



#YOUTH2030

Concept Note “Empowered, Included and Equal” 8-9 April 2019

Background

The 8th Annual Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum takes place at a critical point in time as the world is working to address the disadvantages of the current trends in globalization, which are not sufficiently sustainable or inclusive. It will address the theme, “Empowered, Included and Equal”, which is aligned with the theme of ECOSOC and the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) which focuses on inclusion and equality in 2019.¹ (More information about the ECOSOC Youth Forum is available here: <https://bit.ly/2DJMgCm>)

Opportunities and challenges

The 1.2 billion youth around the world represent 16 per cent of the global population.² The capacity to fully harness this demographic dividend depends on sufficient and adapted investments in youth across all sectors.

Young people can be a force for development as well as drivers of innovation and progress at the local, national and global levels. They tend to be among the first to embrace new ideas and innovation and frequently recognize the global and local dynamics of development. Their role in ensuring inclusiveness and equality in societies is central to the overall efforts of the global community.

Failure to foster youth development in an inclusive manner or fulfill young people’s rights can lead to inequalities with long-term economic and social consequences. For instance, it is recognized that the exclusion of young people from educational and employment opportunities negatively impacts their well-being and therefore damages social cohesion and stability.³

Many of the trends associated with globalization – technological advancement, increased connectivity and flows of people, finance, goods and ideas, the transformation of work and education – have the potential to foster youth development and empower young people.

¹ The theme of the ECOSOC 2019 Session (July 2018 to July 2019) is “One world for all: empowering people to build equal and inclusive societies” while the theme of HLPF 2019 is “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

² DESA, 2017 Revision of World Population Prospects, available at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

³ DESA, 2016 Report on World Social Situation, available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/report-on-the-world-social-situation-rwss-social-policy-and-development-division/rwss2016.html>

However, access to the benefits remain challenging, as they often accrue to population groups and countries that are already ahead. As a result, these trends can also exacerbate existing inequalities. Moreover, with ongoing conflicts and violence as well as accelerating climate change impeding sustainable development, people around the world – especially young people – are being left behind. At least 1 in 4 young people are affected by violence or armed conflict in some way. Youth are also more likely to be among the working poor, unemployed or underemployed and face gaps in social protection coverage, exacerbating inequalities.⁴ For example, globally, three out of four young workers have jobs in the informal economy and over 200 million youth are either unemployed or are working but live below the poverty line.⁵

When it comes to education, there has been noteworthy progress on improving access since 2000, but globally 138 million youth of upper secondary age (15 to 17) are out of school⁶ and in low income countries out-of-school rates for upper secondary are close to 60%.⁷ In several regions, young women face additional challenges in their efforts to complete their education. Even where access has improved, quality and inclusiveness remain key challenges for young people in education.

In addition, young people also face ageism, intersecting with other forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, migrant and refugee status – some aspects often linked to violence or extremism. Policies and programmes aimed at youth are often inadequate to address the discrimination that young people face, because a rights-based approach is missing. With respect to health, including sexual and reproductive health as well as mental health, young people’s access to adapted services is far from universal. Marginalized youth such as indigenous young people, face higher rates of suicide and self-harm than their peers.

There are multiple reasons behind young people’s adoption of alternative ways to contribute to community and national development, democratic life and society. Civic engagement (such as through digital activism, social entrepreneurship and volunteerism) is increasingly attractive to young people. On the other hand, low rates of youth parliamentary involvement may be both the cause and the consequence of the reframing of their relationship with traditional politics. Moreover, young people face legal and other barriers in running for office. It is noteworthy that 73% of countries restrict young people from running for office, with minimum age requirements for candidacy that are higher than the voting age. It is also representative of their experience of exclusion from formal governing processes and – conceivably – from social and economic development.⁸

⁴ DESA, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/report-on-the-world-social-situation-rwss-social-policy-and-development-division/2018-2.html>

⁵ ILO, Infostories, updated June 2018, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/youth-decentjobs>.

⁶ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Blog, available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/blog/no-time-lose-road-universal-primary-and-secondary-education>

⁷ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, February 2018 fact sheet “One in Five Children, Adolescents and Youth is Out of School”, available at <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs48-one-five-children-adolescents-youth-out-school-2018-en.pdf>.

⁸ DESA, 2016 Report on World Social Situation, available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/report-on-the-world-social-situation-rwss-social-policy-and-development-division/rwss2016.html>

However, even when faced with structural or social barriers, young people are creative in carving out a place to share their views and offer their contributions; and they regularly do so with resilience and solidarity.

A year of opportunities

Since in 2019 the United Nations will address key aspects of the 2030 Agenda, the ECOSOC Youth Forum can act as an additional unique space for substantive contributions of young people to be shared with decision-makers of planned high-level events and representatives of governments attending those events. The first is the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) under the auspices of ECOSOC (from 9 to 18 July 2019) on the theme, “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”, which will review progress in the areas of quality education (SDG4), decent work and economic growth (SDG8), reduced inequalities (SDG10), climate action (SDG13), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16), and partnerships for the goals (SDG17).

The HLPF under the General Assembly, which will take place at the level of Heads of State and Government (SDG Summit) on 24-25 September 2019, will review the 17 SDGs and is expected to identify progress, persistent and emerging challenges and mobilize further action to accelerate implementation. The Youth Forum can provide an opportunity for youth participants to have an initial reflection together with government representatives as well as to provide input on the actions that can be taken to speed up implementation of the Agenda and galvanize actions.

Additionally, the recent launch of the UN Youth Strategy (Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People) allows for an opportunity to present it to the Forum, including plans underway for its rollout and implementation at the country, regional and global levels. This will also allow for building support for partnerships with and commitments by a range of stakeholders attending the Forum and could help advance its implementation.

The Youth Forum will also take place just prior to the High-level Meeting to mark ILO's centenary. This meeting will take place in New York on 10 April 2019, hosted by the President of the General Assembly and ILO. It will include discussion of the Commission on the Future of Work. This provides an opportunity for young people attending the Youth Forum to participate and contribute to the discussions on an issue central to their livelihoods, empowerment, wellbeing and economic and social rights.

The 2019 Youth Forum can also be the space for a broader dialogue that considers the historic Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on youth, peace and security. The Youth Forum will create a space for a dialogue on youth actions and policy options in this regard that can also be used to feed into the High-Level Event on Youth, Peace and Security that the President of the General Assembly will be convening in the near future.

In reviewing SDG 13 on Climate Action, the Youth Forum could also prepare its input into the Secretary-General's Climate Summit to be held on 23 September 2019 and feed into the larger efforts underway to mobilize young people and engage them in the lead up to and follow-up of the Summit which is intended to mobilize political and economic energy at the highest levels to advance climate action. It will challenge states, regions, cities, companies, investors and citizens, including youth, to step up action in six areas: energy transition, climate finance and carbon pricing, industry transition, nature-based solutions, cities and local action, and resilience. Young

people could also use the ECOSOC Youth Forum to gather their inputs and contributions to the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on financing sustainable development (FfD) on 23 September 2019 in parallel to the Climate Summit, and to discuss these with representatives of governments. At the same time, the 2019 Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, to be held in May 2019, will also see the first stocktaking for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction based on data submitted by member states. It will also see the launch of the global assessment report on DRR.

Furthermore, a number of youth-focused frameworks are being developed (e.g. the 4th phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, which will focus on youth) and would benefit from consultations with young people at the ECOSOC Youth Forum. The Forum can also offer space to present the outcomes of youth engagement in regional SDG review processes and continue the dialogue between youth participants and government representatives from different regions.

Purpose

The ECOSOC Youth Forum is a platform where young people can exchange ideas and develop recommendations on issues of importance to them, engaging in dialogue with Member States as well as regional and global actors.

Within the theme of “**Empowered, Included and Equal**” the ECOSOC Youth Forum seeks to:

- Provide a forum for discussion on the importance of young people and formulate recommendations to advance the youth development agenda for potential inclusion in key processes and frameworks such as the Climate Summit and Financing Sustainable development;
- Facilitate active engagement of youth in the discussion of the theme of the 2019 ECOSOC substantive session and the HLPF and the six SDGs to be reviewed and to hear their initial perspectives on progress, challenges and actions for transforming our world as a contribution to the SDG Summit;
- Present the United Nations Youth Strategy: Youth 2030 and inform participants of the plans underway for its roll-out and implementation at country, regional and global levels while offering a strategic opportunity to explore partnerships with and share commitments by a diverse set of stakeholders attending the Forum to advance the Strategy’s implementation;
- Provide a platform for representatives of youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks and others to engage Member States and UN officials (including the President of the General Assembly).

Based on dialogue with Member State representatives, the ECOSOC Youth Forum could thus be the preparatory space for young people to shape proposals they would like to share with Heads of State and Government on how to build on progress made and to identify from their perspective the challenges and actions that could be taken to speed up implementation. As an example, the September meeting of the HLPF at the level of Heads of State and Government, is expected to identify progress, persistent and emerging challenges and mobilize further action to accelerate implementation.

Format

The Forum will seek to facilitate meaningful youth engagement and its agenda will be shaped in a way that allows for young people to generate contributions and recommendations to these major recent or upcoming global events and processes, and to discuss these with Member States. Topics of sessions will be informed by a mapping of global events, processes and frameworks of importance to young people. Formats of sessions will be identified based on expected outcomes related to the major event(s), process or framework the session is linked to.

The Forum will also include plenary sessions with representatives from youth organizations, high-level and other keynote speakers. The breakout sessions will be co-led by one to two UN organizations and youth entities.

Social media and virtual participation

Virtual participation will be used to the greatest extent possible, and youth representatives will be invited to participate through video-link from selected countries. The meeting will also be streamed live on UN WebTV and participants will be able to pose questions via social media through Facebook and Twitter (using #Youth2030). The objective is to allow for broader participation at the same time as leveraging their influence and global reach to inspire concrete actions to promote implementation and provide feedback on progress.

An SDG media zone may also be organized so participants at the Forum can engage in conversations about innovation and interventions aimed at strengthening the involvement of young people in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. It will also provide an opportunity for UN officials and government representatives to interact more directly with a young and diverse audience on a variety of social media platforms.

Outcome

The outcome of the 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 and the High-level Political Forum convened under the auspices of ECOSOC in July 2019 and the General Assembly in September 2019. An informal summary of the proceedings by the President of ECOSOC with highlights of discussions will also be produced. Specific recommendations will also be shared with decision-makers of these events, processes and frameworks linked to the various sessions included in the agenda. The outcome will also contribute to all ECOSOC formal events, to be organized in 2019.

Participation

Participation in the ECOSOC Youth Forum is by invitation-only and will include representatives from youth-led and youth-focused organizations selected through the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, regional youth platforms and international youth organisations that are members of the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO), representatives of National Youth Councils, as well as youth representatives from Civil Society Organizations and other youth leaders and advocates. High-

level Government representatives (including Ministers of Youth and other Ministries responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at national level); representatives of National Youth Institutes; representatives from the Permanent Missions of Member States to the UN in New York; official youth delegates from Member States; and representatives of regional and other multilateral organizations will also be in attendance.

Other participants will include representatives from the UN System, Major Groups and other Stakeholders, and NGOs with consultative status with ECOSOC. The Forum will also reflect the diversity of formal and informal youth organizations and include a balanced representation of youth from all regions and groups, such as indigenous groups and persons with disabilities.

Preparation of the Youth Forum

The 2019 ECOSOC Youth Forum will be chaired by the President of ECOSOC and is 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, in particular, its Working Group on Youth and SDGs, and co-convened by the UN-MGCY and ICMYO.

Preparations should take place at the regional level prior to the ECOSOC Youth Forum, together with regional youth platforms, to gather as wide a participation of youth-led and youth-focused organisations, as well as government representatives, as possible. The outcomes of these regional consultations should feed into the Youth Forum and subsequently to the other processes.