



**ECOSOC**  
**YOUTH FORUM**  
**10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

**#YOUTH2030**

**10<sup>th</sup> Economic and Social Council Youth Forum**  
**A Decade of Action: Building a Resilient Recovery**

**Plenary Session “Leaving No Youth Behind”: Addressing the long-term consequences of Covid-19 for vulnerable youth groups**

**8 April 14:30-16:00**

**Concept Note**

**Background:**

Globally, while young people have been – and still are – heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, their experiences of the pandemic are extremely diverse as “youth” is far from being a homogenous group. Preliminary data shows that the pandemic’s social and economic effects have increased pre-existing inequalities, pushing vulnerable youth further away from opportunities and well-rounded youth development. A global survey on youth and COVID-19 found that the impacts of the pandemic on young people, particularly among women, younger youth and youth in lower income countries, are systematic, deep and disproportionate.<sup>1</sup>

Young people have the right to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health especially during the pandemic and after. Sadly this is dependent upon the realisation of other human rights such as rights to food, accomodation, employment, education, human dignity, non-discrimination, freedom of movement etc which has proven a challenge for most youth over this period but especially those already experiencing vulnerability, exclusion and marginalisation.

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<sup>1</sup> ILO, OHCHR, UN MGCY, EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, AIESEC, European Youth Forum:  
<https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/campaign/COVID19-survey>

In the education sector for instance, more than 1.26 billion young people, or 72.4 per cent the world's student population, are kept away from school and universities in more than 177 countries. This has significant impacts on the learning and development of young people and disproportionately affects young women and girls<sup>2</sup>. Studies indicate also that even though over 90 percent of young people had their school or training disrupted with lockdowns, the move from physical to digital learning disadvantaged learners who lacked facilities and internet, learners in developing countries, as well as young people with disabilities, young women and girls, refugees, and migrants, among others. It is estimated that *an additional* 23.8 million children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school due to the pandemic's economic impact alone. Most of these youth will be from vulnerable situations. For example, the needs of youth with disabilities, who were already marginalized before the onset of the pandemic, might not be considered and included in distance learning strategies. According to a recent UNICEF study, less than half the population has access to the Internet, with a large urban-rural divide, therefore placing roadblocks for rural populations trying to move to remote learning because of the pandemic.

School closures make girls and young women more vulnerable to early and forced marriage, early pregnancy, and violence – all of which decrease their likelihood of continuing their education. Learners who might need some additional support in the education, such as refugees or migrants, may never return to school if not properly supported and this would further exacerbate pre-existing disparities and erode their resilience. Learning losses – which are particularly affecting vulnerable youth – threaten to last beyond the current generation and erase decades of progress. Lastly, youth who receive additional services from their schools, such as meals and psychological support, risk being further marginalized and deprived by school closures or remote learning.

As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens economic and social stress coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, gender-based violence is increasing exponentially. Rates of violence against women especially young women and minorities spiked globally – cities and countries are registering increases of reporting, from 20% in some contexts to a doubling of reports in others. For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes.

When it comes to employment, even prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, youth were already three times more likely to be unemployed compared to adults and represented 77 percent of those informally employed. Prior to the pandemic, more than one in five (22 per cent) young people were neither in employment, education or training (NEET). Two out of every three (67 percent) of these youth NEETs are young women, who thus outnumber young men two to one. A high NEET rate for young women suggests their engagement in household chores, and/or the presence of strong institutional barriers limiting their participation in labour markets. Vulnerable youth, such as those in the informal economy (including the gig economy), unemployed youth, youth without stable housing, are often left out of social protection systems, which are mostly family-based or employment-based.

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO (2020) Education Response <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition>

Young persons with disabilities, young people living with HIV, young people in need of sexual and reproductive health information and care, young members of LGBT communities, and youth experiencing mental health challenges are among those already facing difficulties in accessing health services. Young people who may not have stable housing cannot safely engage in home-based social distancing. Young women and girls are the most impacted by the shortages in SRHR care and services as they lack access to fundamental SRHR services such as emergency contraception, safe abortion, HIV/AIDs and maternal and child morbidity and mortality, particularly as young mothers are more likely to die of childbirth complications. Further, due to pandemic-related disruptions in prevention programmes, 2 million more young women and girls could undergo FGM over the next decade<sup>3</sup>.

Young people make up more than 30 percent of the world's migrants and refugees who also stand to suffer disproportionately both from the pandemic and its aftermath – whether due to limited movement, fewer employment opportunities, increased xenophobia etc. The pandemic may further fuel stigma and discrimination against certain groups of young people, which in turn would further exclude them from accessing the healthcare they need. Protecting and promoting fundamental rights such as freedom of association and expression are critical for young people to continue their human right and peace building work, even during COVID-19, and unfortunately during the COVID-19, human rights violations have particularly targeted young people who have had limited say in decision-making

These are only a few examples of different pandemic impacts on vulnerable and marginalized groups of youth; these should inform policy and programmatic response to this crisis. However, it is the intersectionality of these vulnerabilities that often goes unseen, undocumented, and unanswered.

### **Approach and objectives for this plenary session:**

The UN approach to leaving no one Behind is set out in the *Shared Framework on Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Health of Sustainable Development*, endorsed by the Chief Executives Board in November 2016. This includes a shared framework for action to ensure the UN System puts the imperative to combat inequalities and discrimination at the forefront of United Nations efforts to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, are we adopting a “one size fits all” approach to “leaving no youth behind”? Are we truly understanding the plethora of factors contributing the realities of young people in vulnerable and marginalized situations? The intersectionality between youth and discrimination and inequality is needed to recognize, understand and address the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized youth.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital>

Such an approach is not only anchored in human rights, but it also puts all people, including vulnerable youth, at the centre of the recovery with a view to produce better outcomes in terms of pandemic response. Furthermore, as we need to recover from this pandemic while also strengthening our collective resilience, ensuring that human rights of vulnerable youth are realized is key to equitable and sustainable development.

And more importantly, the agency of *all* young people, including those in vulnerable situations, is critical to making the 2030 Agenda a reality for *all*. Young people are already looking after one another and supporting those in vulnerable situations, in a remarkable demonstration of global solidarity. How can this same solidarity be extended across generations? Can intergenerational dialogue contribute to enhancing shared knowledge regarding the diverse realities of vulnerable youth, and therefore lead to evidence-based co-designed actions?

The objective of this session is to discuss the intersectionality of youth vulnerabilities through few case studies/stories, foster an intergenerational dialogue with UN practitioners working at the country level, and identify concrete actions/commitments that would contribute to ensuring that no youth are left behind in global efforts to rebuild after the pandemic and strengthen our shared resilience.

**Speakers:**

**Youth speakers:**

- Ms. Nujeen Mustafa, Syria
- Ms. Alba Verónica Vicenta Yacabalquiej Salanic, Guatemala
- Ms. Lynda Romdhane, Tunisia
- Mr. Tushar Kanti Baidya, Bangladesh
- Ms. Angelica Ojinnaka, Australia/Nigeria

**Discussants:**

- Mr. Clement Voule, Special Rapporteur on Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association
- Ms. Fiona McCluney, UN Resident Coordinator in Albania

**Setting the stage and closing remarks:**

- Elliot Harris, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist, UN

**Moderator:**

- Mr. Derrick León Washington, OHCHR Senior/Regional Minority Fellow

## **Organizers:**

This session is organized by the following UN partners and youth partners:

UN partners (in alphabetical order):

- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights)
- Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY)
- United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) - Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- United Nations Women

Youth partners (in alphabetical order):

- International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO)
- Major Group on Children and Youth (MGCY)