



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable  
development: the role of digital technologies on social  
development and well-being of all.**

### **Statement submitted by International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

As young people, we will inherit the consequences of current decisions made by global leaders. These decisions will not impact us uniformly, as youth facing marginalization will have existing issues of exclusion compounded by the climate crisis. Despite recent efforts to include youth in spaces of international governance and decision-making, youth facing marginalization on the basis of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability and class face continued exclusion from decisions that have a direct impact on their livelihoods.

As an entirely youth-led organization, the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University, calls upon governments to adopt an intersectional framework in the review of the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth. The adoption of this intersectional framework is essential to ensuring the needs of all youth are addressed in a socially just transition towards sustainable development. We highlight seven priority areas with limited progress for marginalized youth and provide corresponding calls to action.

### **Environmental Issues as a Priority Area**

To evaluate the meaningful engagement of youth in environmental decision-making, a useful model - developed by the International Association for Public Participation, is the "ladder of participation." This model includes progressive levels of engagement that can target the consultation of youth on climate policy and allow young people to build a strong foundation for environmental advocacy. By the fifth level, youth are empowered to engage in partnerships. To facilitate these partnerships, we call on governments to support youth-led organizations through funding and capacity development. This will empower youth as they lead initiatives to mitigate the impacts of climate change in their local communities, engage in climate advocacy and is crucial to the process of "ladder participation."

We also call on governments to increase climate literacy by expanding curriculums to include education on the implications of climate change at the local and national level. This climate education must move beyond the discourse on personal responsibility, to build awareness of the role of economic and social systems in driving global greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Girls and Young Women as a Priority Area**

Findings from the 2018 World Youth Report demonstrate that young women's employment is at 30% as compared to young men's employment at 13%. To address the gender gap in access to education and employment, we call on governments to increase the accessibility of education to young women and girls by eliminating legal, administrative, and financial barriers, as well as providing equal opportunity and professional development for women teachers. As experiences of gender-based violence are also a barrier to education and employment, we also call on governments to pay special attention to the elimination of sexual assault and harassment across secondary and post-secondary institutions.

Social enterprise and entrepreneurship have proved successful in improving the livelihoods of young women and girls. To further empower young women and girls in business, we also call on governments to identify and eliminate discriminatory access to credit markets and training opportunities.

### **The Full and Effective Participation of Youth in Society and Decision-Making as a Priority Area**

Thus far, the full and effective participation of youth in society and decision-making has made limited progress. With youth populations on the rise but youth unemployment remaining at 22.2%, 1 in 5 youth lack livelihood skills and are likely to face social exclusion. The added challenges that women, youth with disabilities, and racialized youth face also present significant barriers to participation.

As youth have proven to be successful catalysts for social change and necessary stakeholders in environmental decision-making, we reiterate the call on governments to take into account the contributions of youth in designing, implementing and evaluating national policies and plans. Specifically, we urge governments to go beyond temporary inclusion by allocating spaces for youth in trans-national delegations and establishing youth councils at all levels of government to provide input and recommendations based on the distinct implications of the climate crisis for youth.

### **Globalization as a Priority Area**

The unequal relationships between countries, aggravated by globalization, has created significant barriers for marginalized youths to access opportunities for sustainable development. As a result, youth facing existing exclusion tend to experience increased rates of poverty and unemployment.

While many governments have implemented monetary policies to soften the downturns of our globalized world, these methods remain insufficient when it comes to empowering marginalized youth. We, therefore, call on governments to address human rights abuses as well as provide access to social services, economic opportunities and skills development programs as essential aspects of youth empowerment.

The current pandemic has unleashed racist and discriminatory responses that have affected racialized youth and young migrants. We, therefore, call on coordinated action plans between governments and youth-led educational initiatives to fight xenophobic behavior against immigrants.

### **Intergenerational Issues as a Priority Area**

According to the Youth and Intergenerational Partnerships Factsheet, by 2050, the number of people over 60 is projected to increase by 50% in developed countries and triple in developing countries. Additionally, with increasing urbanization and migration as well as changing multigenerational family structures, we may experience a decrease in the sharing of knowledge, cultural norms, traditions and increased reliance on future younger generations.

While there has been a commendable focus on creating social protection policies for both the older and younger generations, this priority area still requires much attention as these intergenerational relationships and, therefore, policies are context-specific, based on differences between regions, urban and rural areas and gender.

### **Education as a Priority Area**

In the priority area of education, the goals of universal basic education, vocational training and human rights education have experienced gradual improvement, but nonetheless remain inadequate. Even as literacy rates increase, 'gender parity' has been incorporated in less than 15 % of curricula and the number of well-trained teachers are inadequate. There is an urgent need for curricula to

showcase the stories, ideas and inventions of women - particularly women who are underrepresented. There is also a strong need to institutionalize consent education to combat gender-based violence and challenge gender norms.

Young women, migrants, and Indigenous youth face the most severe consequences of these shortfalls, as these groups face significant barriers to consistent and quality education. To address this, we call for the development of widely accessible, affordable and portable technologies to be accompanied by trained teachers who will supplement this type of remote learning.

### **Access to Essential Health Services as a Priority Area**

The 21st century has seen an increase in the number of people able to access basic health services such as immunization, family planning, HIV treatment, and malaria prevention. That stated, health issues that disproportionately impact young people have not been prioritized as an agenda item. The coronavirus pandemic has reversed much progress made in global health and is likely to increase youth vulnerabilities and fatalities.

Furthermore, while the number of new HIV and Hepatitis B infections — which are often acquired by adolescents and young adults — are on a downward trend, sexually transmitted infections and neglected tropical diseases are increasing in many countries. Additionally, while education attainment levels are rising, there is little reporting on how health education is implemented in the classroom. To address this, we call for a designated teaching framework for essential sexual health information. This framework must also be designed with the ability to be adapted for local contexts, and we strongly encourage that this education be taught by young people, for young people.

Ultimately, we emphasize the need for sustainability to be at the forefront of all priority areas. The rapid and fatal consequences of the climate crisis are destroying the livelihoods of youth, where already vulnerable groups are the most adversely impacted. Moving forward, in carrying out the World Programme of Action for Youth, we call on governments to adopt an intersectional framework to strengthen the execution of all priority areas, especially as it relates to the climate crisis.

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