



Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

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

19-20 April 2022

Background

The 2022 Annual Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum takes place at a critical point in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be an opportunity for young people to share their perspectives on how to transform the world into a fairer and more sustainable place and reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) amidst the continuing crisis. It will address the theme of ECOSOC and the 2022 UN High-level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) on “Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” It will also review progress in the areas of quality education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), life below water (SDG14), life on land (SDG15) and partnerships for the goals (SDG17).

Since 2012, the Youth Forum has established itself as the largest gathering of young people at the United Nations bringing their views, ideas, solutions and innovations to policy discussions on issues that matter to them. In that context, the Forum is the platform for young leaders and representatives of youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks from around the world to engage in a dialogue with UN Member States, and to explore ways and means of promoting youth development and engagement with the view of realizing the SDGs Decade of Action.

The 2022 ECOSOC Youth Forum will be convened by the President of ECOSOC and is co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), in collaboration with the United Nations Inter Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), and co-convened by the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO), with technical input from youth organizations relevant to the theme of the forum.

Context and substantive focus

Countries are struggling to cope with the COVID-19. As the situation rapidly evolves, the pandemic has upended the lives of young people from every region, limiting movement, and severely impacting social

and economic activity. This situation has had an unprecedented impact on health, the education systems, the labor force, employment, among other challenges.

"We all hope that 2022 will be the year when we overcome the COVID-19 pandemic," said ECOSOC President Collen Vixen Kelapile. "The year when we embark with renewed energy in realizing the world we outlined in the 2030 Agenda, building on the lessons from this terrible crisis and our responses".

According to the United Nations' latest World Economic Situation and Prospect report, "Global economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic hinges on a delicate balance amid new waves of infection, labour market challenges, lingering supply-side constraints and rising inflationary pressures weighing heavily on near-term growth prospects."¹

Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a global crisis that is also undermining hard-won development gains and progress, the UN Secretary-General has called for a comprehensive response that is linked to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs Decade of Action and delivery. More efforts are needed from all actors of societies to mainstream the SDGs in their respective national development and sectoral policies.

From gender equality to education and skills development to fighting climate change, and protecting our oceans and biodiversity, young people are advocating many initiatives with creativity and commitment in response to our fast-changing world and for future generations. As the UN Secretary-General highlighted in his recent report, "Our Common Agenda", "it is time to find ways to give more weight to young people's collective interests and to make our systems work to safeguard their futures". This report which presents his vision for the future of global cooperation proposes solutions to address today's challenges and highlight main areas of proposals, among them several on youth. Guided by the UN system-wide youth strategy, "Youth2030", the United Nations has been strengthening its work for and with young people worldwide. The main objective has been to engage, support and empower young people to put their ideas into action.

Education Youth Want and Need (SDG 4)

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic more than 1.5 billion children and young people were affected by closures of educational institutions around the world resulting in significant learning losses and increased dropouts. Even as schools reopened, millions of students remain at risk of not returning, especially those from poorer and more marginalized communities, and more particularly girls and young women. Inequality in educational opportunities has been further exacerbated, as hybrid education systems were called to provide for the continuation of learning with the need of increased investing in accessible digital education platforms. The education disruption together with the various wider social lockdowns has also significantly impacted young people's mental health and well-being as evidenced by reported increased symptoms of anxiety and depression compared to pre-pandemic levels and compared to other age groups. The negative impact has been particularly challenging, as education is key in driving progress across all SDGs and in supporting young people to be prepared to enter the work force and actively engaged on critical social and environmental issues.

Young people are not only entitled to their right to education but should also be meaningfully engaged in the process of transforming education to help build just, equitable, and sustainable futures.

¹ [United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19](#)

Broadening the spaces for youth voices to shape the decisions made about their education is vital. Young people have the right to play an important role in building our shared futures, especially as they lead the discussions on reimagining and transforming education in the fight against climate change, various form of discrimination and oppression, health issues, gender norms, and for the diversity of cultures and indigenous self-determination. Young people must not only be listened to or consulted, but also mobilized and supported in the construction of transformed education systems, as per the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Report entitled “Reimagining our Futures together: A new social contract for Education”.

Formal representation of youth and student voices is critical for the achievement of SDG 4, which is why UNESCO is positioning students and youth at the forefront and center of SDG 4 through the newly designed SDG4Youth Network². Young people will also be engaged through the preparation and the lead up to the UN Secretary-General’s Transforming Education Summit to be held later in 2022. The Youth Forum will be the opportunity for them to share their priorities at this early stage of preparations. At the same time, the SDG 4 on Education, to be addressed at the High-level Political Forum in July 2022 will be an opportunity to prepare and contribute to the Transforming Education Summit.

Generation Equality: Building back better with young women and girls at the center (SDG 5)

A new generation of young women and girls are leading the gender equality movement as well as other social justice causes that affect their lives personally. Yet, feminist gains are experiencing reversals. Young women and girls face multiple barriers and disadvantages that include violence and limited and unequal access to resources, knowledge, information, networks and job markets as well as early marriage and childbearing in many countries. These multiple forms of discrimination are due to persistent inequalities, discriminatory laws, stereotypical cultural norms and unequal gendered social roles that are attributed to them within their communities and families. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened some of these inequalities.

The Generation Equality Forum celebrated in 2021 was an opportunity to discuss the challenges of COVID-19 for the gender equality agenda and open spaces, accessibility and visibility to young people, supporting their meaningful participation (co-creating and co-leading all processes) and engagement. How do we make sure young women and girls are centered in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic?

Life below water (SDG 14) and Youth: Connecting generations to protect our Ocean

Covering 70% of the earth’s surface, absorbing 25% of all CO2 emissions and 90% of the heat from the emissions, the ocean is the planet’s largest biosphere and the climate regulator. Yet, the ocean’s intricate link with climate change and biodiversity as well as its crucial role in providing food, energy resources, jobs and potential pharmaceuticals to combat diseases have not been acknowledged sufficiently.

² The SDG4Youth Network initiative was [launched](#) in November 2021 in close cooperation with the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Generation Unlimited, and other partners. The SDG4Youth network is designed as an open, inclusive and representative platform to support student and youth leaders in shaping global education policies and decision-making within the renewed Global Education Cooperation Mechanism (GCM) and the global apex body for education – the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC). The network is youth and student-led with an Interim Council made up of youth and student leaders nominated by partner organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to Ocean protection, among them the negative impacts of climate change on oceans and the role of oceans in mitigating climate change. At the same time, ocean-based tourism has been hit hard with travel slowing significantly worldwide, which also resulted in the reduction of operational ocean science. Market and supply chain has been disrupted, as 90% of the global trade of goods is carried by vessels. The pandemic also brought enormous challenges to the fishing industry, and people whose livelihood depends on it. While initially projected to double by 2030, the growth of the ocean economy has been hindered by COVID-19, with significant revenue losses throughout.

Young people have played an essential role in addressing the challenges confronting the contemporary world, including impacts of climate change, peace building and growing inequality, and their active involvement in climate action and environmental protection. Being the largest and most connected generation with the advancement of technology, the younger generations are often more creative and bolder in finding solutions and bringing positive changes to global issues. Member States, youth advocates and other stakeholders will be able to discuss the contribution of youth towards a dynamic ocean community, exchange ideas, knowledge and experience to inspire Youth-led Ocean action. It will also be an opportunity to collect inputs from young people to the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, which will be held in Lisbon, Portugal, from 27 June to 1 July 2022.

Life on Land (SDG 15) – Securing a sustainable life on land

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call on many levels, representing a once in-a-lifetime opportunity to shift the global development paradigm towards greater sustainability and a greener, more inclusive economy. Increasing efforts to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15) is critical to building back better, for a more resilient and sustainable future for all. In this regard, young people have a vital role as changemakers, in turning global commitments into action on the ground, acting to protect nature and the planet and promoting nature-based solutions to benefit people and the planet.

Life on land is continuing to be degraded at alarming rates. The impacts of climate change are growing – from rising temperatures to extreme weather events. The frequency of disasters is increasing, from forest fires and storms to floods and droughts. Pollution levels are worsening, and species extinction is growing. This has profound consequences for the ecological integrity of our planet and for the lives of people, including many vulnerable young people in particular.

Young activists, scientists, practitioners have been supporting global efforts in sustainably managing forests, combating desertification, reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss through their direct work, and by engaging with Governments and other partners to accelerate the transition towards green and climate friendly ways of living and economies. Young people have a vested interest in ensuring that the health of the planet and its ecosystems are at the core of all plans and policies to build back better. They can amplify and increase the reach and impact of major international initiatives - from the One Health approach to ensuring the health of ecosystems and people, to the Secretary-General's global initiatives on "Turning the Tide on Deforestation", "Climate Action", and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. They can be part of actions to support the most vulnerable groups such as youth living in slums or human settlements exposed to pollution and natural disasters.

Financing our Future (SDG 17)

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed and exacerbated vulnerabilities and inequalities between and within economies and societies. At the same time, the enormity of COVID-19 and its related consequences have opened the door for countries to take once-in-a-generation strategic opportunities that address challenges like pandemics, climate change, inequality and unemployment that negatively impact youth and their lifelong trajectories. And yet, action has not met the scale of the challenges faced. Financing of a global vaccination strategy has not kept pace with the pandemic. Climate finance targets remain unmet along with underinvestment in adaptation and resilience. Resources lack to strengthen social protection and health systems and more generally realize the SDGs. The digital divide for young people has underscored how limited access to technology impacts youth education, employment and training opportunities. Stimulus packages in developing countries have been dwarfed by the amount of resources mobilized in developed countries.

Building back better and fairer from COVID-19 will require a strengthened global partnership that reduces risk, enables recovery and builds resilience—with a special focus on the needs of youth and future generations. This will require targeted, high-impact financing and investment, both domestic and international, in future generations. Resources from stimulus packages need to advance the sustainable development goals and be sustained despite inflationary and other pressures. Non-financial investments including capacity building will also be critical to the long-term sustainability of recovery efforts, ones that are inclusive and promote intergenerational solidarity.

Learning lessons from the pandemic, the discussions will explore how to focus sustainable development finance at the national and international levels on youth including in the health, education, climate and employment sectors. Further opportunities to engage youth in policy formulation and implementation of the financing for sustainable development agenda will also be addressed. The discussions will also bring to the fore youth experience and expertise to engage with policy makers on the practical considerations to be made in financing focused on youth initiatives. It will arrive at concrete policy recommendations to be taken forward by all stakeholders, which will also serve as inputs to the Financing for Development (FfD) Forum, to be held on 25-28 April 2022 and HLPF, to take place in July 2022.

Regional Dimension

The ECOSOC Youth Forum will also be a platform for discussions on the situation regarding COVID-19 and its impacts in the various regions. Regional breakout sessions of the Youth Forum will be prepared by events and consultations organized by the regional commissions, together with regional youth entities and platforms. This will help to gather as wide a participation of youth-led and youth-focused organizations and government representatives as possible.

Various preparatory events will be organized during the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development to ensure youth representation in intergovernmental discussions forging meaningful and inclusive youth engagement in the implementation of the SDGs. At the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific region and the Latin American and the Caribbean region, regional youth forums will be organized to provide inputs for the 2022 ECOSOC Youth Forum and the HLPF. During the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, a youth roundtable will be held on the Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda. The Economic Commission for Europe will organize a Youth pre-meeting before their Regional Sustainable Development Forum to allow youth representatives to connect and to streamline joint advocacy efforts into peer learning sessions on the SDGs for in-depth review at the HLPF 2022. The

Economic Commission for Africa will organize the Fourth Africa Youth SDGs Summit which will be held in the run-up to the Africa Regional Sustainable Development Forum.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean will also organize Subregional Youth Dialogues in February 2022 to ensure a coordinated perspective at the ECOSOC Youth Forum. The Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific will hold a Youth Special Event for young changemakers to discuss innovations that can accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A virtual event on “Africa’s Youth in the Decade of Action: Actors or Bystanders” and a capacity-development workshop will be held by the Economic Commission for Africa to empower youth to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Objectives

The 2022 ECOSOC Youth Forum will:

1. Provide a platform for young people to engage in a dialogue with United Nations Member States and other actors on concrete actions to rebuild from COVID-19 in a way that advances the sustainable development goals at the grassroots, national, regional and global levels.
2. Share experiences and identify solutions to support youth in surmounting the devastating impact of COVID-19 in their economic, social, health and education's lives as well as in bolstering their resilience to future shocks.
3. Allow young people to contribute to the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and to shaping policy recommendations at the HLPF and other Intergovernmental fora, such as the UN Transforming Education Summit, the UN Ocean Conference, the Financing for Development (FfD) Forum and others.
4. Discuss and report on progress for the implementation of the *UN Youth Strategy, Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People*, and leverage the Forum in support of advocating and advancing the UN Youth Strategy, as well as increasing coherence between the Youth Forum and UN Youth Strategy. There will also be discussions on sharing information on plans for measuring and monitoring the impact of the strategy at the national, regional and global levels and on the role of young people and youth organizations in the implementation of the strategy.

Format

Due to expected COVID-19 related travel restrictions and limitations, the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2022 will be held in a virtual format. This will also allow for a larger audience to be connected around the world and actively participate in the discussions.

The Forum will include opening and closing plenary sessions with representatives from youth organizations as well as high-level and keynote speakers. A Ministerial Roundtable bringing together government officials and young people will be held featuring national progress, gaps, challenges and next steps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The programme would also include interactive thematic and regional breakout sessions. During the interactive sessions, the moderators would have a primary role to maintain discussions focused, actively engaging the audience, using social media, if possible, with pertinent questions related to the various themes to be addressed.

Young people are encouraged to share best practices, lessons learned, solutions as well as creative and innovative ideas with Member States, other youth and stakeholders for discussion and further action. Youth and other organizations are encouraged to convene events to identify new solutions to advance the SDGs through the response to COVID-19 or make break-through progress on some of the SDGs under review at the HLPF. Participants would also be encouraged to make individual and group commitments for action to build resilient and inclusive societies as the world is trying to recover and get on track on the implementation of the SDGs during this decisive SDG Decade of Action and Delivery.

Participation

Participants in the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2022 will be Member States, including Ministers and other high-level representatives, young people and official youth delegates, as well as representatives of regional and multilateral organizations. Young people will be representing formal and informal youth entities, organizations, and groups from all regions. A particular emphasis will be given to representatives of marginalized and vulnerable young people. The Forum will also reflect the diversity of youth organizations working at the grassroots, national, regional and international levels.

Side Events

Virtual side-events will be held on 18 April 2022, a day prior to the ECOSOC Youth Forum 2022, to enrich the discussions at the forum, offer diverse platforms for dedicated exchanges of views and expand further opportunities for networking. Guidelines for organizing side events will be shared at the ECOSOC Youth Forum's website in advance of the Forum.

Outcomes

The outcome of the Youth 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, the High-level Political Forum in July, the 2022 STI Forum and the FFD Forum, the Oceans Conference, and sent to all Permanent Missions to the UN in New York as well as to the team preparing the Secretary-General's Transforming Education Summit in 2022.

An informal summary of the proceedings will also be prepared including specific recommendations which will also be shared with decision-makers.

In addition, major youth networks will bring together youth entities/organizations to prepare the "*Voices of Youth*" at the ECOSOC Youth Forum. This document would be a complement to the formal Major Group on Children and Youth Sectoral Position Paper, to be prepared for the HLPF in July. It would be a direct call to action from young people on the current challenges they are facing and their expectations vis-à-vis the international community and contain a few high priority action points which young people may want to be reflected in the HLPF Ministerial Declaration.