

8th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

Youth: Empowered, Included and Equal

8-9 April 2019, United Nations Headquarters, New York

PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

The 8th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum was convened during 8-9 April 2019 in New York. The Forum welcomed over 34 ministers, other senior officials from Member States and over 1000 youth participants. As the United Nations gets ready for the Economic and Social Council's High-level Political Forum in July, the General Assembly's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit and the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in September, the ECOSOC Youth Forum engaged young women and men from around the world to share their concerns, their assessment of progress and the way forward.

Over the two days, the Forum focused on the Sustainable Development Goals to be reviewed during the July High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). These include SDG4 on quality education, SDG8 on inclusive growth and decent work, SDG10 on inequalities, SDG13 on climate action, SDG16 on peaceful societies and robust institutions and SDG17 on means of implementation. These SDGs are particularly critical for youth to be empowered, included and equal. Young people also had an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the President of the General Assembly on youth, peace and security. The Forum also examined the unique challenges facing different regions of the world.

Participants identified the following issues and priorities during our discussions:

- The 2030 Agenda is the agenda of the young generation. The SDGs echo the richness and complexities of the lives of young people. Partnership with this young generation—that is the largest and most educated one—is therefore crucial and indispensable to deliver on the SDGs.
- Many Governments established national plans and mechanisms, including youth councils, to ensure the engagement of youth in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including in monitoring and ensuring accountability.
- Progress on the SDGs remain slow, including on climate action. Young people are demanding that leaders listen to their concerns and deliver on the promises envisioned in the 2030 Agenda.
- We must increase the representation of young people in decision-making bodies at all levels. Institutionalizing their participation through national Youth Advisory Councils and other mechanisms could be explored. Young people should be involved in shaping policies, from design to implementation, monitoring and review. They need to be involved in national and sub-national development planning and budgetary processes.
- Young people also called on Member States to make decision-making more responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative by opening new spaces for participatory democracy, increasing youth participation in politics, and lowering the voting age to 16.
- Individual actions are also important and can lead to real impact on the ground, including through collective mobilization - from adopting sustainable lifestyles to civic and political engagement.
- We heard about growing inequality, which is already at unacceptably high levels. All young voices need to be heard and included irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. This is critical for breaking down barriers and reducing inequalities to achieve the SDGs.

- Efforts to include young people in election processes were welcomed. Youth can mobilize and register voters thus fostering electoral participation and preventing violence.
- Young people strongly prioritized access to education as millions remain stripped of this fundamental right. Inclusive and quality education is a driver of sustainable development, including climate change adaptation and building peaceful resilient societies. We must ensure young people can acquire skills for work and life through formal, informal and non-formal education. Education systems need to provide hard and soft skills, practical and theoretical knowledge to empower young people to be successful and adapt to rapidly changing environment. They should provide quality and accessible training opportunities, such as internships and volunteering. Quality education should be contextualized and localized.
- Education is also crucial to achieve concrete results in climate action and allow the fundamental changes required to achieve carbon neutrality. Educational avenues including colleges and schools should develop and prioritize courses on climate change and sustainability. Schools must teach children and young people to become agents of change in their communities and in the world.
- Governments should include migrants, refugees, stateless, displaced people in the education systems, and in the national development plans to facilitate recognition of their qualifications and skills.
- In addition, all learners should acquire skills, values and attitudes for peaceful coexistence. Mainstreaming education for human rights and global citizenship would be key to addressing discrimination, xenophobia, and violence.
- Progress on economic growth and decent work is far behind. It is not acceptable that many young people around the world remain unemployed or enter the most precarious and insecure parts of the labor market. Technological advancements are expected to impact the future of work. But this impact will depend on our policy choices today.
- We must invest in capacity-building and training to prepare young people for the labor market of today and tomorrow. Changes are also needed to safeguard worker's rights and improve social protection as more young people engage in the platform economy. Furthermore, young people should not only be job-seekers, but also job-creators. To this end, ministries responsible for the youth portfolio could support young people in launching entrepreneurial initiatives by choice, rather than by necessity.
- We must put people and planet at the centre of our policy-making. We must integrate what is invisible, from work that is performed in the informal economy, to volunteering, home care and parenting, which are particularly related to the contribution of women to the economy.
- We need to create decent jobs through multi-stakeholder partnerships, including public-private partnerships, to achieve empowerment and promote inclusivity and engagement.
- More and better jobs for youth will also emerge from policies that guarantee access to quality education, skills, markets, networks, information and technology and engage young people from all backgrounds and settings, including young people in the rural economy, young people with disabilities, and young indigenous peoples.
- We must rebuild trust in the institutions of work through universal and equitable engagement of young people. This is essential for a brighter future of work, one with social protection and youth rights.
- Gender inequalities exist both in developing and developed countries. To ensure women and girls are empowered, included and equal, we need to ensure their access to education and jobs, and to ownership and control over land, and other forms of property. We also need to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking, harmful practices, such as early and forced marriage, as well as discriminatory laws, policies and practices.
- Intergenerational justice is fundamental for climate action. Young people are especially impacted by climate change, with their future at existential risk. At the same time, young people are also part of the solution and must be involved meaningfully on all levels.

- Governments must increase their ambitions, develop more enhanced nationally determined contributions (NDCs), prioritize mitigation and adaptation, and lead institutional changes. Young people call on Governments to develop and implement transformative climate ‘master plans’.
- The economy needs to be transformed, including through gradually phasing out subsidies for polluting industries, such as fossil fuel industries, while supporting and promoting sustainable alternatives. This should be seen as an opportunity to create jobs, including for young people and women, and boost innovation and economies. Capacity-building and access to green technology is essential in that context, especially for developing countries.
- We heard about the need of young people to know their rights in order to act on their rights. This is a call for awareness-raising and education to eliminate corruption and promote access to justice and human rights for young people.
- We must promote the participation of young people in formal and informal decision-making and peace processes and empower young people to foster coexistence in and between societies divided by conflict. There is concern that young people are marginalized from mainstream political and civic participation based on a perception that they are agents of violence and lack the capacity and skills to meaningfully participate in political decision making. Many young people are already peace actors working within their communities and regions, promoting peace through dialogue, advocacy and social interventions. Young people are keen to be part of solutions and not problems. Partnerships, funding and support are necessary to support the work of youth in peace processes.
- SDG16 was considered a key enabler for the entire 2030 Agenda with its linkages between peace, justice and strong institutions and other SDGs on education, reduced inequalities, partnerships and sustainable cities and communities. We must invest in young people as critical agents of change.
- For young people, exclusion was considered as a form of violence and an inter-generational injustice. All forms of social, economic, political and civic inclusion must be part of a strategy for peace and development. Quotas for youth participation in politics and decision-making were suggested. Economic inclusion was considered key for empowerment and for combatting poverty and achieving the SDGs.
- We need to include a diversity of young people in the review and follow-up of the SDGs, including in the Voluntary National Reviews. This can entail both ensuring a substantive focus on youth, as well as the engagement of young people in the VNR process. Meaningful inclusion of the most marginalized and young people working at the local level must be prioritized to ensure leaving no one behind. We were reminded that to ensure representation we must change mindsets and transform systems.
- The need to focus on the peace, security and development nexus was underscored to find durable solutions for refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. This could effectively roll back the drivers of mass and forced displacement, as well as the devastating impacts of climate change.
- Sustainable long-term financing is necessary for youth organizations’ work. The youth need to be provided with technological tools, data and mentorship, as well as physical spaces, to develop their ideas and innovations. Equally, youth-serving organizations need to be provided with a platform and tools to support future youth leaders.
- Participants welcomed the Secretary General’s UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030, which aims to increase impact and expand global, regional and country-level action to address the needs, build the agency and advance the rights of young people, and to ensure their engagement in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. They urged its rollout and implementation.

Inspired by young people’s ideas, we call on them to share their inputs for the SDG Summit in September through the virtual platform for messages about the SDG Summit from stakeholders. We also call upon young people to continue to raise their voice, advocate for the SDGs and hold their Governments accountable for the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda.