

Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

“Youth shaping sustainable and innovative solutions: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of crises”

SIDE EVENT AT THE 2024 ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM

Event Report

“Towards a Global Standard for Meaningful Youth Engagement in the Pact for the Future”

Organized by the International Association of Youth and Students for Peace & UN Youth Delegates and Youth Representatives of Austria, Czechia, Denmark, the European Union, Ireland, Kenya, Malta, Switzerland, and the United States of America; co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Ireland and the European Union to the UN

General information on the Event

The Side Event took place on 18 April at the European Union Mission to the UN with two primary objectives. First, to define and recommit to standards of meaningful youth engagement such as the ones outlined in the *Secretary General's Policy Brief 3* and secondly, develop actionable recommendations for meaningful youth engagement by outlining barriers, voicing best practices and facilitating action. We wanted to put a spotlight on a timely debate which works to fill the ongoing negotiations



on the Pact of the Future with concrete ideas for implementation, and work towards the achievement of SDG 16.7, which aims to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels. We furthermore sought to foster substantive dialogue by facilitating intergenerational and interactive discussions exploring youth involvement in policy-making processes in line with SDG 17.

To realise these ambitious goals we were beyond thankful to build on trusted partnerships. With the event co-organised by youth delegates and representatives of 10 countries we again wanted to highlight the incredible potential youth participation has for global cooperation.



The event commenced with keynotes provided through a “[Global Call for Video Statements](#)” and Marija Vasileva-Blazev (*Special Adviser UN Youth Office*). These highlighted not focusing on the ‘why’ of youth involvement, given its undeniable importance, but the ‘how’ and showcased initiatives such as the [Youth 2030 Agenda](#), the [Let #YouthLead](#) campaign and how the UN Youth Office is working to shape the outcomes of the Pact of the Future. Following these first deliberations, three distinguished experts were welcomed to the panel: Lopa Banerjee (*Director of the Civil Society Division at UN-Women*), Nudhara Yusuf (*Co-Chair of the UN Civil Society Conference in Support of SOTF*) and Shreyaa Venkat (*Founder and CEO of NEST4US*).

An event on meaningful youth participation must hold up to its own calls to the best of its ability. All participants had the opportunity to engage the panelists in a collective discussion around key questions. Through this active fishbowl method, speakers from various backgrounds and regions shared their insights on the importance of establishing global standards for meaningful youth engagement.

Main Outcomes

Standards Are Essential: Standards help to systematically measure and monitor the effectiveness of youth engagement initiatives, ensuring they are accountable and impactful. Unlike vague principles, standards provide a concrete framework that can guide meaningful integration of youth in policy dialogues and decision-making processes.

Barriers to Meaningful Youth Engagement:

1. **Accessibility Issues:** Challenges due to gender, geographic location, disability, etc., hinder equal participation.
2. **Financial Constraints:** Inadequate funding and lack of resources such as capacity building or guidance restrict effective youth involvement.
3. **Limited Opportunities:** The lack of institutionally mandated spaces for intergenerational dialogue and shrinking civic spaces pose significant challenges.
4. **Lack of Accountability:** Absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms leads to diminished accountability.
5. **Disillusionment Among Youth:** Many young people feel disheartened by the minimal impact of their initiatives and a perceived lack of support in rejuvenating democratic engagement.
6. **Tokenism:** Youth often feel they are not genuinely represented or heard in political arenas.

Strategic Shifts Required:

1. **Recognizing Youth Potential:** Acknowledging the unique creativity, resilience, and potential of young people as fundamental to driving change.
2. **Empowering Youth:** Encouraging youth to co-create and lead initiatives, recognizing them not merely as participants but as partners in policy-making.
3. **Youth-Led Approaches:** Emphasizing strategies 'by youth, with youth, for youth' to ensure genuine representation and involvement.
4. **Intergenerational Cooperation:** Promoting partnerships across generations to enrich policy-making with diverse insights and experiences.
5. **Implementing Standards:** Developing measurable, institutionalized standards to uplift communities and ensure meaningful youth engagement is protected and sustained.
6. **Action-Oriented Involvement:** Facilitating youth involvement in policy development at all stages, from planning to implementation, ensuring their voices lead to tangible outcomes.
7. **Capacity Building:** Investing in education and training to equip youth with necessary skills and knowledge to effectively participate, contribute, and lead.
8. **Institutional Integration:** Establishing permanent, structured youth engagement mechanisms within organizations and governments to ensure sustained and impactful participation.

Examples of Youth Engagement Opportunities: Participants discussed various models and avenues where youth engagement has and could lead to significant policy impacts with greater investment. Examples include CSW68 youth delegate spaces, youth advisory boards, impact coalitions, leadership appointments, the Sarai Movement, and the UN Civil Society Conference. These examples highlight the potential of well-supported youth initiatives to influence global policies and agendas.

Going Forward: The discussions emphasized the need for ongoing refinement of youth engagement strategies to ensure they are dynamic, responsive, and inclusive. This approach allows young people globally to actively influence their futures. It was noted that current challenges and opportunities should not restrict future efforts, but rather, a flexible and comprehensive approach to youth empowerment should be adopted. This includes employing a multistakeholder approach, reassessing restrictive field requirements, and ensuring that initiatives continually evolve to meet future needs.



Further Resources

Please find the full recording of the event and the key-note video [here](#).