

ECOSOC YOUTH FORUM 7 and 8 April 2021

"ACHIEVING THE SDGs WITH AND FOR YOUTH"

Interactive Virtual Round Table

Preparation

Input elements for a combined intervention by Minister Benjamin DALLE from BELGIUM (2 minutes) and by Ms Oriane SCHMIDT from the UN Youth Delegates (1 minute)

Dear Chair, Ms Jayathma Wickramanayake (the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth), colleagues, UN youth representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first thank you for organising this interactive virtual round table on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the ECOSOC Youth Forum.

As far as the content is concerned, we align ourselves, as always, with our colleagues from the European Union.

The three Communities of Belgium have a longstanding tradition in youth participation and partnerships. The respective Youth Councils are anchored by decree and can, inter alia, give advice on their own initiative on all topics that concern young people.

Children and young people should no longer only be seen as the future, but first and foremost as a group that exists here and now, today! It is crucial to pay attention to the voice of children and young people and to act on it! A good example in this respect is the extensive preparation of the present four questions with all actors involved within the three Communities of Belgium. On simple request, this written preparation can be obtained from the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the UN and our Belgian UN Youth Delegates.

Conversations with young people show that they are active and engaged (even in crisis situations) and are agents of change. Through their engagement, young people contribute to the 2030 Agenda and help keep certain topics on the agenda!

By structurally anchoring youth participation in all policy areas, especially areas that concern them, young people are given the opportunity to have a greater and more direct impact on the implementation of the (youth-related) SDGs. Young people are by nature more innovative, creative and progressive, which is why they offer a different perspective and form of knowledge in policy-making processes. This is nicely illustrated during this pandemic period by the Youth Work Summer 2020 that came about after intensive consultation with all youth actors and with the involvement of all stakeholders from the three Communities!

The COVID-19 crisis has also shown us the importance of intergenerational partnerships. Young people volunteered for example to go shopping for their elderly neighbours. We also saw how youth

movements built self-invented constructions at nursing homes and residential care facilities so that residents can see visitors standing outside at the level of the floor where they are staying.

To reach the goals set out by the 2030 Agenda all actors and relevant partners need to be on board. The National Commission for the Rights of the Child in Belgium is currently running a process for and together with children and young people to translate the 'Concluding Observations for Belgium' in a way that is tailor-made for children and young people and establishes an explicit link with the SDGs in the final reflections.

The SDGs are also present in the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan which sets out 5 priorities with a direct link with the SDGs in each chapter. By way of example, priority 1 is about well-being and positive identity development. Promoting the mental well-being of young people is also included in the SDGs, more specifically in Goal 3.4. The COVID-19 crisis has also directly impacted labour market and professional opportunities for young people. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that youth unemployment remains a major challenge. Therefore, the realisation of decent work is part of the vision of the SDGs and youth employment is seen as an important element in realising sustainable economic growth. In order to achieve access to quality jobs that match young people's interests and talents, Goal 4.4 aims to get more young people into work by helping them acquire the skills needed for employment. Goal 8.3 also aims to develop policies that promote the employment of young people.

Recently, the French Community has engaged in a 4-year EU programme with the aim of providing opportunities for young people to engage towards the fulfilment of the SDGs at the local level, while connecting with their counterparts across different regions in Europe.

The Youth Strategic Plan (2023-2027) of the German-speaking Community which considers the SDGs was also drafted by a cross-sectoral working group, gathering individual young people and representatives of the youth work sector, the government, and the ministry.

I would also like to use this opportunity to thank all the Belgian UN Youth Delegates (UNYDs) who are working actively on all these key topics. To underline this, I would now like to give the floor to one of the UN Youth Delegates from the French community, Ms Oriane SCHMIDT.

Intervention from the UN Youth Delegates by Ms Oriane SCHMIDT

Dear Chair, Ms Jayathma Wickramanayake (the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth),
Dear fellow delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honor today to take the floor together with Minister Benjamin Dalle to present the work of Belgian UN Youth Delegates in relation to the SDGs. As delegates representing the youth of our country we are trying to put the SDGs in the picture as often as possible. On a local level we try to bring these goals closer to children and youth through education, social media platforms and by implementing concrete youth-led projects. To give just a few examples, we are working on gender equality (SDG5), climate (SDG 13) and sustainable food systems (SDG 2, 13, 15).

At the federal level, we are in contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Mission, which allows us to bring the voice of Belgian youth on the international scene and to take the floor at official events. We work also closely together with UN Youth Delegates from other countries.

In 2020, the Decade of Action called for accelerating sustainable solutions to deliver the SDGs by 2030. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of our lives, and hit vulnerable groups such as young people. This didn't affect young people's engagement: young people are agents of change and deserve a seat at the table. The Agenda 2030 needs to be implemented together with young people, and my presence here shows that we are going in the right direction.

Thank you for your attention.