



ECOSOC
YOUTH FORUM

YOUTH2030

Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

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

REGIONAL SESSION ON EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA AND OTHER STATES

26 April 2023, 10:45 AM – 12:15 PM (NY Time)
Hybrid Event

IDENTIFICATION	
SDG/theme or Region	Europe, North America and Other States
Session title	Youth-Responsive Resilience: Advancing Human Rights and Environmental Justice in the Europe, North America and Other States Region
Session co-lead UN	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
Session co-lead Youth	Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO)
Session co-organizers (both UN and Youth)	Global Youth Health Caucus (GYHC) Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE) (TBC)
BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES (approx. 500 words)	
<p>The engagement of youth in global, regional and country-based institutions has historically been characterized by two conflicting attitudes. On one side, children and youth are recognized as one of the most vulnerable populations to economic, social, and environmental impacts, and therefore, key beneficiaries of policies and processes aimed at mitigating those effects. However, they have traditionally not been seen or directly engaged as co-shapers of these policies and processes. On the other side is a prevailing message that young people are symbols of hope and that they will “save the world” with their</p>	

energy, creativity, and passion. Inconsistent with this positive sentiment is the reality that young people are often receiving limited financing and institutional support to contribute to global issues, having to balance underpaid advocacy work with their own education and careers.

This has begun to shift through hard fought advocacy by youth constituencies leading to global and regional initiatives such as the UN Youth2030 strategy, the European Union's Youth Action Plan, the United States' launch of the Global Youth Democracy Network and Canada's Youth Secretariat and Council.

As the world grapples with the complex and interconnected crises of climate change, energy and food insecurity, fast rising global inflation, political polarization and conflict, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly clear that addressing these challenges will require a synergistic approach. The United Nations has identified this need and is calling for a coordinated, multilateral response through the upcoming SDG Summit and Summit of the Future. At the midpoint of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), just as it is crucial to recognize that the global challenges the world faces are not one-dimensional, neither should be the mechanisms we use to engage young people who are agents of change in building a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Key issues have been identified by regional youth through several preparatory processes leading up to this 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum session. Youth engagement in the context of the following key issues and their intersections with the 2023 goals under review (SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17) will be explored during this interactive dialogue:

Confronting Legacy Environmental Injustices

Indigenous, low-income, rural and minority communities in the Europe, North America and Other States region face unequal exposure to soil, water and air pollution, ecological degradation and the damaging impacts of climate change. Patterns of environmental injustice are evident across the region: from billowing petrochemical plants in predominantly Black communities of the United States' "Cancer Alley," to the largest concentration of industrial facilities and landfills on Aamijwinaang First Nation land dubbed Canada's "Chemical Valley" and Europe's largest steel plant in Taranto, Italy linked to cancers and other health concerns in its neighbouring working-class districts. Even when laws and regulations are strengthened in this region to improve environmental protection, this often directly or indirectly shifts health and environmental burdens to other regions and nations, particularly in the Global South.

A robust framework also remains to be developed which considers the rights of children and youth and intergenerational equity in the environmental justice movement. Environmental degradation produces lasting negative effects on the quality of life, education and future economic opportunities of young people. Children and youth also experience heightened and unique vulnerabilities to long-term health problems from exposure to toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes.

Participants will discuss environmental injustices in their communities, and identify strategies to address these challenges, including the need for greater participation of young people in environmental policy and regulation.

Addressing Growing Political Divisiveness and Backsliding on Human Rights

A major war in Europe, threats to civil society's independence, uncontrolled campaigns of disinformation and cyber-attacks, and rising anti-rights rhetoric are creating an environment of uncertainty and fear for youth in the region. For marginalized youth, these trends have had devastating effects on their mental health, well-being and sense of belonging in their communities.

For the first time in 2021, the World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report* listed "widespread youth disillusionment" as a critical threat requiring greater prioritization by governments. Youth are instrumental partners in building a more inclusive and equitable society, demanding that political leaders uphold human rights and work towards building more just and democratic institutions.

Participants will explore the role of youth-led movements in reinvigorating political institutions and driving progress in human rights, as well as the challenges and opportunities facing these movements in the region.

Creating Economic Opportunities and Reducing Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment remains a persistent issue in the Europe, North America and Other States region, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising costs of living, including housing, transportation and education have further added to the financial strain on young people. This lack of financial security not only limits the ability of young people to plan for their future but also increases the risk of generational cycles of poverty.

Participants will be invited to share experiences of the economic challenges faced by young people in their communities and countries, and examine the role of governments, businesses and civil society in promoting economic opportunities for young people.

Moving Beyond Entrenched Extractive Economies Towards Sustainable COVID-19 Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the deep-seated inequities and vulnerabilities in the region's current economic systems. Many countries in this region rely on extractive industries such as fossil fuels and mining for their economic growth. This over-reliance on extractive industries has contributed to environmental degradation, social inequality, and energy insecurity.

Through this segment, we will explore the transition to more sustainable models, such as circular economy approaches, which promote a regenerative and restorative approach to production and consumption. Participants will be invited to share their ideas and insights on how the youth can be more involved in shaping recovery policies and strategies, and how the UN and governments can support youth-led initiatives in this regard.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

The session objectives for the Regional Breakout Session for Europe, North America and Other States are to explore how youth engagement can advance human rights and environmental justice in the region through the lens of the 2023 goals under review: SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17. The interactive session will provide an opportunity for representatives of youth organisations, youth delegates, representatives of

Member States, the UN system and other institutions to discuss the specific challenges the regions' youth are facing, ideas and solutions to those challenges, and means for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The session will garner youth input from the region to inform the work of the 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum, the SDG Summit and Summit of the Future.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The session is expected to generate a set of concrete recommendations on advancing human rights and environmental justice in the Europe, North America and Other States region through meaningful youth engagement. These recommendations will feed a regional perspective into the ECOSOC Youth Forum sessions focused on specific SDGs and inform the outcome report of the ECOSOC Youth Forum as well as the work of the High-Level Political Forum, SDG Summit and Summit of the Future, along with other upcoming 2023 events. These recommendations will be shared with relevant stakeholders and institutions to inform their policymaking and implementation efforts. Furthermore, the session will provide a platform for youth to connect with one another, share experiences and good practices and collaborate on ideas aimed at advancing sustainable development in the region.

APPROACH USED TO GENERATE CONCRETE CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The session will be interactive and discussion-based, structured with guiding questions, allowing participants to exchange views on the main regional challenges, possible solutions, lessons learned and opportunities. Discussion topics and questions are guided by the outcomes of two preparatory consultations and one online pre-survey held in March-April 2023 leading up to the session.

A North American youth representative will moderate the session in-person, and participants (young people and institutional representatives) will discuss challenges, ideas and recommendations for each of the prepared discussion topics. The chat function of the session streamed online via Webex will be monitored by online moderators / technical support person(s), with key questions and comments fed to the in-person moderator. Virtual and in-person speakers may also be invited to share pre-prepared interventions contributing to the issues addressed and the search for solutions and recommendations.

OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW

Time	Segment	Presenters/Structure (tbc)
5 minutes	Welcome and introductions	Shannon Lisa, interim Global Focal Point, Chemicals and Waste Youth Platform – MGCY (in-person)
20 minutes	Confronting Legacy Environmental Injustices	Scene-setting by moderator

		<p>Youth speaker(s) to deliver short (2-3 minute) intervention/statement</p> <p>Open floor for guided discussion questions</p>
20 minutes	Addressing Growing Political Divisiveness and Backsliding on Human Rights	<p>Scene-setting by moderator</p> <p>Youth speaker(s) to deliver short (2-3 minute) intervention/statement</p> <p>Open floor for guided discussion questions</p>
20 minutes	Creating Economic Opportunities and Reducing Youth Unemployment	<p>Scene-setting by moderator</p> <p>Youth speaker(s) to deliver short (2-3 minute) intervention/statement</p> <p>Open floor for guided discussion questions</p>
20 minutes	Moving Beyond Entrenched Extractive Economies Towards Sustainable COVID-19 Recovery	<p>Scene-setting by moderator</p> <p>Youth speaker(s) to deliver short (2-3 minute) intervention/statement</p> <p>Open floor for guided discussion questions</p>
5 minutes	Conclusions	Shannon Lisa, interim Global Focal Point, Chemicals and Waste Youth Platform – MGCY (in-person)

SESSION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions will be used to guide discussions during the session:

Confronting Legacy Environmental Injustices

- What specific examples of environmental injustices have you witnessed or know to be occurring in your community/country/region?
- What actions can governments and businesses take to address legacy environmental justices while also promoting sustainable development?
- How can youth-led movements be more effective in advocating for environmental justice and holding institutions accountable for past and current harms?

Addressing Growing Political Divisiveness and Backsliding on Human Rights

- How has political divisiveness and anti-rights rhetoric impacted marginalized youth in your community?
- How can young immigrants and refugees be better supported as they navigate new cultural and social contexts in the region?
- What strategies has your youth-led or youth-serving organisation used to push for a more inclusive and equitable society?
- What can governments and civil society do to ensure that human rights are upheld and democratic institutions are strengthened, particularly in the face of disinformation campaigns?

Creating Economic Opportunities and Reducing Youth Unemployment

- What barriers have you experienced in accessing stable and well-paying employment, and how have they affected your financial security and future planning?
- In what ways can young people themselves be empowered to create their own economic opportunities? How can this be supported by the UN and governments in the region?
- How can education and skills training be improved / better aligned with the needs of the labour market to support youth in accessing stable and well-paying employment?

Moving Beyond Entrenched Extractive Economies Towards Sustainable COVID-19 Recovery

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for more sustainable economic models?
- What are some examples of sustainable COVID-19 recovery that are or could be implemented in your community or country?
- How can we ensure that COVID-19 recovery efforts prioritize environmental sustainability, and do not perpetuate harmful practices and policies?

NAMES OF SESSION SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR(S)**Moderator:**

- **Ms. Shannon Lisa**, Interim Global Focal Point, Chemicals and Waste Youth Platform, MGCY

Speakers:

- **Mr. Fidelis Stehle**, German UN Youth Delegate
- **Ms. Yağmur Yenilmez**, Founder and Chairperson of the Board, Callisto Youth, and Founder, Equus Youth.
- **Mr. Shayan Chowdhury**, Director, Reach4Help
- **Ms. Megi Marku**, President, UN Youth Association of Albania
- **Mr. Daniel Helmer**, Regional Focal Point North America, SCP Youth Constituency, and Coordinator, March for Our Planet

OVERVIEW OF PREPARATORY EVENT/CONSULTATION

The event will build upon youth inputs shared during the following preparatory events / consultations:

- 2023 Youth Assembly for UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) held virtually on 26-27 March 2023.
- Youth and the SDGs Virtual Event in the lead-up to the SDG Summit 2023 held virtually on 29 March 2023.
- ECOSOC Youth Forum 2023: Europe, North America and Other States Session Pre-Survey open from 12 - 20 April 2023.

Participants for the regional session at the ECOSOC Youth Forum are otherwise encouraged to prepare for the session through the suggested reading.

SUGGESTED READING, IF ANY

European Environment Agency: Unequal exposure and unequal impacts: social vulnerability to air pollution, noise and extreme temperatures in Europe

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/unequal-exposure-and-unequal-impacts>

CBS News: “Two different realities”: Why America needs environmental justice

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/environmental-justice-movement-climate-change-racism-peggy-shepard/>

UNDP: Five steps to environmental justice

<https://www.undp.org/blog/five-steps-environmental-justice>

Cambridge University Press: Intersections of Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-handbook-of-environmental-justice-and-sustainable-development/intersections-of-environmental-justice-and-sustainable-development/8C0BE505D188DDA946AD06CC28FB9158>

European Commission: Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU External Action 2022-2027 <https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Joint%20Communication%20-%20Youth%20Action%20Plan%20in%20EU%20external%20action%202022%20%E2%80%93%202027.pdf>

IISD: UNECE Region Further Away from Fulfilling 2030 Agenda: SDG Status Report

<https://sdg.iisd.org/news/unece-region-further-away-from-fulfilling-2030-agenda-sdg-status-report/>

United Nations: Policy Brief: Transforming Extractive Industries for Sustainable Development

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_extractives.pdf

UNECE: Joint efforts for the circular economy will drive a sustainable COVID-19 recovery and boost climate action

<https://unece.org/circular-economy/news/joint-efforts-circular-economy-will-drive-sustainable-covid-19-recovery-and>

World Economic Forum: How a circular economy could aid the COVID-19 recovery

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/circular-economy-covid-19-recovery-warwick/>