



**ECOSOC  
YOUTH  
FORUM**

**#YOUTH2030**

## **Economic and Social Council Youth Forum 10th Anniversary**

### **REPORTING TEMPLATE FOR REGIONAL AND THEMATIC SESSIONS**

<b>IDENTIFICATION</b>	
<b>Session focus</b>	<b>Caribbean Session at ECOSOC Youth Forum</b>
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<b>CURRENT LANDSCAPE / ISSUES / PRIORITIES (Approx. 500 to 750 words)</b>	
<p>The Caribbean is home to more than 11 million youth between the ages of 15 and 29. These young people have a central role to play in achieving sustainable development in the region. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an opportunity to galvanize action aimed at promoting greater inclusion of youth in all spheres, as it recognizes in several of its goals, the centrality of the full incorporation of youth as a necessary condition to move towards more egalitarian societies on a path of sustainable development in Caribbean Small Island States. However, youth in the region face many challenges that need to be addressed in order to facilitate an environment that enables them to reach their maximum potential to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs by 2030, leaving no one behind and a legacy for future youth generations.</p> <p>After almost a year of multidimensional impacts (health, economic and social) of the COVID-19 pandemic, the region faces the most severe crisis in recent decades. With the decline in regional gross domestic product (GDP) (-7.9% in 2020), several structural inequalities were highlighted. The increase in youth unemployment, violence against children and youth (especially young women and girls and vulnerable groups), gaps in access to education, information and technologies, political instability, as well as extended periods of confinement, have put current and future children and youth at risk, that have a critical role in the success of the 2030 Agenda in the region and in the recovery process.</p>	

**Key issue #1 A PEOPLE-CENTRIC RESPONSE - SDG 2 (Zero Hunger); SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a number of underlying vulnerabilities, which can no longer be taken for granted, such as access to healthy and nutritious food, and access to basic health care.

**Access to healthy and nutritious food** - Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Caribbean has been grappling with NCDs and water and food shortages. These factors along with heavy reliance on importation of ultra-processed food and products, significantly limit access to healthy and nutritious home-grown foods. The restrictions and lockdown measures enforced by Governments throughout the region to deal with the pandemic have caused an increase in under and unemployment which have threatened the ability of young people to access healthy food and maintain healthy lifestyles.

Students have transitioned from physical classes to online schooling at home, with implications for those who depended on school meal programmes as their main source of food. Furthermore, lockdown measures have reduced access to physical spaces (for example, physical education in schools, gym memberships and group sporting activities). As a result, poor nutrition and limited physical activity have led to the rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

**Mental Health** - The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on self-harming behaviours as well as gender-based violence and social isolation stemming from COVID-19 lockdowns. Mental health issues have increased among young people who are in isolation while still trying to balance online school, multiple organizational affiliations and family life. There are also cases of children and young people with limited or no access to digital devices and internet to keep connected, which can also impact mental health due to social isolation.

**Sexual and reproductive health (SRH)** – Prior to the pandemic, young people already had challenges accessing SRH services, mainly due to stigma and discrimination. With the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift in focus to more essential health services to deal with the virus, further limiting young people's access to SRH services. Furthermore, with lockdown measures, young people have been in situations where their sexual autonomy has been compromised. There has been increased reports in the media of sexual abuse, amongst children and young people, especially girls and young women. This can possibly create a trickle-down effect of increased unwanted and adolescent pregnancies.

**Key issue #2 ACCELERATING ACTION FOR THE PLANET - SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns); SDG 13 (Climate Action)**

Children and youth face a myriad of challenges that seek to undermine their fundamental rights, and climate change in particular, affects their right to a safe and healthy environment. This therefore has repercussions for their social and emotional well-being, especially those young people who reside in areas that are often raged by the impact of storms, floods, droughts, and fires. The COVID-19 pandemic has been described as a dress rehearsal for climate change as it has already caused a myriad of challenges, particularly in relation to the plastic problem.

**Plastic pollution** - Most Caribbean SIDS are still heavy consumers of plastics and plastic products, with limited avenues for recycling. Additionally, the increased use of disposable masks and plastic face shields during the COVID-19 pandemic, has also been contributing to the plastic pollution problem

which would have repercussions in the long term. Young people play a critical role in advancing sustainable consumption and production patterns as well as overall climate action.

**Competing priorities** -The COVID-19 pandemic has created a shift in focus, where the issues of climate change have been relegated to less of a priority. For Caribbean SIDS, climate change has to remain a priority due to the region's vulnerabilities to natural hazards and environmental degradation.

**Key issue #3 PROSPERING AND THRIVING - SDG 1 (No poverty); SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**

**Access to quality education** - Availability and accessibility to quality education for young people is key to achieving SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). There are limited youth focused training and youth employment initiatives in the Caribbean and lockdown measures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in a disruption of education, which more than likely will create a shortfall in skill sets. This will ultimately have an effect on young people in terms of their transition from school into the workforce.

**Limited economic diversity and lack of social protection** – Most Caribbean islands are heavily dependent on the tourism sector, which has been halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The limited flights and hotel availability created reduced revenue streams within the tourism sector and had spill off effects on other sectors such as restaurants as well as the informal sector. This situation highlighted the lack of diversity within the economy as well as the lack of social protection as many of the islands within the region do not have unemployment insurance.

**Key issue #4 INCLUSIVE PEACE: THE WAY FORWARD - SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities); SDG 16 (Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing inequalities especially those in the poorest and the most vulnerable communities. It has also exposed the deficiencies in the countries' economic systems and health systems, as well as the weak institutions and limited access to justice and social safety nets.

**Crime and violence** - Latin America and the Caribbean is considered to be one of the most unequal and violent regions in the world, which hinders youth development. There is a very high incidence of violence against women and girls, with 4 out of every 10 girls between the ages of 15 to 19 experiencing some kind of partner violence, and over 1 million in that same age group experiencing sexual violence. One out of four women in the region are victims of child marriage or early union before they turn 18 years old. These factors contribute to explain the very high rates of teenage pregnancy.

Even though corporal punishment is a crime in many countries, many children under the age of 15 still suffer from this in their home. Additionally, there are over 60 adolescent victims of homicides each day.

**Migrants** – In the Latin America and Caribbean region, 33% of international migrants are youth. When people are forced to migrate out of necessity, as a means of survival, they are often in a position of vulnerability, and are often structurally victimized. The COVID- 19 pandemic has aggravated access to medical treatment, access to mental health, and other social services for young persons as they are not formally accounted for in the public health and economic systems in the countries that they have migrated to.

There has been a noticeable increase in the anti-migrant narratives across the Caribbean and the pandemic has spread a lot of fear and further discrimination against migrants with no guarantee of access to medical treatment for different vulnerable groups or possible vaccines.

**Key issue #5 HARNESSING PARTNERSHIPS, RESOURCES AND SCIENCES: WORKING TOGETHER TO GET THINGS DONE - SDG 17 (Partnerships)**

**Working in silos** – The Caribbean has a tendency of insulation and working in silos, instead of enhanced regional collaboration.

**Limited fiscal space** – There are challenges for the region to implement the 2030 Agenda as it requires significant financing. In most cases the Caribbean countries are not eligible for donor financing or to access grants.

**SOLUTIONS / ACTIONS what has been done  
(Approx. 500 to 750 words)**

**Barbados**

- The Government has developed an online platform called “National Transformation” which offers free online courses on soft skills with the aim of making young people more marketable in the employment sector.
- The “Protect Our Girls” movement has highlighted the issues and recommendations for dealing with gender-based violence. This was led by the Barbados Youth Parliament, the CYC and other groups.
- The Barbados Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition in partnership with the Office of the Prime Minister, worked alongside local farmers and local markets to make and distribute healthy food packages to vulnerable persons and households.

**Trinidad and Tobago**

- Mental health services have been decentralized and public educational campaigns have been implemented in an effort to reduce the stigma attached to mental health. The Government has also produced a mental health workbook for young persons, stemming from a series of surveys conducted throughout the country on issues related to abuse, mental health and education.

**Other organizations**

- UNICEF has designed a tool called U-Report which is a safe innovative online platform targeted to young people to share their views on important development issues, with the aim of collectively influencing positive social change. Young people throughout the region have been able to communicate and collaborate with each other on his platform which has been a key advocacy tool climate change and education.

- The CYC has supported initiatives throughout the region and have provided seed grant funding for some initiatives as well as hosting a hackathon to develop innovative responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (Approx. 250 to 500 words)

Despite some of the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been opportunities that young people should take advantage of as the world transitions to a new normal.

- A **Caribbean Youth movement** is needed connecting Youth groups across the region. It is important to ensure that Youth groups do not work in silos to promote and advocate on the issues that affect them.
- **Partnerships** with the Government, private sector, civil society and youth are essential to ensure that no one is left behind. Partnerships contribute to the sharing of technical knowledge and best practices. The COVID-19 pandemic has created the digital space to engage youth on a deeper level to tap into their passion and creative imagination.
- Young people need to advocate for **more meaningful political participation** and to be included at the decision-making level. This partnership with the government should go beyond the electoral process.
- Young persons who actively engage in **climate advocacy and activism**, must keep the momentum. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how countries can lessen their carbon footprint, as there has been less travelling and use of paper due to telecommuting and online modalities. Countries need to internalize the lessons learnt on these practices that have contributed to less pollutants, as there is increasing evidence that people's health is heavily dependent on the health of the environment, showing a clear relationship between healthy ecosystems and healthy humans.
- **Migration policies** should be a priority, not only to increase protection of the most vulnerable, but to promote more growth, development, and to enrich societies. Lack of employment opportunities, natural disasters, and political instability can force young people to migrate in search of better opportunities.
- More attention needs to be paid on the **quality of education**, and the extent to which students are truly learning and gaining the skills that will adequately equip them to transition into the workforce. Additionally, there is the need for more youth entrepreneurship opportunities for young people to acquire the skills necessary for decent work.