

Summary of HLPF 2023 Special Event: Intergenerational dialogue on leveraging skills and investment to achieve the SDGs



Overview

At a time of compounding crises, young people fear an uncertain future. The economic lives of working-age youth are being challenged by increases in the cost of living, inflation, un- and underemployment, conflicts as well as an escalating climate emergency and rapid digital transformation.

During the 2023 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the European Union and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) co-organized a Special Event on Wednesday 19 July 2023, which brought together young people and decision-makers from across the globe to discuss youth economic

empowerment and the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through two intergenerational panel discussions, this event provided concrete ideas on challenges and solutions for youth economic empowerment and what skills and investments are needed to empower youth economically and expedite the achievement the SDGs. To watch the archived video of the event, please go to [Intergenerational dialogue on leveraging skills and investment to achieve the SDGs \(HLPF 2023 Special Event\) | UN Web TV](#).

Programme

Opening Session

Master of Ceremony

Ms. Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

Opening remarks by **H.E. Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva**, President of ECOSOC 2022-2023

Introduction and Welcome by **H.E. Ms. Jutta Urpilainen**, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships

Quick-Takes Conversation Session

Moderator

Saru Duckworth, United Nations Foundation Next Generation Fellow, BRAC Program Associate for Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative

Panelists:

1. **Jessica Polfjärd**, Member of the European Parliament
2. **Jevanic Henry**, Member of the UN Secretary-General Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change
3. **Luísa Franco Machado**, Co-Founder Jeunes OpenGov
4. **Sameh Kamel**, Organizing Partner of MGCY
5. **Gibson Kawago**, Founder and Chief Technical Officer of WAGA

Sunlit Conversation Session

Moderator

Jayathma Wickramanayake, United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth

Panelists:

1. **H.E. Ms. Maritza Chan**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations
2. **Cillian Lohan**, EESC member, Vice-president of the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)

3. **Mr. Steven Collet**, Deputy Director-General for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands
4. **Hanyuan (Karen) Wang**, Climind CEO and Founder
5. **Daniele Taurino**, European Youth Forum
6. **Ana Aguirre**, Global Youth President of the International Cooperative Alliance
7. **Ronelli Requena**, Founder and Designer of Zayvha

**Closing by Jayathma Wickramanayake
United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth**

Outcomes: key messages from sessions

1. Challenges presented at the Quick-Takes Conversation session



The first panel highlighted the following **challenges** to youth economic empowerment and **uncertainties associated with the effects of the digital and green transitions** on future economic opportunities for youth.

Educational Barriers

- Skills taught in institutions no longer match those needed for the jobs of the future. Education needs to respond to the changing skillsets required by the digital transformation.
- The educational system needs reform, and SDG 4 should be mainstreamed across all development objectives.
- More effort should be made to connect young entrepreneurs with mentors and networks to advance their ideas.

Lack of Funding

- Funding to scale-up youth-led solutions should be increased and be more accessible to all young people.
- National and sub-national institutions need to increase support for development initiatives driven by youth.

Strengthening Partnerships

- Youth Engagement and the UN:
 - Youth issues should be addressed collectively at the UN.
 - The ideas and participation of young people need to be taken seriously, and youth should not be involved in discussions as tokens.
 - Youth spaces should be led by young people and be free from co-optation by non-youth actors.
 - Member States should follow-up their commitments to youth empowerment with long-term commitments and funding for meaningful youth engagement that aims to protect young people and their rights.
- Government partnerships and actions
 - Youth advocates should engage with local and national governments.
 - Youth advocates should approach governments with a clear and concrete outline of both the problem they would like to address and solutions they are proposing. Advocates should outline what actions they are asking of the government and how much funding should be allocated to this action. While these actions can help advance issues important to young people, the success of youth-led solutions are often contingent on political will.
 - Youth can partner with influential stakeholders to amplify their messages to decision-makers.
 - To reach and protect the most marginalized sectors of societies, governments should approach these groups directly and ask what skills and investments they need to support their communities. Policy making and

initiatives regarding such communities should derive from these discussions.

Green and Digital Transformations

- Young people are paying the highest price for the climate crisis and uncertainties of digital transformation.
- Like the global COVID-19 pandemic, these transitions could exacerbate existing inequalities. These inequalities must be addressed before they are exacerbated by the digital transformation.
- LGBTQIA+ youth, young women, and people of color, as well as other marginalized communities are massively underrepresented in the digital and green sectors, not due to their lack of ability but rather due to systemic barriers. The question is not whether we are creating new jobs with these transitions, but who can access them. We cannot exclude marginalized communities from benefiting from the green and digital revolutions.

2. Solutions presented at Sunlit Conversation Session



The second panel focused on the solutions to many of the challenges presented in the first panel, discussing **what skills and solutions are needed** and **how we should approach the digital and green transitions to preserve and create economic opportunities for young people**.

Digital Solutions

- As we live in an age of unprecedented connectivity, we have tremendous opportunities to utilize digital technologies for the benefit of young people.
- We can broadly expand access to education through digital infrastructure:
 - At-home education can give more autonomy to young people in how they want to acquire skills and what skills they choose to focus on.
- Digital technologies like Chat GPT present both challenges and opportunities for youth empowerment, as they can be used to distribute disinformation and provide false simple solutions, while at the same time holding the potential to revolutionize the way that we work.
- Access to information through digital technologies can also increase youth capacities for participation.

Participation and Partnerships

- Youth participation is threatened by the shrinking spaces for civil society and a global authoritarian tide; for youth to be able to participate in shaping the future, we must ensure that our societies remain democratic, while at the same time democratizing spaces that are currently less so.
- Leaders must have the foresight to consult young people on projects and proposals at all levels, so that finalized projects reflect their experiences, and that young people can feel a sense of meaningful participation and ownership in the political process.
- “To democratize power, we need to socialize knowledge;” our education systems must promote participatory cultures and democratic values, while giving young people the skills to contribute equally.
- As we face many setbacks in the achievement of the SDGs, which are often the result of decades of inaction by older generations, youth engagement and activism can spur ambition and action among leaders:
 - The Fridays for Future movement, which has been particularly influential in promoting the European Green Deal, which has now been taken up by the European Union’s Commission is testament to this trend.
- For meaningful youth engagement to become a reality, youth need to be understood as equal partners; eye-to-eye dialogues in which both parties are equally engaged can be part of the solution to bridging intergenerational divides on questions of technology and the green transition.
- Neither the green nor the digital transitions should be taken as given; we have the chance to shape them together so that our futures are more equal and just.

Resilient Economies

- The future of youth is highly dependent on the future of our economies.
- To be self-sustainable and empowered, young people must have access to meaningful and permanent employment.
- Young people belong to the most educated generation in human history, and yet they often lack access to quality jobs and mentorship for work.
- As the labor market is the product of policy-makers decisions, they have the responsibility to make it more inclusive for young people.
- Our education systems must be reformed to give more agency to young people to choose their career paths; while at the same time coordinating with the private sector to ensure that the skills our institutions transmit are suitable for the labor market.
- While young people require access to mentorship, their labor and their contributions must be appropriately valued; internships must be paid.
- In light of the green transition and our planet's limited resources, it is imperative to consider the long-term sustainability of our economies:
 - Short-term profit should be de-emphasized in favor of new economic models that favor resilience and equality; cooperative businesses can play a role in this.

ANNEX I.

Key takeaways (prepared by Maxime van Hoeve)

Opening statements
Opening remarks by H.E. Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva, President of ECOSOC
<p>H.E. Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva opened the Special Event by acknowledging the significant uncertainties faced by youth in recent years, especially concerning labour market opportunities. According to the ILO, more than 1 in 5 young people are currently not employed or in training, a challenge that disproportionately affects youth in low- and middle-income countries. The pandemic has further exacerbated this trend, leading to inflation and a cost-of-living crisis that has pushed millions into poverty.</p> <p>To address these pressing issues, H.E. Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva emphasized the need to increase youth engagement at the United Nations. The Summit of the Future, scheduled for 2024, will place this crucial topic on the agenda. However, today's event marks the beginning of the conversation on how to tackle these challenges effectively.</p>
Introduction and Welcome by H.E. Ms. Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships
<p>H.E. Ms. Jutta Urpilainen highlighted the significance of youth engagement as a crucial aspect of her work. She emphasized the need to tackle global challenges collectively, such as 1) Russia's war on Ukraine, 2) the pandemic's adverse impact on education and inequalities, and 3) the threats posed by climate change to economies and the future of our planet. These combined challenges create uncertainty in our economic future. However, Ms. Urpilainen also recognized that the climate emergency and rapid digital transformation present opportunities for transforming the working environment.</p> <p>To ensure the success of the largest generation of youth, the EU relies on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a guiding framework. Placing youth at the core of efforts, the EU aims to equip them with the necessary skills for the jobs that will emerge from the green and digital transition. Achieving this goal involves fostering partnerships between various sectors, including collaboration with the private sector.</p>

H.E. Ms. Jutta Urpilainen has a particular focus on projects within the EU that prioritize education. Notably, the EU published the first Voluntary Reviews (VRs) with a dedicated section on youth during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Furthermore, during the SDG Summit, the EU aims to reinvigorate efforts to advance the SDGs.

Panel 1: Quick-Takes Conversation Session

During the first half of the event, speakers shared brief statements that sparked dialogue. Moderator Saru Duckworth, a United Nations Foundation Next Generation Fellow and BRAC Program Associate for the Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative, asked panelists about the essential elements for youth economic empowerment. From their responses, it became evident that addressing the skills mismatch, funding constraints, and power imbalances are crucial challenges to overcome.

The panelists also emphasized that while the green and digital transition present opportunities, it is vital to ensure these advancements do not disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. To effectively scale up youth initiatives and engage with governments, it is essential not only to present the problems but also to provide viable solutions. By tackling these issues collaboratively, we can foster youth empowerment and create a more inclusive economic landscape.

During the event, several speakers shared their insights on youth empowerment:

- Saru Duckworth emphasized that having the right skills can make a significant difference in achieving success or feeling isolated.
- Jessica Polfjärd highlighted the impact of young leaders like Greta Thunberg and stressed the importance of education in equipping youth with skills for various transitions, particularly in the face of climate change and budget reallocations.
- Jevanic Henry addressed the challenge of skills mismatch and advocated for education system reform with a focus on accessibility, availability, and affordability. For this, he highlighted the need for support from national institutions. Besides, he pointed out that young people's fear to be left behind increased with the pandemic, considering the unequal distribution of vaccinations.
- Luísa Franco Machado emphasized the barriers young leaders face from older colleagues due to systemic injustices and called for true investment in the skills of young people to empower their ambitions. She also saw the green and digital transition as an opportunity to address these injustices.

- Sameh Kamel noted the disconnect between older generations perceiving youth as lucky to be able to access certain services while young people face challenges like climate change and limited funding. He stressed the importance of listening to youth voices to overcome these issues.
- Gibson Kawago stressed the significance of providing quality education and practical skills to prepare youth for future job requirements. Mentorship and a stable political environment were also highlighted as crucial for young people to operationalize their ideas.
- In response to a question from the audience about interacting with governments to scale up youth initiatives, the panelists advised conducting stakeholder mapping to find relevant programs that align with their initiatives. By considering these insights and taking collaborative action, we can foster youth empowerment and create a more supportive environment for their initiatives and ambitions.

Panel 2: Sunlit Conversation Session

In the second part of the session, Moderator Jayathma Wickramanayake, the United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, posed a crucial question: What skills and investments are necessary to support youth during the transition? Key takeaways from this panel discussion include:

1. Democratizing knowledge and socializing education in an increasingly digitalized world is essential for empowering youth and addressing societal challenges.
2. Many of today's crises are deeply rooted in our current economic model, necessitating a transformation towards one that operates within the limits of our planet.
3. Recognizing and investing in the well-being of young people is vital, as they face multiple challenges during this time of polycrisis.
4. Achieving peace requires dialogue and cooperation, necessitating a reform of the global contract to foster unity rather than division between regions.
5. Transformative action is needed to effectively implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and address pressing global issues.

By heeding these insights and focusing on collaborative efforts, we can better support youth during their transitions and work towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

During the session, various speakers shared their insights on youth empowerment and the skills needed for their success:

- H.E. Ms. Maritza Chan emphasized that youth lack opportunities, not skills. To effect real change in history, we must provide them with an enabling environment and a seat at the table.
- Cillian Lohan highlighted the importance of two types of skills: vocational and participatory. Both are essential, not just for highly intellectual positions but also for fostering active participation. He stressed the need to involve youth in designing these skills and called for a systemic shift to include their energy and ideas in achieving the SDGs.
- Hanyuan (Karen) Wang discussed the importance of learning how to learn, with learning taking on different meanings in various environments. Advancements in AI demonstrate the ability to learn differently.
- Steven Collet shared insights on the Netherlands' 'Youth at Heart' strategy, which equips young people with the necessary skills for the labor market. The program, shaped by youth, also emphasizes the significance need for improvement of soft skills.
- Daniele Taurino advocated for democratizing the labor market and ensuring equal rights for young people, including paid internships. He highlighted the need for larger reforms in education and welfare systems, such as reducing the workweek, and considering post-growth models aligned with planetary boundaries.
- Ana Aguirre stressed the importance of participation and ownership for youth to engage in the labor market. Socializing knowledge for participatory societies is vital, moving beyond just empowering youth to making them self-sustained.
- Ronelli Requena emphasized the need to support lifelong learning for youth and invest in education beyond institutional forms.
By considering these valuable perspectives, we can better equip and empower youth for the challenges and opportunities ahead, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable future.

ANNEX II. Social Media Engagement

Following the event, a number of panelists and the President of ECOSOC shared quotes and key messages from the event on Twitter. Some of these are included below.

UN ECOSOC President @UNECOSOC

We are here today, because there is no viable future for this world if youth are not engaged and have not the opportunity to thrive economically. #Youth2030 #HLPF #GlobalGoals #SDGs

3:50 PM · Jul 19, 2023 · 5,491 Views

26 Retweets 5 Quotes 94 Likes 1 Bookmark

Jevanic Henry @Jeo758

Engaging intergenerational session at #HLPF2023 organized by @SustDev and @EU_Social on driving youth economic empowerment for #Agenda2030 in light of uncertainties with the digital and green transitions. #Youth2030 @YAGClimate

View session here: rb.gy/kqinf (1/4)

12:28 PM · Jul 20, 2023 · 297 Views

1 Retweet 11 Likes

Saru Duckworth @SaruDuckworth

Had an incredible intergenerational dialogue at the United Nations #HLPF2023 session on #skills and investments for youth economic empowerment! 🌍 🇪🇺

A million thanks to those who joined, and @EU_Partnerships @UNDESA for having us.

#YOUTH2030 @OurFutureAgenda

10:12 AM · Jul 20, 2023 · 514 Views

6 Retweets 21 Likes

UNESCO EU @UNESCOEU

YESTERDAY!

Ronelli Requena, fashion designer from #Belize 🇧🇪 & beneficiary of @UNESCO #Transcultura Programme funded by @EU_Partnerships 🇪🇺 took part in the #HLPF2023 to discuss youth economic empowerment & progress on the #SDGs.

Listen: media.un.org/en/asset/k1m/k...

#Youth2030

UNESCO 🏛️ #Education #Sciences #Culture 🌍 and 9 others

4:35 AM · Jul 20, 2023 · 1,513 Views

1 Retweet 4 Likes

ANNEX III. Digital cards created by OISC-DESA

