



**ECOSOC**  
**YOUTH FORUM**

**YOUTH 2030**

## **Economic and Social Council Youth Forum**

# **"Accelerating the COVID-19 recovery and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda with and for youth"**

### **PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT**

The 2023 Youth Forum, held in hybrid format, took place from 25 to 27 April 2023, guided by the theme of the 2023 HLPF on “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”. The Forum provided a space for youth to discuss their vision and recommendations for the SDG Summit to be held in September 2023. The Forum, which is the largest and most diverse gathering of youth at the United Nations, attracted over **1000 in-person youth leaders and activists**, 55 Ministers and 80 senior officials of Government, 115 official UN Youth Delegates, 4 Young Parliamentarians, **and over 20,000 virtually**.

This year’s Forum was held during a period of challenging geopolitical tensions, a relentless climate crisis, rising poverty and inequality, as well as a slow and uneven recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Youth conveyed their strong concern regarding COVID’s impact on their mental and physical health, their job prospects and educational opportunities, and identified a number of transformative actions needed to regain lost ground. Youth also expressed deep alarm about the climate crisis, current and emerging conflicts and their impacts on young people, the growing digital divide and the pushback on the rights of women and girls.

Despite the concern about the current global context, there was a sense of hope and optimism that youth can make a difference. However, beyond hope and optimism, youth stressed the importance of an enabling environment for their wellbeing. Youth see themselves as innovators, rights holders and agents of change who play an integral role in SDG implementation and should be engaged at all stages of policy design, implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. They want to be full participants in decision-making concerning their present and future. Key to this engagement is their full participation in global governance.

They welcomed the establishment of the UN Youth Office and looked forward to more information on how it will be operationalized.

The strong participation of Ministers responsible for Youth Affairs and other high-level Member State representatives was welcomed. They shared updates and concrete examples on how young people are meaningfully engaging and leading on accelerating COVID-19 recovery and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including on the SDGs under review for 2023, namely, on water and sanitation, sustainable cities and communities, affordable and clean energy,

industry, innovation and infrastructure and partnerships. Working across generations is key to achieving the SDGs.

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The following key messages emerged from the discussions:

- We must urge governments, public and private actors to build meaningful partnerships with young innovators and networks to support youth-led solutions in WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) at regional, national, and international levels. We should also ensure that 30 percent of youth below 30 are meaningfully engaged in water-related decision-making through targeted policies by 2030, and prioritize effective menstrual hygiene management, including dedicated financing, especially in humanitarian contexts.
- We must prioritize more meaningful youth participation in policy-making processes at all levels, and direct more funding for youth-led community based projects and initiatives on affordable and clean energy (SDG 7). We must also provide youth with more training and mentorship, including in green skills, to better prepare them for jobs in the energy transition.
- We must ensure that governments and the international development community should focus on inclusive policies that support youth in acquiring the necessary skills and accessing the resources (such as finance, technology and infrastructure) needed to participate in and drive sustainable industrialization, build resilient infrastructure, and grow innovation markets (SDG 9).
- We need to increase youth representation and meaningful inclusion in local governments and urban governance processes in order to build sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). To achieve this, it is critical to combat ageism and other barriers to participation, to make governance systems understandable and accessible to youth, and to build capacities and knowledge of youth to engage with and contribute to all levels of governance.
- We must ensure the access of all youth, including migrant and refugee youth, and people on the move, persons with disability and other groups, to basic services and social systems, especially public health services that include mental health care, as well as access to adequate housing for all. We must co-create, together with governments and local authorities, safe and accessible spaces as well crime prevention and anti-corruption strategies that are contextually relevant. We also need to promote the localization of the SDGs which should be led by youth and could be effective in addressing climate change, reducing inequalities and promoting sustainable urban development. This includes sufficient funding for youth-led initiatives.
- We need to advance in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through inclusive, intersectional, interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and gender-transformative processes. Meaningful youth and adolescent engagement involves ensuring sustained follow-up to youth consultations, creating transparent mechanisms to hold policy-makers accountable, and institutionalizing youth-led decision-making mechanisms at all levels. All stakeholders should invest in youth and adolescent-led initiatives and support youth leadership in driving change on the ground, to leverage the power of technology to promote innovative solutions to modern challenges, and to build the capacity of youth and adolescents to maximise their impact and foster long-term solidarity.
- We also need to sustain and strengthen multilateralism in global governance in order to restore trust in global institutions, democratizing UN processes, and to create an enabling environment where youth are recognized as key partners in co-creating solutions. Peer-to-peer engagement strategies should be adopted to ensure ownership and agency among youth and adolescents. The full participation of young people and adolescents in all their diversity, including, inter alia, those from vulnerable, marginalised, and under-represented backgrounds and communities, is key to transforming ambition into future-oriented action.

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We heard from youth from all regions and diverse constituencies:

- **From African Youth:** We must strengthen the capacity of young people and youth-led organizations on the AfCFTA framework, Africa's new continental free trade area. Youth called

on governments and development partners to offer technical and financial support and foster partnerships through research, capacity building and encouraging adoption, replication and scaling of women and youth economic and financial inclusion. To further advance the AfCFTA, they encouraged the creation and enhancement of necessary infrastructure such as last-mile fibre connectivity, to support the trade and e-commerce ecosystem. They also encouraged the adoption and implementation of the African Digital Transformation Strategy, that would allow for the leapfrogging of old technologies and rolling out of a digital regulatory framework.

- **From Arab Youth:** We must ensure youth inclusion and engagement in the Learning to Earning transition, a key priority for the Arab States region. With regards to upskilling and reskilling, young people believed that education approaches need to be rethought to provide adaptable learning pathways that prepare them for the changing labor market. Youth called for closer relationships between educational institutions and employers to provide training (including virtually) leading to successful careers. They further called on stakeholders to help them navigate their transition with skills development programs, job matching platforms and financial literacy programs. They also believed governments can promote volunteerism and civic participation among youth, an asset in the job market, by introducing it in the education curriculum, creating online platforms for volunteer opportunities, offering tax incentives, and creating yearly awards.
- **From Asia-Pacific Youth:** We must prioritize the meaningful and systematic inclusion of young people in decision-making roles at local, national, regional, and global levels in the Asia Pacific region. They also called for the creation or enhancement of comprehensive, systemic partnerships and platforms with and for youth at all governance levels. The immense opportunities and challenges across this diverse region demand innovative solutions in which youth are invested and meaningfully engaged. In addition, they called for comprehensive policies and programmes in all aspects of youth's development, so they can reach their full potential and contribute to community development, get better access to education, facilitate their labor market transitions, and secure decent jobs, including green jobs.
- **From Europe, North America and Other States Youth:** We need to target policies which promote inclusion, educational support and the political empowerment of young people in Europe, North America and Other States. Young people see persistent inequalities, growing political divisiveness restricting civil society's independence, and environmental injustice systematically impacting Indigenous, low-income, rural and minority communities. At the same time, they face high youth unemployment combined with increased cost of living. They also called on Member States to move towards proactive policies that both address the historical root causes of socioeconomic and environmental inequalities while thinking forward to future generations and generational impacts.
- **Latin American Youth:** We need Member States to adequately respond to the challenges and invest in equal opportunities for the development of youth in the Latin America region. Young people called for concrete actions to include youth in intergenerational and inclusive decision-making and implementation processes and ensure that young people have their basic needs fulfilled so that the post-pandemic recovery is accelerated. On the achievement of the Goals under review, they encouraged as priorities working on regional responses to ensure a fair energy transition, ensuring resilient infrastructure and guaranteeing inclusive, safe and resilient human settlements.
- **Caribbean Youth:** We need better youth access to financial, educational and other resources through public-private partnerships and de-risking investments and for a Caribbean Youth Mobilization Plan to keep up with advances in technology and innovation. Caribbean youth emphasized the need for inclusive and targeted solutions that recognize their intersectional and dynamic identities.

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We heard strong appreciation expressed by Governments, young people and UN leadership for the progress achieved in the five years of implementation of **Youth2030**, the UN Youth Strategy. They underlined the Strategy's key role as a catalyst for transforming the UN's work with and for youth on the path to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Youth2030 is the right framework to

fast track to the 2030 goals, and it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to accelerate implementation.

We also heard strong support for the formalization of the ECOSOC Youth Forum as an important global platform for intergenerational dialogue with Member States at the United Nations and senior officials of national Governments, seated side by side to connect, discuss, network, share ideas, and propose solutions on implementing sustainable development. Young people look forward to being full partners in decision-making bodies at the global, regional and national levels.

The ECOSOC Youth Forum concluded with frank and substantive discussions on priorities for the SDG Summit and beyond, including ways to strengthen multilateralism which will be conveyed to the Heads of State and Government at the upcoming SDG Summit in September 2023. We must build on the ECOSOC Youth Forum as an essential space for youth engagement and participation in SDG implementation and in addressing global challenges for current and future generations.