



**ECOSOC**  
**YOUTH FORUM**

**YOUTH2030**

## **Economic and Social Council Youth Forum**

**"COVID-19 recovery: Youth taking action for a sustainable future"**

### **CONCEPT NOTE**

**REGIONAL SESSION ON  
"EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA AND OTHER STATES:  
REGIONAL REALITIES - CHALLENGES, PRIORITIES AND  
ACTIONS FOR THE POST COVID-19 RECOVERY AND  
REALIZING THE SDGS DECADE OF ACTION"**

**20 April 2022, 9:45 AM – 11:15 AM**

| <b>IDENTIFICATION</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>SDG/theme or Region</b>  | Europe, North America and Other States                |
| <b>Session co-lead UN</b>   | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) |
| <b>Session co-lead Youth</b>  | European Youth Forum                                  |
| <b>BACKGROUND &amp; KEY ISSUES</b>  |   |
| <p>The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the vulnerabilities and inequalities of our social and economic systems and stressed the need for more concrete actions as it has affected the education, employment, and well-being of young people. Despite targeted measures such as national recovery plans, the impact of COVID-19 is still disproportionately weighing on vulnerable populations, including young people across the world.</p> |   |

The health crisis has exposed both inequalities and the damages caused by years of austerity, excessive privatisation, and underfunding of public services. Our society remains unequal in accessing basic needs such as healthcare, education, housing, or food that are basic human rights. Against this background, we must unite our efforts to “build back better” and create an economic system that is fairer and more sustainable.

For what concerns climate crisis, the reduction in CO2 emissions as lockdown measures were implemented – albeit limited and short-lived – has shown that positive trends in fighting the crisis are possible. Nevertheless, phenomena such as warmer temperatures, extreme weather, droughts and floods, changing hydrology, and environmental and biodiversity degradation still impact our ecosystems and people’s livelihoods. Meanwhile, violent conflict in the region that also has implications on oil and gas supplies reminds us of the importance of disengaging from fossil fuels and increasing the efforts towards the energy transition. In many European and Central Asian countries, the transition has already started, but is not going far enough to structurally transform our economies. We are simply consuming too much of the Earth’s resources. Overconsumption, and the resulting harm to people and planet, continue largely unaddressed. Europe’s ‘material footprint’ - the total amount of fossil fuels, biomass, metals, and minerals consumed, including in imports - is double that of a sustainable level.

We are presented with a unique opportunity to transform our current economic system based on economic growth - a vicious cycle that feeds on endless profit, extraction, production, consumption. To consume within ecological limits, best available research says the EU must aim to reduce its material footprint by up to 70% (to approx. 4.4 tons annually per capita) from current levels. We need science-based binding targets for material footprint reduction to keep the level of consumption within planetary boundaries.

The COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted the vulnerabilities and inequalities of our fiscal systems, which require urgent reform. It is essential that countries in the region ensure their recovery plans address the most vulnerable populations and enable green investment and spending. The restrictions in social interactions and the closure of schools and places for social activities to contain the infections have impacted their mental health and stability but also impacted their education, including on sexual and reproductive health and employment opportunities. This is, however, only a short-term solution. Ultimately, we need to design fiscal systems that are focused on the wellbeing of people and sustainability, rather than merely economic stability and growth.

### **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 at the root of our region’s crises of inequality and sustainability. We will facilitate a dialogue between youth and policymakers to brainstorm ideas and knowledge on shifting to economic and political systems as part of the recovery that guarantee the rights and promote the wellbeing of youth in line with the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while ensuring the participation of young people in policymaking and implementation.

The session will focus on the theme of the 2022 HLPF: “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

### **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

Rather than merely having young people talking among themselves, we will facilitate an online exchange between young people and policymakers in the region. For young people, the outcome will be to raise their concerns and ask questions. For policymakers, it is a chance to listen to the everyday 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 Member 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, quantitative evidence, perceptions of young people or policy positions within their organisations or institutions. Participants should also be prepared to share promising practices as regards to policies, implementation of the 2030 Agenda, climate and environment, youth rights and economic governance.

### **OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW**

(15m) The moderator sets the scene and introduces the flow of the session, as well as its theme, background, and objectives. Participants are asked to react (using either Kahoot or a Mentimeter) to a series of statements/questions related to the themes (climate and environment, youth rights and

economic governance) 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. Further, UN Volunteers will provide speakers for each cluster, who will present youth related initiatives of the UN. Questions from the chat will be collected to feed into the dialogue.

(10m) Each speaker gets 3 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.

## SESSION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### **Climate change 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?
- How can we address overconsumption in the region at the expense of countries in the global South?

### **Youth rights**

- What challenges and discrimination do young people face? What has been the impact of the crisis on the latter?
- What are some best practice examples conducted at the local or national level that supported young people during the crisis, particularly those facing multiple forms of discrimination?
- What are some examples where young people, youth-led organisations and youth organisations could help shape policy measures taken during the crisis?

### **Economic governance**

- How can pandemic recovery funds and programs be best utilised to ensure the full realization of human rights for young people, including economic, social, and cultural rights?
- What policies should be put in place to ensure greener and fairer taxation systems?
- How can we transform our fiscal systems to ensure that they provide enough space for governments to invest in sustainable and social causes?

## NAMES OF SESSION SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR(S)

**Moderator:** Anja Fortuna, Vice-President, European Youth Forum

### Climate & environment

- Youth speaker: **Clara Botto**, Liaison Officer on Environmental Governance, Youth and Environment Europe
- Institutional speaker: **Rozalina Petrova**, Member of Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius' team- European Commission

### Youth rights

- Youth speaker: **Andreea Scriosteanu**, Youth Council of Romania
- Institutional speaker: **Ksenia Mikhailova**, UNV and UNICEF

### Economic governance

- Youth speaker: **Thomas Desdouits**, European Youth Forum
- Institutional speaker: **Lucia Piana**, Deputy Head of Unit Fiscal Policy and Surveillance - European Commission

## OVERVIEW OF PREPARATORY EVENT/CONSULTATION

On 6 and 7 April the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) for the UNECE Region (Europe and Central Asia) took place. Member States and Civil Society came together to analyse the Sustainable Development Goals that are in focus this year (4, 5, 14, 15 and 17), as well as other key issues relating to Agenda 2030 for the region.

The Youth pre-meeting, which is an integral part of the RFSD, took place on 1 April (online) and allowed youth from across the region to come together and strategize on youth's active role in the 2022 Regional Forum and to streamline joint advocacy efforts. The discussion was structured around the theme of the 2022 HLPF: "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"; and the SDGs under in-depth review. Main messages from this meeting were reported back during the first plenary of the Regional Forum and will be shared with participants of the ECOSOC Youth Forum.

## SUGGESTED READING

- Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2021:  
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2021-Report.pdf>

- European Youth Forum (2022): Position paper on fiscal policy <https://www.youthforum.org/files/220225-Fiscal-Policy-Position-Paper.pdf>
- 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>