



**ECOSOC  
YOUTH  
FORUM**

**#YOUTH2030**

## **Economic and Social Council Youth Forum 10th Anniversary**

### **CONCEPT NOTE**

#### **Session on Europe, North America and Other States**

<b>IDENTIFICATION</b>	
<b>Session title as per programme</b>	Session on Europe, North America and Other States.
<b>Session co-lead UN</b>	Elise Zerrath, UNECE.
<b>Session co-lead Youth</b>	European Youth Forum: Jan Mayrhofer and Assia Oulkadi
<b>Session co-organizers</b>	Christopher Bell, North American Students of Cooperation
<b>Session moderator(s)</b>	Anja Fortuna, European Youth Forum
<b>Session note-taker(s)</b>	Christopher Bell, North American Students of Cooperation European Youth Forum: Jan Mayrhofer and Assia Oulkadi
<b>BACKGROUND &amp; KEY ISSUES</b>	
<p>The health crisis has fast become an economic and social one, with many fearing what the pandemic and the upcoming economic downturn means for our rights in the long term. While the virus might not have impacted young people's health as much as it did other groups, the pandemic disrupted our education, it's affecting our jobs and income prospects, it's limiting our rights and it's putting our overall wellbeing at risk.</p> <p>COVID-19 is demonstrating all too well that unequal and unsustainable societies go hand-in-hand with increasing health issues, fragile economies and delicate democracies. As the world starts to recover from the pandemic, the social, economic and environmental impacts of the bigger crisis that we are facing has become clearer. COVID-19 has triggered a more profound reflection on the ways in which our societies are structured, and the values they promote.</p>	

By magnifying inequalities, the health crisis has exposed the damage caused by years of austerity, excessive privatisation, and underfunding of public services; it has shed light on the shortcomings of our often celebrated social models in the UNECE region; and it has exemplified how unequal our society is in accessing basic needs such as healthcare, education, housing, or food. Not only are these essential human needs, they are also fundamental human rights protected under international law, including in treaties such as, *inter alia*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

Environmentally, this crisis has shown the extent to which our current lifestyle pollutes the environment. While climate change as such hasn't stopped and benefits are only temporary, since the lockdown measures have been in place CO2 emissions and air pollution have consistently decreased, and we have witnessed more biodiversity, and a generally healthier planet. In turn, this has resulted in a decrease in health conditions linked to air pollution exposure. At the same time, since individuals with pre-existing conditions seem to be more vulnerable to COVID-19, chronic air pollution has indirectly put an additional strain on healthcare systems. Additionally, temporary environmental gains have come at a cost, lockdowns have resulted in millions of jobs being lost. These tradeoffs once more show the unsustainability of our current systems. More than anything, this crisis has provided a glimpse into what a low-carbon future may look like with a society that respects rather than exploits our natural environment. As major fiscal stimulus and rescue packages are being introduced to manage the recession, governments must avoid repeating past mistakes, and prioritise long-term human wellbeing by investing in ecological stability.

From an economic standpoint, early projections show that the recession that we are about to face will be comparable in scale to the 2008 financial and economic crisis, if not larger. The COVID-19 pandemic is exposing the failures of our current economic systems. Already before the outbreak, the world had been facing multiple crises – the climate crisis, rising inequality, and increasing public mistrust in political leaders and democratic processes. As young people, we, and the most marginalised among us in particular, are often at the frontline of the impacts of unsustainable models.

Our higher vulnerability today - from the gaps in employment and social policies, to the threats of climate change - means that we have a greater stake in the future. Responses to the pandemic risk greatly exacerbating these crises if we do not challenge their root cause: an unsustainable economic system putting growth and profit over people and the planet. It is vital that our responses do not seek simply to go back to the status quo and “relaunch” GDP growth, reducing market regulations for the sake of “flexibility” and imposing austerity measures to curtail public debt. Instead of rebuilding a broken system, we must consider the policies required to build back better so that our economy delivers on Agenda 2030's ambitious vision of balanced social and ecological wellbeing.

## SESSION OBJECTIVES

The objective of the session is for representatives of youth organisations, youth delegates, representatives of Member States, the UN system and other institutions to discuss the systemic challenges that are the root of our region's crises of inequality and sustainability. We will facilitate a dialogue between youth and policy-makers to brainstorm on ideas and knowledge on shifting to economic and political systems as part of the recovery that guarantee the rights and promote the well-being of youth in line with the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while ensuring the participation of young people in policy-making and implementation.

The session will focus on the theme of the 2021 HLPF on "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Rather than merely having young people talking among themselves, we will facilitate an online exchange between young people and policy-makers in the region. For young people, the outcome will be to raise their concerns and ask questions. For policy-makers, it is a chance to listen to the every-day reality of young people in the region and hear their ideas for overcoming current challenges and implementing the 2030 Agenda. In addition to an outcome summary of the session, the discussions will provide food for thought for participants to take forward into other sessions and serve as a starting point for a continued policy dialogue between youth organisations and members states.

### APPROACH USED TO GENERATE CONCRETE CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The session will be interactive, allowing youth participants and policymakers to exchange views and discuss the main regional challenges, priorities, and engage on possible solutions, lessons learned and opportunities from a systems thinking perspective.

Given the number of expected participants, a facilitation method in the main online space will be used to allow a limited number of participants to interact. The chat function of the session will also be used to collect inputs and the outcomes of the session.

A European youth representative will moderate the session and participants (young people and institutional representatives) will dialogue to discuss challenges, ideas and recommendations.

**Participants are encouraged to prepare to discuss the systemic challenges facing young people in their country or in the region, based on data and quantitative evidence and**

**perceptions of young people or policy positions within their organisations or institutions.**

Participants should also be prepared to share promising practices as regards policies, implementation of the 2030 Agenda, human rights (economic, cultural, and social rights in particular), mental health, youth participation, climate and environment and employment or contributions of young people and youth organisations in their country or in the region.

**OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW**

Indicative structure and flow:

- Before the workshop: an online platform will be used allowing participants to get to know each other ahead of the regional session.
- (10m) The moderator set the scene and introduce to flow of session  
Moderator introduces the background, objectives and flow of the session. Participants are asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of statements related to the themes (Mental health, Youth participation, Climate and environment, Employment, Economy, finance in post-covid, and human rights in the COVID-19 recovery) and are offered the opportunity to discuss, with a focus on challenges to progress and positive examples.
- (60m) Two speakers (one youth, one member state representative) from each thematic will dialogue. The youth speaker will focus on concerns and questions as well as solutions for each of the thematics. The member state representative will respond to the concerns and solutions raised. In addition, questions from the chat will be collected to feed into the dialogue.
- (10m) Each of the group gets 2 min to summarise the key outcomes (1m for the young people and 1m for the policymaker)
- 5m: closing

This structure and flow may be subject to modification, including based on the number of session participants, to ensure interactivity, participation and opportunity for exchange.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

We will focus discussion questions, but instead, both policy-makers and youth participants are in the driver's seat to generate discussion questions in the exchanges. Examples of discussion questions per thematic to kick-off the discussions include:

Mental health:

- To what extent is the current mental health crisis related to the pandemic and to the system of employment and social welfare?

- How can we ensure that young people in the region have access to mental health services?

Youth participation:

- How can ensure structured and meaningful youth participation in recovery efforts at national level?
- How can the right to participate in the 2030 Agenda for young people be strengthened at the local level? What's the role of politicians in including young people in decision-making?

Climate and environment:

- How can we ensure that the recovery is not building back our old unsustainable model, but instead recovery funds contribute to a just transition?
- How can we put young people at the centre of environmental decision-making given their stake in the future?

Employment, Economy, finance in the post-COVID era:

- How can we tackle the current record youth unemployment in the region?
- Likely facing secular stagnation of the recession, how can ensure that austerity policies do not return and impact governments' ability to make important investments in social and environmental policies?

Human rights in the COVID-19 recovery:

- How can pandemic recovery funds and programs be best leveraged to ensure the full realization of human rights for young people, including economic, social, and cultural rights? Where is action most urgently needed?
- Considering the interconnected and indivisible natures of both human rights, and of Agenda 2030, what action(s) might generate the most positive change?

**PREPARATORY EVENTS**

The event will build on the UNECE Regional Forum's session Session 2-2: The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on youth.

**SUGGESTED READING**

- 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum Europe, North America, & Others Regional Session: Questions sourced from young people themselves  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xgd432M0wCpHliJ9FX62NyHiTYCHXIBAFMoH4WPiW\\_U/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xgd432M0wCpHliJ9FX62NyHiTYCHXIBAFMoH4WPiW_U/edit?usp=sharing)
- European Youth Forum: Blueprint for recovery  
<https://www.youthforum.org/european-youth-blueprint-recovery>
- European Youth Forum: The growth and jobs treadmill: a new policy-agenda for post-coronavirus Europe <https://www.youthforum.org/escaping-growth-and-jobs-treadmill>

- Youth Progress Index, 2017: <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/page-pdfs/Youth%20Progress%20Index%20FULL%20REPORT.pdf>
- Sustainable development and environment: <https://www.unece.org/stats/sde.html>
- Voluntary National Reviews (2016-2021) by UNECE member States: **<https://www.unece.org/sustainable-development/sdgs-in-the-region.html>**
- ILO, Decent Jobs for Youth, AISEC, European Youth Forum, OHCHR, MGCY, and EUTF for Africa: Youth & Covid-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Wellbeing <https://www.youthforum.org/youth-covid-19-impacts-jobs-education-rights-and-mental-wellbeing>

#### ADDITIONAL DETAILS

We will also offer an online space for participants to introduce themselves with spaces for thematic interests and geographical connections.