



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 November 2024

English only

Commission for Social Development

Sixty-third session

10–14 February 2025

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority Theme: “Strengthening solidarity, social inclusion and social cohesion to accelerate the delivery of the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Statement submitted by the International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

This statement is presented by the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, a portfolio of the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University. We work closely with policymakers to ensure that the voices of young people are integral to decision-making processes. Our mission is to amplify youth representation in policy by organizing community consultations and partnering with youth-driven NGOs. Through these efforts, we empower young people to directly contribute their perspectives and concerns, making sure their input shapes international policies and discussions.

As we approach the 63rd Commission on Social Development, we want to emphasize the unique perspective that young people possess on this year's priority theme of strengthening solidarity, social inclusion and social cohesion to accelerate the delivery of the previous United Nations commitments.

Youth, as digital natives, are at the forefront of technological advancements, cultural shifts, and global interconnectedness, offering insights that stem from their unique lived experiences. Given our direct impact from long-term policy decisions, youth hold valuable knowledge that can help ensure that slow-moving, multilateral policies address both current and future challenges effectively. Therefore, our recommendations for the Commission on Social Development should be framed with this unique lived experience in mind.

We emphasize the criticality of encouraging and supporting the integration of grassroots organizations, initiatives and activism into policy development at both national and international levels, recognizing their unique yet under-supported contributions to overcoming barriers in social development. While local involvement with SDGs remains nascent, grassroots partners play a crucial role in identifying social development challenges, priorities and solutions. As a youth-based grass-roots organization, we have experienced firsthand the difficulties in gaining visibility and consideration for our policy suggestions on a national and international scale. Our experience underscores the need for enhanced resource allocation and institutional support to empower grassroots initiatives, solutions and perspectives, ultimately fostering a more inclusive roadmap to achieving the SDGs.

We value the commitment outlined in the Copenhagen Declaration to strengthening partnerships between governments, organizations and civil society. However, **we urge the Commission on Social Development to move away from relying on top-down approaches to policy development and promote the active participation of grassroots organizations in critical decision-making processes, initiatives and platforms.** Bottom-up and top-down partnerships require exploration to achieve balanced and representative decision-making outcomes that impact international social development. This suggestion includes creating interactive platforms for grassroots organizations to share specialized knowledge and development suggestions that are critical in crafting representative social representatives and development solutions.

To ensure equitable development across all nations, **we urge the Commission on Social Development to prioritize the empowerment of grass-roots organizations in LDCs by decentralizing resources to support the success and implementation of their initiatives.** While global seed funding for local organizations has increased, grass-roots organizations in LDCs are monumental in creating innovative and region-specific solutions in areas such as conservation and welfare, human and particularly women's rights and Indigenous rights. Their deep understanding of local challenges, cultures and contexts position them as uniquely capable of developing effective region-specific solutions. To ensure these initiatives are implemented and considered

at the national level, resources must be decentralized and not concentrated at a national governmental level.

We recognise the urgency of shifting away from GDP as the sole measure of development since it fails to account for critical elements that shape broader well-being, including environmental degradation, social inequality, and unpaid household services like care work—areas that young people are disproportionately impacted by. Indeed, 7 of every 10 youth globally are economically disengaged or under-engaged. Moreover, informal economies and unpaid internships remain invisible in these metrics, like the young people who disproportionately occupy key roles in those areas. GDP does not encapsulate nuances of young people’s economic realities. During economic downturns, young people face more severe consequences than adults; a 10-percentage point decline in GDP translates into an 8.1 percentage point decline in youth employment compared to 6.3 percentage points for adults.

We commend the progress the United Nations has made in addressing SDG target 17.19 and moving beyond GDP, especially in the pivotal texts affirmed in the Summit of the Future. **We urge the Commission on Social Development to consider young people when developing alternatives, and to be sure that new metrics incorporate perspectives on unpaid work, environmental sustainability, and other youth-specific challenges.**

Equally important is the need for increased multistakeholder financing for development, particularly toward the Global South, in alignment with the Copenhagen Declaration. While youth face unprecedented global challenges, austerity threatens to undermine previous foundations of protection. Greater investment is essential in programs that focus on youth education, green jobs, digital access, and mental health support. Such investments are urgent and must be long-term, aimed at equipping young people with the tools they need to carry the torch in sustainable development. **We call on governments and international institutions to commit to substantial financial support for youth-centered initiatives.** Empowering today’s youth is not only an investment in the future but also a crucial step towards building more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable societies.

While we commend the acknowledgment of youth in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely in relation to employment and education, **we urge the Commission on Social development to add mentions of youth in commitments related to human rights and partnerships.** Regarding the former, young people and children remain especially vulnerable in armed conflict, as they often lack capacity and resources to protect themselves. Indeed, between 2022 and 2023, the rate of children killed in areas of conflict tripled, with alarming numbers in Palestine, Yemen, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine. As for the latter, following the Summit of the Future’s outcome, reinforcing language around the structural inclusion of youth voices in multilateral governance for sustainability and equity could ultimately lead to the engagement of a more diverse range of young people at the United Nations, beyond those who can afford to participate.

Furthermore, **we urge Member States to incorporate explicit language on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in upcoming declarations related to Social Development,** as it remains absent from the Copenhagen Declaration. In accordance with the observations made by the working group on discrimination against women and the committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights must be protected, especially in a context where backsliding on women’s rights is prevalent within the United Nations. This issue is directly linked with social development, as the limitation of bodily

autonomy can prevent young girls and women from achieving their full potential in our societies.

All things considered, we call for more intentional integration of youth into global policymaking. By involving young people in decision-making, we ensure that policies reflect the realities of those who will be most affected by long-term global challenges. Empowering grassroots organizations, rethinking development metrics beyond GDP, and addressing critical issues like Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are interconnected steps toward a future where young people are active participants, not just beneficiaries, in shaping more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies.

This statement has been endorsed by *Ágora Ciudadanos Cambiando México*, Education for Social Justice Foundation, International Alliance of Women, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum, Population Matters, and the Sikh Human Rights Group.
