Afro-descendant, rural, LGBTQIA+, and disability communities. While progress was noted in legislative frameworks and youth policies in some countries, significant gaps remain in implementation, budgeting, and meaningful participation.

Participants called for stronger intersectional, intercultural, and evidence-based public policies, expanded financing for youth-led initiatives, and revitalized regional platforms through mechanisms like the New Youth Agenda. Concrete national and regional examples were presented, including Panama’s participatory youth policies; the Dominican Republic’s “Ecojuventudes” initiative promoting youth-led environmental action; Honduras’ efforts to advance inclusive youth participation frameworks; and Uruguay’s push for the implementation of intersectional feminist agendas. Brazil also emphasized the need to strengthen regional coordination to enhance youth engagement in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

The session concluded with a strong call to recognize youth not just as consulted stakeholders but as essential partners and leaders in advancing the 2030 Agenda towards a more just, inclusive, and sustainable region.

Europe, North America and Other States

At the regional session on Europe, North America and other States, young people emphasized the urgent need for systemic change to support youth across education, digital access, mental health, and social inclusion. Education, while intended to unlock opportunity, often leads to debt and insecurity when not aligned with real-world needs. Many young people in the region lack essential financial literacy, highlighting the need to integrate practical financial education into school curricula. Aligning education with labor market demands and guaranteeing universal access to essential services such as healthcare, housing, transportation, and digital infrastructure is critical.



Concerns about digital safety and accessibility highlighted the risks posed by unregulated digital environments. There is a pressing need for clear frameworks that ensure young people can benefit from emerging technologies such as AI, without risking exploitation or data misuse. A safe, inclusive digital space must be a priority, especially as corporations continue to profit from unchecked youth engagement online.

Broader support for youth well-being was also emphasized, including access to mental, reproductive, and physical health services. Institutional and gender-inclusive approaches were identified as essential, particularly for those excluded by binary systems. Finally, structural youth inclusion, through representation, funding, and intergenerational support, were viewed as critical to drive meaningful, lasting change.

Africa

The Africa regional session brought together African youth, government officials, UN representatives, the African Union, civil society, academia, and the private sector to discuss youth empowerment through science, technology, and innovation (STI), aligned with the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

Participants emphasized Africa's demographic dividend, highlighting that by 2030, young Africans will represent 42% of the global youth population. However, only approximately 3 million jobs are created each year—well below the near 18 million young Africans entering the labor market annually. There is an urgent need to increase job creation. Africa's vulnerability to climate change, despite contributing less than 4 per cent to global emissions, was also underscored.

Youth called for policies that empower innovation and creativity, access to transformative technologies for the responsible use of AI, and investment in STEM education. It was highlighted that the African Continental Free Trade Area, the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence, and public-private partnerships are essential to generate decent jobs and promote development. The session concluded with a strong commitment from youth to the SDGs, the Agenda 2063, and the Summit of the Future, affirming their role as key actors in shaping Africa's sustainable future.



The Caribbean

The Caribbean regional session provided a space for youth to present the outcomes of the regional youth preparatory consultations in the framework of the Forum of LAC Countries on Sustainable Development. The Forum provided an opportunity to promote and strengthen the dialogue between Caribbean Member States and UN agencies, with the goal of advancing the meaningful participation of children, youth and adolescents in the acceleration of efforts towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Caribbean youth proposed bold, actionable strategies to advance key SDGs. For SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), they called for inclusive, rights-based health systems, better regional data-sharing, and the integration of resilience education into school curricula. On SDG 5 (Gender Equality), youth emphasized the need for safe, inclusive spaces, gender-responsive budgeting, comprehensive sexuality education and a shift toward prevention over punishment in gender justice. For SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), they urged investment in digital access, entrepreneurship, and holistic community-rooted programmes. In support of SDG 14 (Life Below Water), youth advocated for stronger marine conservation through youth-led education, a regional marine waste dashboard, and innovation platforms like the proposed Sargassum Resilience Initiative. Under SDG 17 (Partnerships), youth demanded institutionalized leadership via formal Youth Councils, greater access to data and funding, and meaningful co-creation in policymaking.





Closing Session

Ms. Keshia De Freece Lawrence, Harvard Forest Indigenous Education Specialist and Sovereign Science Director and PhD candidate at Trent University, delivered a powerful reflection on intergenerational responsibility, Indigenous knowledge, and youth empowerment as vital forces in building a sustainable future. She emphasized the sacred relationship Indigenous communities hold with water and marine life and called for the protection of abundance through transparency and inclusive action. Highlighting the 2025 ECOSOC Youth Forum as a symbol of global unity, she applauded youth from every region who brought forward bold recommendations such as fair compensation, health care, and structural inclusion, especially for young people in conflict zones and marginalized communities.

Ms. De Freece Lawrence called for the demilitarization of ecosystems, a recommitment to gender rights, and greater acknowledgment of Indigenous contributions to science and sustainability. . Amplifying voices from all regions, she urged global leaders to invest in youth, declaring them the “last seeds” of humanity’s first line of defense for a just and livable future.



Ms. Bjørg Sandkjær, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, subsequently acknowledged the powerful contributions of young people, governments, and partners in advancing a more inclusive and sustainable future. Marking the 30th anniversary of key global agreements on youth, gender equality, and social justice, she emphasized how far the world has come—while recognizing how much remains to be done. Reflecting on her own experience as a youth activist, Ms. Sandkjær reaffirmed that young people are driving forces of progress. Youth must be fully included in shaping global policy, particularly in the lead-up to the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha. She also stressed the importance of youth in bridging the gap between science and policy and pledged continued support for youth participation in global decision making.

“You have helped shape a Forum that doesn’t just talk about youth leadership. It practices it,” stated **Dr. Felipe Paullier, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs**. Celebrating the unprecedented gathering of young people and decision-makers, he described the Youth Forum as a living example of inclusive and meaningful youth participation. Young leaders contribute energy, leadership, and determination in driving forward the 2030 Agenda, not as passive recipients, but as active agents of change. The United Nations remains committed to youth through key initiatives such as Youth2030 and the newly launched UN Youth Compass, aimed at strengthening youth engagement from local to global levels. Dr. Paullier concluded with a strong call for institutional responsibility, sustained youth engagement, and full implementation of the commitments outlined in the *Pact for the Future*.

H.E. Mr. Krzysztof Szczerski, Permanent Representative of Poland to the UN and Vice-president of ECOSOC on behalf of H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, President of the Council, closed this year’s ECOSOC Youth Forum with a powerful call to action, urging youth not simply to inherit the future, but to boldly redefine it as a new generation of changemakers driving sustainable development forward.

