



**ECOSOC
YOUTH
FORUM**

#YOUTH2030

8th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

SUMMARY

EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA AND OTHER STATES

“Empowering, Including and Ensuring Equality in Europe, North America and other States”

**8 April 2019
CR 12, 1.45-3.45 p.m.
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

Background

Participants discussed the challenges in the region that jeopardise progress towards the 2030 Agenda and that prevent young people from being fully empowered, included and equal. Following discussion on challenges, participants separated into smaller groups to discuss good practices and positive examples of 1) youth solutions and 2) government actions to address those challenges, before focusing on policy recommendations.

Challenges

A majority of participants agreed that national governments have still not adjusted their policies to meet the SDGs, which are still not seen as a political priority in many contexts. Some participants provided examples of where local governments, which are key for the implementation of many of the Goals, are doing a better job of adjusting their policies, while others stressed the importance of multistakeholder approaches, the use of national parliaments and a bottom-up call for change in encouraging governments to take the 2030 Agenda on board.

Almost all participants expressed that outreach to and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised youth is lacking or insufficiently implemented in government policy. Much more remains to be

done in this regard. Participants agreed that discrimination is a challenge that affects young people in the region. Many participants recognised that young people face age-based discrimination. Several examples were also presented of multiple discrimination and systemic discrimination in school systems and the workplace, and the impacts of this on the social inclusion of marginalised groups and communities of young people.

Participants touched on the positive and negative sides of the rise of technology and discussed whether or not technology contributes to empowering, including and ensuring equality. One participant shared how, due to the digital divide, technology can exacerbate existing inequalities, for example where it is only possible to apply for social security benefits or other means of support through the internet, or where the use of technology in educational institutions puts those without access to such technologies at home at a disadvantage. Another participant shared the challenge that technology emphasises biases and therefore embeds existing discrimination. On the other hand, participants shared the positive use of technology and social media in making connections, building movements and promoting advocacy.

After hearing input from the youth pre-meeting to the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, participants identified additional remaining or deepening challenges, including: climate change and insufficient climate action, unequal access to quality and inclusive education, worsening inequality, lack of forward thinking beyond 2030 in decision-making, insufficient investment in youth or support to youth organisations, and a lack of youth mainstreaming across policies. Participants shared that decision-making often remains closed and inaccessible to young people, that existing youth councils are not being integrated into policy processes and that youth participation is not financed.

Solutions and actions

Participants shared examples from their organisations, as well as some good practices or promising actions from governments, to address the challenges identified.

Participants explained that young people and their organisations are mobilising collective action through social media, using their voting and consumer power to support sustainable development and encouraging their peers to do the same. Many youth organisations are raising awareness around sustainable consumption or the importance of democratic participation, for example. Many examples of youth organisations using non-formal education to raise awareness and create spaces to discuss problems and find collective solutions were shared.

Some participants shared positive examples of government action, although this mainly related to actions and programmes at local or sub-national level, rather than Member State level.

Recommendations

Among many ideas regarding further action from governments and regional or international institutions, the following key recommendations were discussed:

- Equal access to quality and inclusive education for all young people, irrespective of their background, must be prioritised. In the transition from education to employment, governments should promote equal access to opportunities, including through the banning of unpaid and poor quality internships.
- The UN and Member States should ensure recognition and validation of non-formal education and its role in empowering young people, and provide support to non-formal education providers.
- Governments, institutions and other donors must provide sufficient long-term funding for youth organisations to maximise the positive impact of their actions.
- Common guidelines for youth organisations to report on their actions towards sustainable development should be created as a tool for youth organisations to showcase their work and be better able to secure funding for their organisations and activities.
- Decision-making at all levels (local, sub-national, national, regional and UN) must become more responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative. Member States should open new spaces for participatory democracy, involve local and national youth councils in decision-making, take steps to increase youth participation in politics and lower the voting age to 16. This should be coupled with support to citizenship education, in both formal and non-formal settings.
- The recognition that young people face age-based discrimination both in policy and in practice, violating their economic and social, civil and political rights, is vital. Attention should be drawn to these discriminatory laws and practices in order for them to be eliminated and for the social, economic and political inclusion of all young people to be promoted.