

## Youth Assembly for the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

### Background and Context

Children and youth are not just the future, but actors of today, comprising over 40 percent of the global population. Young engagement has become a high priority in the multilateral system in recent years, with strong references on youth and future generations made in the Secretary Generals' Our Common Agenda report<sup>1</sup> released in September 2021.

The engagement of youth in global, regional and country-based institutions has historically been characterised by two conflicting attitudes. On one hand, children and youth are recognized as one of the most vulnerable populations to economic, social, and environmental impacts, and therefore, key beneficiaries of policies and processes aimed at mitigating those effects. However, they have traditionally not been seen or directly engaged as co-shapers of these policies and processes. On the other hand is a prevailing message that young people are symbols of hope and that they will "save the world" with their energy, creativity, and passion. Inconsistent with this positive sentiment is the reality that young people are often receiving limited financing and institutional support to contribute to global issues, having to balance underpaid advocacy work with their own education and careers.

This has begun to shift through hard fought advocacy by youth constituencies leading to global and regional initiatives such as the UN Youth2030 strategy, the European Union's Youth Action Plan, the United States' launch of the Global Youth Democracy Network and Canada's Youth Secretariat and Council.

Since 2019, the youth in the UNECE Region has engaged in the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development to bring the youth concerns and demands on the SDGs under review, with the vision to be agents of change in building a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

### *About UNECE*

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was set up in 1947 by ECOSOC. UNECE's major aim is to promote pan-European economic integration. UNECE includes 56 member States in Europe, North America and Asia. Over 70 international professional organisations and other non-governmental organisations take part in UNECE activities.

### *What is the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development?*

For the UNECE region, the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) is a broadly recognized platform that has brought together a growing number of actors and groups since its first stand-alone session in 2017.

Bringing together countries from North America, Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia as well as Israel, the Regional Forum has engaged Member States in the exchange on regional priority issues of prosperity,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>

innovation, inclusion, gender equality and environmental sustainability, climate change and sustainable consumption and production, with a positive impact on SDG implementation at the national level. It is similar to a “Regional HLPF”.

### ***RFSD 2024***

The 2024 UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) will take place ahead of the 2024 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The annual intergovernmental forum aims to assess progress and exchange knowledge, best practices, and policy solutions to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in line with regional priorities.

Organised by the UNECE, the Forum will provide the space for an in-depth review of the Goals to be reviewed by the HLPF in 2024: SDG 1 (no poverty); SDG 2 (zero hunger); SDG 13 (climate action); SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); and SDG 17 (partnership for the Goals). The Forum will also support the presentation of voluntary national reviews (VNRs) at the 2024 HLPF.

### **Youth Assembly: Connecting youth to RFSD**

In the lead-up to the RFSD, adolescents and youth will gather virtually (before the RFSD) and in-person (at the RFSD itself) to frame their priorities and demands - as well as showcasing how young people across the region are leading action on the SDGs.

The Youth Assembly is a self organised space - convened by youth, for youth - which provides a dynamic platform for policy discussions, training and capacity building for youth engaging at the RFSD.

In particular, the youth assembly will aim at reflecting the themes of the RFSD, the Youth Assembly will focus on SDGs under review, specifically progress in the areas of SDG 1 (no poverty); SDG 2 (zero hunger); SDG 13 (climate action); SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); and SDG 17 (partnership for the Goals).

The Youth Assembly is open to all adolescents and young people in the ECE Region - whether they are participating at the RFSD in person or following online. It is aimed to take place across a number of days - starting with virtual convening spaces and culminating in an in person meeting the day before RFSD.

The ECE Regional Caucus Coordinators of the MGCY (Focal Points for the ECE Region for MGCY and the ECE-RCEM) are organising the Youth Assembly, with support from the MGCY Secretariat and MGCY members from the ECE Region. MGCY is also coordinating with UNECE the youth engagement across the RFSD and hopes to build strong relationships with the Issue-based Coalition on Adolescent and Youth to ensure strong synergies on youth development and a ensure system-wide approach to meaningful youth engagement in SDG follow-up and review at the regional level.

## 1. Agenda of the Youth Forum

### a) Youth Assembly - Day 1 (Virtual):

Thursday, March 7, 2024

#### Introduction about UNECE, RFSD, regional processes in the ECE region & Sub-Regional Break-Outs

Time-slot	Item
15:00 - 15:15	Opening remarks and overview - representatives from MGCY (RCCs) Round of introductions / Ice-breakers <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What is your background? What do you hope to get out of your participation?</li><li>● Will you be joining the RFSD in person?</li></ul>
15:15 - 15:45	<b>Overview of the process on UN regional process, etc on regional level.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Representative from UN agencies presenting about RFSD and other regional UN processes<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Monika Linn, Principal Adviser, Office of the Executive Secretary, UNECE</li><li>○ Aida Ailarova, Regional Adolescent Development Specialist, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office</li><li>○ Valeria Rocca, Senior Regional SDG Advisor, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia</li></ul></li><li>● Representatives from youth</li></ul>
15.45 - 16.30	<b>Sub-regional discussions</b> across the goals under review and other processes on regional/global level. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- North America<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Moderator: Sophia Chen, Global Youth Caucus on Decent Jobs and Sustainable Economies</li><li>- Representative from RCYNO</li></ul></li><li>- Central Asia and Israel<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Moderator: Sologo, Chemicals and Waste Youth Platform</li></ul></li><li>- Europe (Western / Eastern Europe)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Timea, MGCY RCC</li></ul></li></ul> <p>Reporting back from the break out session</p>
16.30 - 17.15	<b>Summit of the Future Engagement</b> (Shannon) A dedicated segment on Summit of the Future <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Presentation from some keynote speakers</li><li>● Interaction with speakers and among youth</li></ul>
17.15 - 17.30	<b>Closing</b>

**b) Youth Assembly - Day 2 (Virtual):**

**Friday, March 8, 2024**

**Focus on Goals under review and finalising preparations for RFSD**

<b>Time-slot</b>	<b>Item</b>
15:00 - 15:10 CET	<b>Opening remarks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Representative from MGCY: Cristina Arnes Sanz</li></ul>
15:10 - 15:50 CET	<b>Overview of the five SDGs under review in the context of the ECE Region and explanation of the SDG review process in RFSD (e.g., roundtables)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Representative from UNECE: Elise Zerrath</li><li>● Representative from UNFPA: Rune Brandrup</li></ul>
15:50 – 16:30 CET	<b><i>SDG 1 (No poverty) OR SDG 2 (Zero hunger)</i></b> - Two breakout rooms  Moderator to present some key ideas / perspectives about the goal under review in context of the ECE region and then facilitate discussion among the participants based on guiding questions to collect inputs for RFSD <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● SDG 1 moderator: Maria Szczerbowska</li><li>● SDG 2 moderator: Adzra Aliyya</li></ul>
16:30-17:10 CET	<b><i>SDG 13 (Climate Action) OR SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions)</i></b> - Two breakout rooms  Moderator to present some key ideas / perspectives about the goal under review in context of the ECE region and then facilitate discussion among the participants based on guiding questions to collect inputs for RFSD <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● SDG 13 moderator: Elene Samukashvili</li><li>● SDG 16 moderator: Joshua Steib</li></ul>
17:10 – 17:30 CET	<b>Report back from SDG breakout rooms and next steps in RFSD</b>  Moderators to report back the inputs collected in the breakout session and then RCCs will comment the next steps on RFSD regarding the in-person youth assembly/statement drafting

### **c) Youth Assembly - Day 3 (In-Person):**

**12th March 2024, Palais des Nations**

Time-slot	Item
10-11	Civil Society pre-meeting: Introduction and Orientation
11-11.30	<b>Youth Assembly Day 3 - Opening Session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UNECE ASG Youth Affairs Welcome Video Message</li><li>• Introduction to RFSD + Introduction of participants</li><li>• Conclusions and reflections from the online segment of the Youth Assembly</li></ul>
11.30-12.30	<b>Youth Dialogue Session with UN</b>  Moderated exchange between youth and diverse stakeholders including UN representatives and representatives of the RFSD Co-Chairs. The conversation will revolve around youth views and experiences on the themes of the RFSD, reflecting in the online youth assembly, with focus on the SDGs under review: SDG 1 (No Poverty); SDG 2 (Zero Hunger); SDG 13 (Climate Action); SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions); and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).
12.30-13.30	Break
13.30-15.00	<b>Drafting the Youth Report with the inputs from Day 1 and Day 2 (SDG breakout segments) of the online part of the Youth Assembly, as well as new inputs from in-person participants in Day 3</b>
15.00-15.30	<b>Next steps at RFSD: Roundtables, bilaterals, etc</b>
15.45-17.00	Civil Society pre-meeting: Combining priorities
17-17.30	Civil Society pre-meeting: Closing session

- In yellow: activities exclusive to the Youth Assembly - Day 3.
- In blue: activities from the Civil Society pre-meeting.

### **About the Major Group for Children and Youth**

The Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) is the UN General Assembly mandated formal engagement mechanism for children and youth to engage in the United Nations. Its primary purpose is engaging communities of young people, in the form of formal and informal child-led, youth-led, and child-and-youth-serving federations, unions, organisations, associations, councils, networks, clubs, movements, mechanisms, structures and other entities, as well as their members and individuals, in the design, implementation, monitoring, and follow up & review of sustainable development policies at all levels.

In order to navigate the UN and multilateral system in an impactful way, MGCY convenes its coordination structures, inter alia, alongside topics of work, regions, types of entities/organisations by scope of work, and by organisational standing in the UN.

**Areas of work:**

MGCY aims to:

2. Facilitate the collective participation of young people in official, formal and informal avenues of policy design, implementation, monitoring, follow-up, and review at all levels.
3. Facilitate activities for young people to enhance their understanding, knowledge, and skills in relation to sustainable development, meaningful engagement, and the UN system.
4. Provide young people a platform for dialogue to create an evidence base for best practices through the assessment of existing knowledge, generating new knowledge, identification of emerging issues, and effective use and dissemination.
5. Provide young people with a platform that encourages them to lead, join, showcase, and share innovative and effective actions addressing the needs of people and the planet.