



ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM

#YOUTH2030

8th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

SUMMARY

Youth: Empowered, Included and Equal

8-9 April 2019

United Nations Headquarters, New York

The 8th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum took place from 8th to 9th April 2019 and was chaired by H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).



“Our presence today reflects our concerted efforts and determination to ensure that you are fully vested in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We have 11 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and we cannot do this without you, the young people.”

H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of the Economic and Social Council

The Forum was co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, in collaboration with the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, as well as with the MGCY¹ and ICMYO². The event welcomed over 34 ministers, other senior officials from Member States and over 1000 youth participants.

Under the theme “Empowered, Included and Equal”, the two-day Forum featured three plenary Interactive Roundtables, the first focusing on “Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People”, the second on “Investing in Youth Development: Financing and other Means of Implementation” and the third on

¹ Major Group for Children and Youth

² International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations

“Looking to the Future: A dialogue on the High-level Political Forum (SDG) Summit”. The first two roundtables featured interventions by Ministers and other High-Level speakers, as well as youth organization representatives, and the third roundtable provided a dedicated space for the interventions from the audience, which highlighted the diverse voices of the youth participants that were present. A key feature of the event was the breakout sessions that discussed key regional priorities for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and thematic sessions on the five Goals that will be under review at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (under the auspices of ECOSOC) in July 2019: Quality education (SDG4), decent work and economic growth (SDG8), reduced inequalities (SDG10), climate action (SDG13), and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16). An interactive round-table discussion was also held on youth, peace and security by the President of the General Assembly.

The discussion went beyond the conference room and continued both in the SDG Media Zone and on social media (with the hashtags #YOUTH2030 #SDGLive and #GlobalGoals) and engaged youth from all over the world. This year’s outcomes of the Forum will be particularly important as they contribute to the High-Level Political forum (HLPF), held under the auspices of ECOSOC, and the High-Level Segment of ECOSOC in July 2019, and also feed into the SDG Summit and the Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit as well as the High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development, in September 2019.

The following key messages emerged from the discussion at the Forum:

- Youth should be actively included and represented in Governments, councils and other policy-making entities as equal partners to ensure their voices are heard, their needs are met, and their aspirations are acknowledged. By opening a policy dialogue, youth will be able to contribute to a future that benefits all.
- Governments, civil society and international partners must scale up their investment in young people - ensuring they are educated, empowered and employed.
- Education should be recognized beyond economic returns to enable learners to be responsible agents of sustainable change and driving forces for social progress.
- All learners should acquire skills, values and attitudes for peaceful coexistence and therefore human rights education and global citizenship education should be mainstreamed.
- Governments should develop and implement transformative climate ‘master plans’. Governments must increase their ambitions, develop enhanced national determined contribution, prioritize mitigation and adaptation, and lead radical institutional changes.
- Governments should include migrants, refugees and other marginalized groups in the education systems and facilitate the recognition of their qualifications, skills, and competencies.
- 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.
- To counter inequality, all young voices should be heard and included irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.
- Progress on economic growth and decent work is far behind. We must put people, including youth, at the core of progress and formally integrate what is invisible, from work that is performed in the informal economy, to volunteering, home care and parenting. We must also promote decent jobs for youth in the green economy as well as paid internships.
- Young people should participate in formal and informal decision-making and peace processes, and they should be empowered to foster coexistence in and between societies divided by conflict.

- Promoting better jobs for youth requires policies that guarantee access to quality education, skills, markets, networks, information and technology and engage all young people from all different backgrounds and all settings, including young people in the rural economy, young people with disabilities, and young indigenous peoples.
- Active and meaningful engagement by youth in the governance of work and promotion of human rights will ensure a brighter Future of Work, one with social protection and respect for youth rights and needs.

To highlight the key messages emerging from the discussions during the Forum, the President of ECOSOC issued a [Presidential Statement](#) on 11th of April. The following detailed summary highlights the different sessions of the ECOSOC Youth Forum, including the thematic and regional breakout sessions:

I. OPENING SESSION

Young people need to mobilize themselves and to provide an assessment on where they stand on the implementation of the SDGs, speakers told at the **opening of the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2019**.



“The success of the 2030 Agenda depends on fulfilling young people’s human rights, meeting their development needs while ensuring their meaningful engagement and participation in the implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth

ECOSOC President H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King reiterated that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an “Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people”. In that context, the youth’s engagement in its implementation, follow-up and review is critical.

Turning to the importance of the Forum, General Assembly President Maria Fernanda Espinosa stated that the “Youth Forum has become one of the most important mechanisms for young people to share implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

Focusing on the Secretary-General’s Youth 2030 strategy³, launched in September 2018, the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth Jayathma Wickramanayake said that the contribution of young people is important in the United Nations reform process and underscored the importance of the UN’s efforts to instill a continued appreciation for multilateralism and dialogue, especially among

young people.

Speaking on behalf of the young people, a youth speaker from civil society, Yolanda Joab, Founder and Executive Director of Island Promoting Resilience through Involvement, Development and Education (PRIDE), stressed during her keynote address that young people make the decision to be bigger and tougher each day, teaching, creating, imagining and marching because they believe in better. “We can’t wait for permission to lead tomorrow. We deserve action now”, she said. She emphasized that “decisions in the

³ The “UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030”, launched by UN Secretary-General Antonio António Guterres, aims to facilitate increased impact and expanded global, regional and particularly country-level action to address the needs, build the agency and advance the rights of young people around the world, and to ensure their engagement in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

High-level Political Forum in July and the Climate Summit in September must be bound to the belief in better, increasing space for young people to participate in decisions at all levels”.



“To my fellow youth, keep believing, keep rising, but as you do, don’t forget to uplift others with you so that together we can all be empowered, included and equal”

Ms. Yolanda Joab, Founder and Executive Director of PRIDE

Following the opening session, the first **interactive roundtable on “Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People”**, was an opportunity for Ministers and High-Level Government representatives to highlight national and regional policies on youth development and youth engagement in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030. Representatives of youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks, civil society and other key stakeholders also contributed to this interactive plenary session by sharing their views on youth development, empowerment and inclusion. Speakers generally highlighted the unique role of the ECOSOC Youth Forum as a very important global space facilitating a dialogue between diverse stakeholders around key concerns relating to young people and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Reflecting on the “UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030”, several Member States and other participants expressed keen interest and commitment and urged the United Nations to advance its roll-out and implementation.

Meaningful engagement with youth was highlighted as a priority when developing and implementing national plans, legislation and public programmes by all Governmental authorities. Governments shared ways they engage with youth, from public consultations, to workshops, to expanded youth-delegates programmes. Ways to institutionalize youth participation were also discussed, for instance, through national Youth Advisory Councils or the establishment of quotas for young people to sit on boards of various organizations.

As a positive development, this year’s ECOSOC Youth Forum saw an increasing number of Member States sharing their speaking time with youth delegates who took this opportunity to deliver strong messages about the benefits of empowering young people by giving them the space to meaningfully participate in affairs that shape their livelihoods and future. The message was clear: “Nothing about us, without us”. Youth organization representatives also shared these views by underscoring the urgent need to increase space for young people in urban and rural areas to participate in decision making processes at every level, from local municipalities to parliaments, to regional and multilateral fora.

Participants then turned their attention to a discussion of individual SDGs, offering national perspectives on their achievement and work that remains to be done. On SDG 4, speakers highlighted the fundamental role of education, skills training, lifelong learning, higher education and research as key drivers for sustainable development and calling on leaders to empower youth with skills and resources needed to tackle evolving challenges.

On SDG 8, it was said that as the future of work becomes more and more uncertain for young people, governments must act now to prepare them for the labor market, by investing in developing their technical skills and by supporting entrepreneurship. Emphasis was also placed on safeguarding workers’ rights,

improving social protection platforms, helping younger people care for older generations and ensuring that the labour market leaves no one behind.

On SDG 10, speakers stressed that progress in implementing the SDGs will only be achieved when the marginalized become included and everyone realizes their universal right to equality. As delegates addressed SDG 13, many stated that youth involvement is crucial to raise ambitions on Climate Change and called on leaders to provide support to youth-led, climate adaptation-focused efforts.

On SDG 16, it was stated that young people have a crucial role to play in promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies. For instance, youth can play particularly important roles in mobilizing and registering voters and promoting peaceful, non-violent messages in their communities during election periods. On SDG 17 on partnerships, participants noted that young people continue to experience discrimination, political exclusion and limited access to health and education. Thus, the need to work together to deter the violation of these rights.

II. THEMATIC BREAKOUT SESSIONS

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



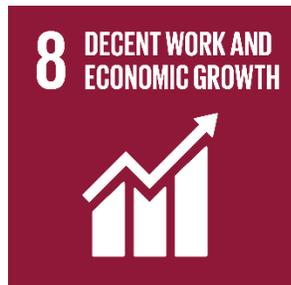
Education plays a key role in empowering youth to be positive agents of change. Participants made a strong call to prioritize concrete steps to facilitate meaningful participation of youth in decision-making and making a positive change in their communities, schools and universities. In addition, a number of speakers emphasized that the private sector and academia could play a role in ensuring active youth engagement in developing solutions for sustainable development, including through innovations and green solutions. Participants united in a call to ensure the right to inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all learners, regardless of race and ethnicity, gender, disability, and self-identification. Referring to the need to address cultural and structural barriers and improve health, a number of speakers underscored the importance of supporting access to youth-friendly and rights-based, comprehensive sexuality education.

In the era of the fourth industrial revolution and rapid development of new technologies, several participants emphasized that young people should have equal access to skills and opportunities 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 a rapidly changing environment. In this context, it was emphasized that education should be recognized beyond economic returns to enable learners to be responsible agents of sustainable change and driving forces for social progress. Stressing the importance of continuous skills development, speakers continuously underscored that quality and accessible training opportunities, such as internships and volunteering.

To address discrimination, xenophobia, and violence, all learners should acquire skills, values and attitudes for peaceful coexistence, thereby education for human rights and global citizenship education should be mainstreamed. Young migrants, refugees and representatives of host countries joined the session, highlighting the pressing challenges related to ensuring the right to education of migrants and displaced persons, in particular those related to languages, cost of education and recognition of prior qualifications. Young people called on Governments to include migrants, refugees, stateless, displaced people in the education systems, and in the national development plans to facilitate the recognition of their qualifications,

skills, and competencies. Finally, many outlined that teachers should be provided with training to address diversity and hardship.

SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.



The discussion on SDG 8 was centered around three themes. First, youth discussed economic growth and going beyond GDP, which reflects the desire to employ other measures of social and economic progress beyond GDP growth. Such measures could acknowledge the different realities of employment, such as the important contribution of work in the informal economy, domestic work, motherhood, and other important activities with large contribution to the economies. Speaking about well-being, a number of speakers also underscored the need to promote workers' rights and to push for regulations that boost living standards.

Second, the participants discussed youth transitions to decent work and the need to scale up opportunities offered to them. Policies must support young people to learn on the job, and while work-based learning opportunities are important, they are more effective when they are paid, including apprenticeships and internships. Entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities also open space for young people to transition into decent jobs. Social entrepreneurship is particularly recognized as an area of great value added. Furthermore, to support successful transitions of youth into the labor market, it is important to foster collaboration among multiple actors, from governments to private sector and civil society, always valuing and encouraging meaningful youth participation. The participants also highlighted that the most marginalized need to receive greater focus, in particular young women, youth in the rural economy, indigenous youth and youth with disabilities.

Third, youth discussed ways to rebuild young people's trust in the institutions of work. In order to regain their trust, Governments must involve young people in shaping the future of work, one with social protection and respect for human rights. This entails a systems approach that works across sectors and policy spectrums securing positive influence at the national level. Governments must ensure the sustainability and scale of solutions that promote decent work for youth while working with multiple partners to protect workers' rights. There also needs to be a global market for people, and not just for goods, and this must be accompanied by a strong effort to curb corrupt practices.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.



In the session on SDG 10, it was discussed that despite important gains made in lifting people out of poverty, inequalities and large disparities remain in income and wealth, as well as in access to basic human rights. Some groups - rural communities, indigenous people, young people, women, those with various disabilities - continue to disproportionately carry the burden of inequalities. To add to the challenges of SDG 10, there are a few trends that could further affect implementation which include changes to the labor market and sectors for job growth due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, forced migration due to conflict and fragility in countries, and climate change.

Participants identified that governments have a key role to play as enablers of legislative and social policies that support the influx of financial flows and good investments, such as in infrastructure, social protection, human development, which can in turn consequently reduce inequalities overall. Governments often know what policies need to be implemented but political will and leadership is required to make the tough choices

that are needed to decrease inequalities. Data is vital to assess situations and develop efficient and accurate policy. Therefore, youth participants suggested to make use of new technologies, to move away from traditional household surveys and towards the digitization of records.

In order to reduce inequality, the labor market should better reflect young people's rights and needs. One suggestion that participants underscored was that markets be more interconnected and academic and professional qualifications recognized globally.

Youth participants also highlighted that migration and mobility should be seen as a strength within societies. In this light, the global community needs to adopt policies in order to promote the well-being of immigrants in their destination countries. Global economic inequality is one of the main causes of migration. Moreover, the importance of participating in certain international events and fora was underscored by those who noted the difficulty some face in obtaining visas to travel. Greater awareness is needed around how such exclusion marginalizes certain voices.

The discussion then turned to gender equality since women face inequalities across all areas of life. Access to sanitation and reproductive health services must be ensured for all women and girls, as well as the access to the rights to education and equal opportunities, pay and ownership. Gender inequalities exist in both developing and developed countries.

SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts



In the session on SDG 13, participants stressed that intergenerational justice is fundamental for climate action. Young people are especially impacted by climate change, which is an existential risk for their future. Young people are also part of the solution and must be involved meaningfully at all levels and given a seat at the “table”. They must be provided access to formal decision-making processes, especially the most vulnerable (indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, etc.) and be able to hold their government accountable to their commitments. Action by nations and citizens are very important and can lead to real impact on the ground, including through collective mobilization.

SDG13 illustrates the interlinkages among the SDGs, including education and decent work. Indeed, participants identified education as an important tool to achieve concrete results in climate action. They thus called upon their schools to mainstream sustainability and climate ambition into curriculum as well as working with them to improve sustainable campus practices. Schools must teach children and young people to become agents of change in their communities and in the world. This goes from adopting sustainable lifestyles to engaging in civic and political engagement.

It is also crucial to transform the economy, including through eliminating partnerships and subsidies for polluting industries, while supporting and promoting sustainable alternatives. This should be seen as an opportunity to create jobs, including for young people and women groups, and boost innovation and economies. Capacity building and access to green technology is essential in that context, especially for developing countries.

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

In the session on SDG 16, participants discussed how youth empowerment in the context of peaceful, just and inclusive societies links to progress on essential elements of the 2030 Agenda as a whole. SDG16 was described as an enabler for the entire 2030 Agenda as youth participants linked peace, justice and strong

and inclusive institutions to other SDGs on education, reduced inequalities, decent work, sustainable cities and communities and partnerships.



While highlighting the need for reintegration and addressing drivers of youth recruitment to terrorism, organized crime and radical movements, participants agreed that the narrative of young people must shift from perceiving young people as troublemakers and perpetrators and victims of violence to perceiving young people as agents of change and peacebuilders. Young participants emphasized the link between youth participation and sustaining peace, thereby recognizing the potential of young people to foster coexistence in and between societies divided by conflict. It would therefore be important to increase the meaningful participation of young people in peace processes.

Youth participants noted the multiple and interlocked forms of discrimination that create barriers for young people's access to justice and human rights. To unleash the full potential of young people to accelerate progress on SDG16, it was mentioned that enhanced awareness of and education on the rights of young people would enable youth to fight corruption, promote access to justice and ensure rule of law.

Youth participants agreed upon the need to invest in young people as critical agents of change and promote youth-led initiatives that already are making a difference in societies. The session identified several impactful solutions and approaches including engaging in equal partnerships, putting youth at the forefront of innovation for peace and new technology, ensuring access to information and support the potential of youth to foster peaceful coexistence.

III. REGIONAL BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Africa

Participants in the Africa breakout session advocated for the peace-security-development nexus to be the golden thread in finding durable solutions for refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, as well as the devastating effects of climate change. The concerns and priorities of migrants, refugees and the internally displaced must be integrated into policy making to ensure inclusion. National legislators pledged to work to enact laws that protect and ensure that migrants and the forcibly displaced are guaranteed all their rights and to further domesticate the SDGs and Agenda 2063 into national frameworks.

Young people noted that targeted and deliberate investments and action in quality education and health and the creation of decent jobs for young people are central to leveraging the demographic dividend in Africa and to finding durable solutions for refugees, returnees and the internally displaced. With its young population, Africa needs to see its youth empowered, included and equal to achieve the SDGs. The creation of decent jobs through multi-stakeholder partnerships, including public-private partnerships, is critical to achieving empowerment and promoting inclusivity and engagement for young people in Africa. They also identified intergenerational relationships as a key tool to promote and foster empowerment and inclusivity amongst the youth in Africa.

Arab States

The number of youth as a proportion of the population is the largest the Arab region has seen in the past 50 years. Participants stressed that the young generation lives in a constant struggle to achieve full economic, political and social integration in their societies. The challenges faced by these diverse young women and men include legal and social discrimination and violence, inadequate livelihoods, and general social, political, and economic exclusion.

It was suggested that there was a pressing need to create alternative paths for youth to generate social change in the Arab states. This can be accomplished by enabling young people, particularly young women, to help write new narratives for the region's most critical challenges. An investment in these youth also has incredible potential for continued returns. Empowering the youth of today not only changes the lives of those directly involved, but also has the potential to affect future generations in the Arab region.

Participants reiterated that Arab youth are already leading in some cases. They understand their realities and the steps that need to be taken to bring about meaningful progress in the region. Young women and men in the Arab states are taking action, playing their civic role, and embarking on a path towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this journey, youth should be given the space, tools and opportunities to work hand in hand with the United Nations system and other international institutions, Governments in the Arab region, civil society organizations at the local and regional level, as well as with the private sector. Successful achievement of the goals by 2030 is dependent upon the concerted efforts and collective action by all stakeholders, including the youth.

Furthermore, in a region affected by ongoing conflict, participants stressed the need for youth policies to include people living in the diaspora, refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people to ensure that no one is left behind. Finally, the collective efforts of youth, UN agencies and youth-serving organizations are needed to push for the elimination of discriminatory laws that prohibit gender equality and women's empowerment. Governments must be held accountable for implementation of laws promoting gender equality.

Asia and the Pacific

Young people highlighted that Asia and the Pacific has very diverse challenges and emerging opportunities for the young people of this region which represent 60% of the world's youth population. As host to hundreds of different cultures, and with countries with very different social and economic development status, it is important to facilitate intercultural exchange and SDGs knowledge sharing within the region. During the discussion, young people underscored that they are bringing unique value to social and economic development, such as youth perspectives, large labor force, and actions to make a difference. In order for Asia and Pacific region to achieve the SDGs, young people should not be left behind. They should be put at the center, including young people from vulnerable backgrounds, such as LGBT youth, young people with disabilities, and young people in conflict areas.

Inequality is one of the most frequent keywords that has been highlighted by young people at the session. Youth representatives from small islands in the Pacific advocated for equal development opportunities for residents of small islands, to change the irreversible damages of climate change on small islands. Youth representatives emphasized that women and girls are not treated the same as men and boys in terms of opportunities to access healthcare, education, employment and they are extremely vulnerable to harmful practices, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and sexual harassment. Education is one of the major areas that shows how resources are unfairly distributed among the rich and the poor, the privileged and the vulnerable. To catalyze young people's power, participants made a strong call for the government, civil societies and private sector to facilitate meaningful youth participation and build youth participatory platforms to engage young people.

The Asia and Pacific region is the driving force of innovation and new technology in the world. Young people should take advantage of these opportunities. In some part of the region, young people have already grasped the opportunities and have become entrepreneurs. This demonstrates how young people are not simply opportunity seekers, but also opportunity creators.

Europe, North America and other States

Participants discussed the challenges in “Europe, North America and other States” that jeopardize progress towards the 2030 Agenda and that prevent young people from being fully empowered, included and equal. A majority of participants agreed that national governments have still not adjusted their policies to meet the SDGs, which are still not seen as a political priority in many contexts. Some participants provided examples of where local governments, which are key for the implementation of many of the Goals, are doing a better job of adjusting their policies, while others stressed the importance of multi stakeholder approaches, the use of national parliaments and a bottom-up call for change in encouraging governments to take the 2030 Agenda on board.

Almost all participants expressed that outreach to and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized youth is lacking or insufficiently implemented in government policy. Participants agreed that discrimination is a challenge that affects young people in the region. Many participants recognized that young people face age-based discrimination. Several examples were also presented of multiple discrimination and systemic discrimination in school systems and the workplace, and the impacts of this on the social inclusion of marginalized groups and communities of young people.

Participants touched on the positive and negative sides of the rise of technology and discussed whether technology contributes to empowerment and equality. Participants shared the positive use of technology and social media in making connections, building movements and promoting advocacy but agreed that the digital divide, technology can exacerbate existing inequalities and emphasize biases and existing discrimination.

Participants identified additional remaining or deepening challenges, including: climate change and insufficient climate action, unequal access to quality and inclusive education, worsening inequality, lack of forward thinking beyond 2030 in decision-making, insufficient investment in youth or support to youth organizations, and a lack of youth mainstreaming across policies. Participants shared that decision-making often remains closed and inaccessible to young people, that existing youth councils are not being integrated into policy processes and that youth participation is not financed.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Youth participants highlighted the complex situation they are facing in Latin America and the Caribbean, with factors including violence and inequality. They emphasized that young people should be taken into account by Governments, including young women and girls, and be made active participants not only during electoral periods, but also in the context of policy development and implementation. Young people should be considered as political actors with the potential and need to be represented in the political sphere with a right to influence public policies that affect them and participate in intergenerational, intercultural and inclusive dialogue through effective and real participatory processes.

This can be achieved by strengthening National Youth Councils in particular. Participants also emphasized that it was crucial to educate young people about the SDGs and making them active players in their achievement.

Participants also recommended that the education system and its curriculum be revised to increase the number of youths who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Participants went on to say there’s a disconnect between what youth are taught and what they will need to progress beyond secondary and tertiary level and skills to start a business.

Finally, participants recognized the vulnerabilities of their countries and region to climate change, demanding governments to strengthen environmental education programmes to enhance its citizens environmental consciousness. Also, they recommended the use of modern technology to build stronger and more resilient infrastructure.

IV. PLENARY SESSIONS

Youth Development: Financing and other Means of Implementation



In the area of SDG 17, many Governments stressed that they 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. They also addressed national financing frameworks and the global financial landscape ahead of the Financing for Development Forum and the SDG Summit.

Participants shared their experiences in tackling issues including unemployment, through promoting job creation, decent work, volunteerism, education reform, skills development and scholarships. They reiterated the need to create decent jobs through multi-stakeholder partnerships, including public-private partnerships, to achieve empowerment and promote inclusivity and engagement.

In terms of priority for financing, a number of speakers highlighted the important role of education as an equalizer and a springboard to achieving the other SDGs, through reducing inequalities, discrimination and promoting inclusion. They also stressed the importance of ensuring access to education for persons with disabilities, women, children and marginalized youth. In addition, the involvement of youth in the development of digital skills, data collection and its dissemination and analysis was underscored. The role of youth as both implementing agent and beneficiary of the SDGs was addressed. In that context, the importance of involving youth in decision-making about how these priorities would be financed was stressed.

In the discussion, a number of Governments took the opportunity to highlight how they are aligning their national youth strategies and programs with the UN Youth strategy. They also stressed their support for entrepreneurship and vocational training particularly for women, indigenous youth and youth in rural areas. Youth Councils, Youth Centers and similar institutions were thus being operationalized or new ones proposed to be created at various levels.

Interactive Dialogue on “Youth, Peace and Security: Challenges and Prospects”

The Interactive Dialogue on Youth, Peace and Security, held by the President of the General Assembly, explored how to foster young people’s participation in civic, political and economic life as conditions for their meaningful social inclusion. Participants stressed that young people are largely marginalized from civic and political participation based on a perception that they are often perpetrators of violence or lack the capacity and skills to meaningfully participate in political decision-making. Participants also underscored that young people continued to be marginalized economically which resulted in different forms of violence, including resorting to criminal activity to generate essential income.

It was stressed that people’s exclusion from the political and economic life of their countries had to be considered as a form of violence which required due attention in order to effectively foster peace and development. Young people shared many examples of extraordinary work they carry out within their communities to prevent violence and consolidate peace across the globe, including through advocacy, community action and promoting employment. They also highlighted that, when given the opportunity, young people had successfully demonstrated their ability to generate change, becoming catalysts for peace in their communities.

Participants stressed the need for Governments to work closely with civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector to create opportunities for youth's civic, economic and political inclusion. Several participants noted that, in order to promote young people's participation in political decision-making, consideration should be given to adopting electoral youth quotas given that young people continue to be chronically under-represented in all key decision-making bodies despite the large global youth population. The need to change biased gender norms and stereotypes and promote civic inclusion through intergenerational dialogue was also highlighted. Participants further stressed that the economic empowerment of young people was key to foster social inclusion and peaceful societies as well as to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Key Messages: Interactive dialogue on youth, peace and security

- Young women and men remain too often marginalized from mainstream political and civic participation, powered by stereotypes and policy myths depicting young men as potentially violent.
- The multiple types of exclusions experienced by young people around the world is a form of structural and psychological violence, and an inter-generational injustice. There needs to systematically address social, economic, political and civic exclusion of young people in order to achieve peace and development.
- Many young people are already active peacebuilders: they work within their communities as peace actors, fostering dialogue, advocating for peace and fighting social injustice. Most young people want to be part of solutions, and not considered as potential problems. Partnerships, funding and support are necessary to strengthen and nurture their work.
- Addressing the violence of exclusion also includes fostering meaningful economic inclusion. Youth economic empowerment is critical to eradicate intergenerational poverty cycles and to achieve the SDGs.
- The media has a role to play in highlighting the positive contribution of young women and men to peacebuilding, by changing the negative narrative of youth as perpetrators of violence.

Interactive Roundtable: Looking to the Future

The Forum heard reflections from participants on the priorities they would like Member States to address in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda over the next decade in the context of the High-Level Meetings in September 2019, in particular the SDG and Climate Action Summits.

SDG Summit

Participants emphasized that effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda would be impossible without partnering with young people and ensuring that they are engaged and empowered in global efforts and processes. They noted that young people have an important role to play in keeping Member States accountable to their commitments to implement the SDGs as well as raising their ambitions. In light of the upcoming High-level Political Forum under the auspices of the UN General Assembly (SDG Summit), there were calls to make sure that young people are provided with opportunities to engage in the preparation and follow-up processes, given their central role in the 2030 Agenda. Youth participants highlighted that meaningful inclusion in the review and follow-up on the SDGs must consider the different country contexts and link local and global efforts. Some participants expressed the need to ensure that all voices are heard and, in this connection, expressed concern that difficulties by youth from certain countries in obtaining visas to participate at international forums by youth meant that important voices were not being heard.

Spotlighting priorities for youth, participants pointed to inequality and unemployment as two major areas of concern. They called for special measures to reduce inequality faced by youth, noting that indigenous

young people, young women and young persons with disabilities are among those most affected. Lack of trust in political institutions resulting in lack of participation by youth was also brought to the Forum's attention. Young people's trust in national and global institutions must be rebuilt, and they must be supported in attaining political leadership to, in turn, meet the needs of their constituents.

Participants also deemed youth unemployment as a silent emergency, as many young people around the world remain unemployed or enter the most precarious and insecure parts of the labor market. In order to address unemployment and quality of work, policy actions must be taken today in order to create decent green and sustainable jobs for youth in the future.

It was also noted that too many young people remain unaware of the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants were encouraged to spread the message about the SDGs, including through formal education, and the use of social media. With respect to the low political participation rates and the lack of funding for youth organizations, Governments were encouraged to create more space for young people to participate in decision-making at every level, from local municipalities to parliaments, to Foreign Affairs Ministries and international forums.

Climate Action Summit

Regarding climate change, young people strongly encouraged governments to open the doors of their institutions to youth as an intergenerational partnership will result in raising ambitions at the Climate Action Summit and beyond. Young people must be thus seen as strategic partners in addressing climate change and attaining intergenerational justice. Youth participants also highlighted the need to consider climate change through a regional approach, as well as the need to foster stronger partnerships between the public and private sectors in order to generate green jobs and develop new public policies on climate change that support a rapid transition to a green economy. Participants further called upon Governments to develop enhanced national determined contribution (NDC), prioritize mitigation and adaptation, lead radical institutional changes and implement transformative climate master plans.

CLOSING SESSION



“To make sure our work is relevant and effective, we need your ideas, your energy and your creativity.”

Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations

A keynote address was delivered by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, who pledged that the Organization will work with youth to deliver on their hopes and address young people's needs and advance their rights.

He assured participants that the key messages and outcome of the ECOSOC Youth Forum will be shared with decision makers and policymakers at the forthcoming series of meetings in New York in September that aim to catalyze greater ambition, leadership and action to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the 2030 Agenda.

He also stressed that this would not be enough and encouraged young people to mobilize and activate their networks and engage in youth-focused events leading up to September.

ECOSOC President Inga Rhonda King called on young people to continue to speak-up. She also asked countries to engage young people in a meaningful way to make our world a better place. She urged Member States to: “Be inclusive; Involve young people in the decisions that you make. And listen”.