



#YOUTH2030

# 7<sup>th</sup> Economic and Social Council Youth Forum CONCEPT NOTE

## Regional Breakout Session “Europe, North America and other States”

31 January 2018  
10:00 am – 11:30 am  
Room 9

United Nations Headquarters, New York

### 1. Background and context

The 2030 Agenda provides a unique opportunity to consider social, economic and environmental policies in an integrated and interlinked manner through comprehensive and coherent sustainable development strategies. In many parts of Europe, North America and other States, however, governments and institutions have yet to deliver on that opportunity.

Although more than 20 European States have already undergone Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) on their progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and another 17 States from Europe, North America and others have volunteered for review in 2018, many of these and other countries in the region have not yet sufficiently considered the impact that the 2030 Agenda should have on their policies, governance and ways of working across the government as a whole. **Comprehensive sustainable development strategies** based on the 2030 Agenda are still lacking in many national contexts, as well as at European Union level.

Despite positive signs from some countries in relation to the engagement of youth in the 2017 VNRs, the **participation of youth** in the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies and policies related to sustainable development is inconsistent and insufficient across the region.

The **full access of young people to their fundamental rights and freedoms**, including the opportunity to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life and enjoy an



adequate standard of living and well-being, is necessary for youth to reach the full potential of their role in building sustainable and resilient communities. Yet, in a difficult economic situation and a context of decreasing living standards, rising inequalities, greater risk of poverty and social exclusion for young people, anxiety regarding increasing movements of people and the failures to guarantee the rights of migrants and refugees, citizens lack control over their common future.

Young people are systematically underrepresented in the current political arena, often being excluded from decisions that affect them and future generations, as well as excluded from society and facing barriers in accessing their rights. Too many young people feel distant from governments, institutions and policies, where bottom-up and participatory vision is lacking. Due to the **lack of youth political participation** and access to policy-making, policies targeting young people can tend towards short-term, tokenistic initiatives rather than long-term solutions, developed with young people's input and with the overall objective of sustainable development and shared prosperity.

Intolerance, misinformation, nationalistic and regressive tendencies, and xenophobic, racist and other discriminative behaviour are increasing in this economic, political and social system that has failed too many people and caused irreversible harm to the environment and natural resources. In both Europe and North America, however, there is evidence that young people remain open to cross-border cooperation, inclusion, solidarity and local, national and global solutions to global challenges. During particularly challenging times, the imperative to listen to young people and actively engage them in decision-making is even greater to ensure the resilience of local communities, the cohesion of societies, the inclusiveness of politics and a sustainable path for the future.

**Investment in young people** is key. With strong investment in youth and access to their rights, young people can contribute enormously to society, local communities and sustainable development. European youth organisations are contributing to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda in many different ways. However, without investment in youth and youth organisations and in the spaces, support and possibility for them to participate in decision-making around sustainable development, the work that youth organisations and young people are doing can only take us so far.

## 2. Objectives

The Regional Breakout Session for Europe, North America and other States will provide an opportunity for representatives of youth organisations, youth delegates, representatives of Member States, the UN system and other institutions to discuss the



challenges the regions' youth is facing, ideas and solutions to those challenges, and means for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The session will garner youth input from the region to inform the work of the 2018 ECOSOC Youth Forum and the High-Level Political Forum. The session will focus on the following issues:

- Investment in young people and youth organisations.
- Young people's risk of poverty and social exclusion, versus their role in building sustainable and resilient communities.
- The challenge of young people's access to rights.
- Young people's participation in democratic life, society and local communities, including in politics, policy-making and budgeting.
- Contributions of youth and youth organisations to sustainable development.
- Comprehensive sustainable development strategies and shift in macroeconomic policies towards inclusive and sustainable development.
- Youth engagement in the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17.

### **3. Format**

The session will be interactive, allowing participants to exchange views and openly discuss the main regional concerns, priorities and opportunities for meaningful youth participation in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities.

A European youth representative will moderate the session and participants may break into smaller groups to discuss ideas and recommendations.

### **4. Guiding questions**

- What are the specific challenges facing young people from Europe, North America and other States?
- How can regional and global frameworks help in addressing these challenges? What is required in order for these frameworks to provide a means of addressing the challenges?
- What measures should be taken to address youth participation in politics, democratic life, society and local communities in the context of the 2030 Agenda? How can these support and harness the contributions that young people can make to sustainable and resilient communities and sustainable development?



- In difficult political circumstances, how can youth organisations and young people ensure that their voices, experiences, expertise and ideas are heard to build sustainable and resilient communities and ensure a sustainable path for the future? How can regional and global institutions support in this regard?
- How can the UN system and regional organisations support meaningful youth engagement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Europe, North America and other States?

## 5. Suggested reading materials

### Frameworks and institutional documents

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

EU Youth Strategy

[http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth\\_strategy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth_strategy/index_en.htm)

Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people's access to rights

[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016806a93e2](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016806a93e2)

UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)

<https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf>

### Reports

*Shadow Report on Youth Policy: A youth perspective*, European Youth Forum

<http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2015/10/Shadow-Report-on-Youth-Policy.pdf>

*Young People and Democratic Life in Europe: What next after the 2014 European elections?*, European Youth Forum

[http://www.youthup.eu/app/uploads/2015/11/YFJ\\_YoungPeopleAndDemocraticLifeInEurope\\_B1\\_web-9e4bd8be22.pdf](http://www.youthup.eu/app/uploads/2015/11/YFJ_YoungPeopleAndDemocraticLifeInEurope_B1_web-9e4bd8be22.pdf)