



**The President
of the
Economic and Social Council**

4 February 2021

Excellency,

It is my honour to invite your country to participate in the Youth Forum of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), scheduled to take place in a virtual format on 7 and 8 April 2021. At this critical juncture when the COVID-19 pandemic is inflicting a heavy toll around the world, the role and actions of youth are more critical than ever in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Youth Forum will address the theme of ECOSOC and the 2021 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) focusing primarily on COVID-19 recovery efforts and the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development. It will provide a platform for young leaders to engage in a dialogue among themselves and with Member States and share ideas for advancing the youth development agenda at national, regional and global levels with a view to responding to COVID-19 and promoting concrete actions and commitments to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event testifies of the international community's commitment to prioritize the contribution and priorities of young people to the realization of the 2030 Agenda.

To ensure that countries across the world are well represented at this Forum, I invite you to nominate and support the participation of your country's youth delegate(s) and/or youth representatives to the Forum. They will be joined by a wide range of participants from the youth community, including from the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth, representatives of regional youth organizations, National Youth Councils as well as youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks, including those in consultative status with ECOSOC. I would also welcome Ministerial participation of your government to share your national perspectives on the role of youth in implementing the sustainable development goals in your country in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please find attached a concept note, which provides information about the objectives and format of the Youth Forum. Should you have any questions, please contact Ms. Patricia Chaves (chavesp@un.org); Mr. Paul Simon (simonp@un.org); and Ms. Marija Vasileva-Blazev (marija.vasileva-blazev@un.org).

I look forward to the active participation of your country at this important event which will also celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Council's active engagement with young people as we collectively strengthen their voices in a more inclusive multilateralism.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Munir Akram

All Permanent Representatives of Member States
to the United Nations



Draft Concept Note

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the ECOSOC Youth Forum

7-8 April 2021

Background

The annual Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will celebrate its 10th Anniversary on 7-8 April 2021. The Forum is being organized at a time when the world is witnessing an unprecedented global emergency with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Youth Forum will address the theme¹ of ECOSOC and the 2021 UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) focusing primarily on COVID-19 and its impact on the implementation of the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development and the kind of recovery that can put us back on track to build a better world as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Forum will also address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will be reviewed at the 2021 HLPF, namely SDGs 1 (No poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production), 13 (Climate Action), 16 (Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies) and 17 (Partnership).

Over the past ten years, the ECOSOC Youth Forum has evolved into a key platform where young people can contribute to policy discussions at the United Nations through their ideas, priorities, solutions and innovations. The Forum has given a unique opportunity for youth to jointly address common challenges as well as advance their contributions to achieve the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

The 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum will be convened by the President of ECOSOC and is co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), in collaboration with the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), and co-convened by the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO), with technical input from youth organizations relevant to the theme of the forum.²

Context and substantive focus

The 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum takes place at a critical historical juncture where the world is struggling to respond to the multidimensional challenges of COVID-19. The pandemic has upended the lives of young people from every region obliging them to adapt to new challenges to health, decent work and employment, food and nutrition security as well as social isolation and exclusion, among others. Young people have been forced to adjust to a "new normal" where social distances prevail, notably with respect to diverse forms of distance learning to ensure the continuation of education and skills acquisition.

¹ The theme of ECOSOC and the 2021 High-level Political Forum will be: "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"

² Considering the focus on the theme of COVID-19 and recovery, these could include youth platforms and constituencies working on public health, disaster response and recovery, and COVID -19 recovery. They will be consulted internally by MGCY and ICMYO.

Despite being disproportionately impacted, young people around the world are coming together to respond to this crisis demonstrating resilience, resourcefulness and leadership while tackling injustice and demanding accountability, from calling for urgent climate action and building peace, to tackling inequalities and gender biases. Their active involvement in implementing the SDGs Decade of Action is critical to achieving a peaceful, just and sustainable future.

As they embark on this journey of recovery – and building a “better” world - from an unprecedented pandemic, young people will be invited to frame their discussions and share their views, experiences and ideas on the recovery from COVID-19 including a special focus on the SDGs under review at the HLPF in 2021. In doing so, a number of cross-cutting issues will frame the dialogues, including financing the COVID-19 response and recovery, investment in youth priorities in a post Covid-19 world, leveraging science, technology and innovation to promote global public goods such as vaccines and treatments, and promoting gender equality will be mainstreamed throughout the dialogues.

A People-Centric Response

Due to the impact of COVID-19, young people have been faced with the impact of supply chain challenges and rising food prices. The slowdown in economic activity has weighed heavily on household incomes. In the face of such challenges, youth have stepped up and are contributing to their communities by engaging in agriculture and rural development in support of SDG 2. This can be turned into a double win: it is vital for the sustainability of the food systems, and it can help in addressing the issues of youth unemployment, poverty and migration.

At the same time, young people working in the health sector (SDG 3) are helping their communities by speaking out for – and in some cases, providing – effective, equitable care and emergency health response. They also use their expertise and time to assist people with mental health issues, improve access to lifesaving testing, conduct scientific research and help develop adequate technology. It is important to put in place all primary and mental health support services for children and young people that are psychologically affected by the impact of COVID-19 on their socioeconomic status.

Accelerating Action for the Planet

The COVID-19 pandemic offers countries an opportunity to prepare recovery plans that will reverse current trends and change people’s unsustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12) towards a more sustainable future. In that context, young people can play an important role towards finding innovative solutions to prevailing economic, social, environmental and climate change challenges.

They can contribute to ensuring that technological advancements, policy, regulatory frameworks, and behavioral changes help to improve consumption and production patterns that can enhance efficiency, productivity, employment and growth and reduce their carbon footprint. In particular, youth-led social enterprises, youth activists, scientists, practitioners -through their good practices -can play an important role in societies and in an increasingly wide range of industries and services.

Meanwhile, young people feel that the determination to fight COVID-19 should also be used in addressing climate change (SDG 13) and to protect our planet. They believe that the response to COVID-19 should include actions against climate change. In some cases, they have shown solidarity with the rest of the society to help stop the spread of the pandemic by taking their climate activism online³.

Young engineers and activists can advance a greener and more sustainable infrastructure, which can have cross-cutting effects in all the SDGs. In that context, they could advance creative ideas to accelerate investments for a sustainable infrastructure facility and its impact in transforming economies for jobs creation and climate action.

Prospering and Thriving:

COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities. An estimated 71 million people are expected to be pushed back into extreme poverty (SDG 1) in 2020, the first rise in global poverty since 1998.⁴ Young people are navigating lost incomes, limited social protection and rising prices for essential goods and services (SDG 8) as the result of COVID-19. In addition to the 68 million unemployed young people before the pandemic⁵,

³ [Example, MGCY Virtual Youth Mobilisation for WED 2020](#)

⁴ [UNDESA, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, Page 3](#)

⁵ [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work: Fourth edition, Page 2](#)

17 per cent of young workers (18-24 years old) stopped working during COVID-19.⁶ The number of young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) is even greater – totaling 267 million before the pandemic.⁷ As a result, youth worldwide were uniquely vulnerable to the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19.

In 2019, 12.8 per cent of workers between the ages of 15 and 24 lived in poverty, compared with 6.3 per cent of workers over the age of 24, with the difference between youth and adult working poverty rates decreasing only marginally since 2000.⁸ In addition, the International Labour Organization is confirming that the “Transition from school to work is increasingly difficult, with the latest data putting the global youth unemployment rate at 13.6 per cent in 2020”.⁹

In the informal economy, over 1.6 billion informal workers, many of them young people, are suffering the consequences of lockdown measures implemented around the world in response to COVID-19¹⁰ and the economic fallout caused by the pandemic. Social protection measures, which are normally designed to help people in moments of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, rarely sufficiently address the specific needs of young people. As the UN Secretary-General advocated, is it time for a new social contract between Governments and citizens, especially young people? What should that look like?

Inclusive Peace: The Way Forward

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that development risks are evolving and becoming more complex. The fallout of this pandemic, and its exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities (SDG 10) and discrimination, have highlighted the importance of just and strong institutions in supporting the rights of all, including youth.

To address these deficiencies, it will be important to enable opportunities for youth participation in decision-making processes, and reducing inequalities of access to services, decent jobs, quality education and justice. Reducing inequality calls for an end to exploitation, strong mechanisms for the provision of justice and anti-discrimination legislation as well as combatting corruption. Indeed, targets 10.2 and 10.3 directly relate to SDG 16’s commitment to non-discriminatory laws and policies. Additionally, progress towards SDG 10, especially the reduction of horizontal inequalities, can help advance peace and reduce the risk of conflict and violence.¹¹ In that context, a sustainable recovery also requires rethinking governance, bridging divides between conflicting parties, and strengthening the social contract between governments and the people for a future of peace and equity.

Young people are taking action for peaceful, just and inclusive societies during the COVID-19 crisis. In doing so, they have been contributing to progress towards SDG 16 by launching a youth call for transparency and accountability in COVID-19 response; raising awareness of preventive measures; bringing the voices of the most marginalized to policy deliberations¹²; advocating for peace and social cohesion¹³; participating in youth-led efforts, providing psychosocial training for peers¹⁴; and fighting hate speech¹⁵ and misinformation.¹⁶ Young people are specifically contributing to an inclusive society by leaving no one behind in COVID-19 response when young volunteers, and youth healthcare workers fill gaps in the health system in communities¹⁷, when youth organizations bring the needs of the most

⁶ [ILO, Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being](#)

⁷ [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work: Fourth edition](#), Page 2

⁸ [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020](#), Page 24

⁹ ILO, “[Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work](#)”, Page 5

¹⁰ ILO, “[COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy – Immediate responses and policy challenges](#)”

¹¹ [HLPF EGM on SDG 10 – DESA and World Bank – April 2019](#)

¹² [UNDP, “Young people go the extra-mile to advance SDG16 during the COVID-19 crisis”](#), 18 June 2020

¹³ [United Nations Secretary-General's remarks to virtual Security Council meeting on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Youth, Peace and Security](#), 27 April 2020

¹⁴ [Conducive Space for Peace and Peace Direct: COVID-19 and the impact upon local peacebuilding](#), Page 7

¹⁵ [UNFPA, “COVID-19: Working with and for young people”](#), page 10

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26

¹⁷ Examples from [Peru](#), [Angola](#), and [Zambia](#)

vulnerable to the attention of decision-makers¹⁸ and when youth networks run information campaigns about COVID-19 prevention.¹⁹

Harnessing Partnerships, Resources and Science: Working Together To Get Things Done

The work to build back better from the lingering effects of a raging pandemic requires new thinking. Partnerships (SDG 17) that seek to build inclusive, fair and resilient communities, societies and economies need to effectively engage young people along the chain of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from future pandemics or similar challenges. The multidimensional nature of the risks can only be addressed by a whole-of-society, intergenerational approach that engages young people as partners and strengthens their leadership²⁰. This paradigm needs to also inform the means of implementation, including financing for development, development cooperation and science, technology and innovation.

Modern technologies, including digital technologies and frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence, are critical inputs to transforming our economies and societies and play an important role in the fight against COVID-19, especially in public health, diagnosis, and therapeutics. Digital technology has also allowed many to learn and work at home but too many poor and vulnerable groups, including youth, who do not have access, or the digital skills have been negatively impacted. Only 53.6 per cent of the world's population now use the Internet, leaving an estimated 3.6 billion without access. To be effective, partnerships should reflect new models such as creative economies, more equal access to technology, equitable distribution of wealth, respect for planetary boundaries and collective ownership of global public goods, increased solidarity, and a more dynamic multilateralism.

Objectives

The 2021 ECOSOC Youth Forum will:

1. Provide a platform for young people, in the context of COVID-19, to engage in a dialogue with Member States and other actors on concrete actions to rebuild and recover better at the national, regional and global levels.
2. Identify specific opportunities for young people to contribute to the intergovernmental review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the HLPF, partnering with Governments, the UN system and civil society to ensure implementation.
3. Share experiences and identify solutions to support youth in surmounting the devastating impact of COVID-19 in their economic, social, health and education's lives as well as in bolstering their resilience to future shocks.
4. Discuss and report on progress for the implementation of the UN Youth Strategy, *Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People*, and leverage the platform in support of advocating and advancing the UN Youth Strategy, as well as increasing coherence between Youth Forum and UN Youth Strategy. Other issues related to young people could be reported, including sharing information on plans for measuring and monitoring the impact of the strategy at the national, regional and global levels and considering the role that young people and youth organizations can play in the implementation of the strategy.
5. Commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the ECOSOC Youth Forum by celebrating its accomplishments, impact and vision for the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

Format

Due to the uncertainties still anticipated in April 2021 for in-person gatherings at the United Nations Headquarters due to COVID-19, the ECOSOC Youth Forum will be held in a virtual format. This will offer the possibility for a larger audience to be connected virtually from around the world and participate in its discussion sessions.

The Forum will include opening and closing plenary sessions with representatives from youth organizations, high-level and keynote speakers. A Ministerial Roundtable will be held to feature national

¹⁸ [16 x 16 blog](#)

¹⁹ [OECD, "Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience"](#)

²⁰ [Example - UNICEF, MG CY, UNESCAP - Guardians of the Planet, Asia Pacific Children and Youth voices on disaster risk and climate change](#)

progress, gaps and next steps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for youth in the context of the UN system-wide Youth Strategy: Youth 2030 and the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development launched in September 2019.

The programme would also include interactive thematic and regional breakout sessions. During the interactive sessions, the moderators would have a primary role to maintain discussions focused, actively engaging the audience, using social media if possible, with pertinent questions related to the various themes to be addressed.

Best practices and lessons learned could be shared that may benefit Member States and other youth and stakeholders. Representatives of youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks, civil society and other social and economic partners could also provide views on youth development. Participants would also be encouraged to make individual and group commitments for action to build resilient and inclusive societies and to achieve the SDGs Decade of Action.

Participation

Participants in the ECOSOC Youth Forum will be Member States, including Ministers and other high-level representatives, young people and official youth delegates, as well as representatives of regional and multilateral organizations.

The Youth Forum will bring together young people from a wide and diverse backgrounds and countries from around the world. They will be representing formal and informal youth entities, organizations, and groups from all regions. A particular emphasis will be given to representatives of marginalized and vulnerable youth communities.

The Forum will also reflect the diversity of youth organizations working at the grassroots, national, regional and international levels.

Regional Preparations

Preparatory events at the regional level prior to the ECOSOC Youth Forum, together with regional youth entities and platforms, are encouraged to gather as wide a participation of youth-led and youth-focused organizations and government representatives as possible. The outcomes of these regional consultations should feed into the Youth Forum and subsequently to the other processes.

Communication strategy

The ECOSOC Youth Forum will be accessible through virtual platforms, including the UN Web TV, and also on social media through Facebook and Twitter (#Youth2030). The United Nations Regional Commissions and the UN System will be mobilized prior and during the event to advertise it throughout their SDGs networks and social media platforms. The UN Information Centres (UNICs) under the Resident Coordinators Office (RCOs) and the UN Department of Global Communication (DGC) will also be invited to promote the Youth Forum at the local, national and regional level.

A virtual SDG Media Zone bringing together youth representatives, SDG Advocates and the young leaders for the SDGs could also be organized. It could be a global online space where participants at the Forum will engage in complementary conversations about innovative and successful initiatives and interventions aimed at strengthening the involvement of young people in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. It could also provide an opportunity for UN officials and government representatives to interact more directly with a diverse young audience. Both governments and youth could announce new initiatives and SDG acceleration actions to advance the 2030 Agenda and an SDG-sensitive response to COVID-19. The format will be informal conversations, which will be broadcast in virtual platform, UN Web-TV and diverse social media platforms.

Outcomes

The outcome of the Youth Forum will be a Presidential Statement, capturing key outcomes of the discussions and findings of the Forum, which will be made available to the ECOSOC High Level Segment, the High-level Political Forum in July and relevant meetings of the General Assembly in September 2021.

An informal summary of the proceedings will also be prepared including specific recommendations which will also be shared with decision-makers.

In addition, the major youth networks (MGCY and ICMYO) will also bring together youth entities/organizations to prepare the “*Voices of Youth*” at the ECOSOC Youth Forum. This document would be a complement to and inform the formal MGCY Sectoral Position Paper, to be prepared for the HLPF in July²¹. It would be a direct call to action from young people on current challenges they are facing and their expectations vis-à-vis the international community.

²¹ For more information, see 2020 version of [MGCY Youth Sectoral Paper for HLPF and Voices of Youth Paper](#)