

EMPOWERING THE FUTURE: MAKING THE SOCIAL RIGHTS OF YOUTH REAL

Side Event at the United Nations Summit
of the Future Action Days



20 September 2024,
16:45-18:00 EST (22:45-00:00 CET)

United Nations Headquarters, Room CR2, New York

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Young people played a crucial role in shaping the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognises them as “critical agents of change”. With the implementation of the SDGs well underway, youth participation and empowerment are both a means and an end. With over **1.2 billion individuals aged 15-24, the global youth population is at an all-time** high, yet many face barriers like unemployment, inadequate education, and social exclusion. Climate change and the green transition demand more equitable and progressive opportunities for youth.

The 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Reykjavík emphasised the importance of incorporating a youth perspective in the Organisation’s work and decision-making processes. Similarly, in the *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3*, the UN Secretary General urges Member States to enhance youth participation in decision-making at all levels, making meaningful youth engagement a requirement in all UN processes.

Despite frameworks from the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union, significant gaps remain in realising these rights and promoting sustainable solutions. Bridging these gaps requires strengthening and implementing international mechanisms to ensure that the social rights of young people-both present and future generations-are respected, protected and fulfilled.

This 75-minute event aims to unite key stakeholders to explore ways to enhance efforts to make the social rights of youth a lived reality.

EVENT OBJECTIVES

Assess Current Frameworks:

Evaluate the effectiveness of existing international standards and mechanisms in terms of protecting and promoting the social rights of youth.

Identify Gaps:

Highlight areas where current standards and mechanisms fall short in realising the social rights of young people.

Propose Solutions:

Develop actionable recommendations for enhancing the capacity of international mechanisms to address and ensure youth rights.

Foster Collaboration:

Encourage greater collaboration between international organisations, governments, civil society, and youth organisations to advance youth rights.

PROGRAMME

Welcome and introduction

■ **Rafael BENITEZ**, Director of Social Rights, Health and Environment, Council of Europe

Opening address

■ **Bjørn BERGE**, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe (video address)

■ **Joan FORNER ROVIRA**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Andorra to the United Nations

Panel Discussion: Challenges and solutions

What do national governments need to do to bridge the gap between their obligations to young people under international law and the lived realities they experience?

■ **Aoife NOLAN**, President of the European Committee of Social Rights, Council of Europe

■ **Ismail CHEKKORI**, Director of Global Issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccan Expatriates of the Kingdom of Morocco

■ **Rareş VOICU**, President of the European Youth Forum

What initiatives can international organisations take to uphold social rights of young people within the existing instruments and mechanisms?

■ **Laura THOMPSON**, Assistant Director-General for External and Corporate Relations at the International Labour Office (ILO)

■ **Siobhan MCINERNEY-LANKFORD**, Head of Unit, Equality, Roma and Social Rights, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

■ **Mayada ADIL**, UN Young Leader, Fashion Designer, Medical Doctor & Co-Founder of La Loupe Creative, Sudan

What changes are needed for young people to be able to make their voices heard in an impactful way in law, policy and other decision-making related to social rights?

■ **Rytis PAULAUSKAS**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations

■ **Uriel TRINIDAD**, Youth Delegate of Mexico to the United Nations General Assembly

Interactive Q&A

Open floor for questions from the audience

Panellists respond with insights and concrete recommendations

Closing remarks by the moderator

■ **Rafael BENITEZ**, Director of Social Rights, Health and Environment, Council of Europe

SPEAKERS



Moderator

Rafael A. BENITEZ

Mr. Benitez holds a Master's in European Law from the College of Europe and degrees in Law and Finance from ICADE - University of Comillas. He studied Political Science at UNED. Currently, he is the Director of Social Rights, Health, and Environment at the Council of Europe, where he has worked since 1994. His previous roles include Director of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Chief of Protocol. Mr. Benitez has expertise in administrative law, international criminal justice, corruption, terrorism, and public international law. He has published works, spoken at international conferences, and lectured at ITI-RI and IIDH in Strasbourg. He speaks Spanish, English, French, and Italian.



**Mayada
ADIL**

Ms. Adil is a Sudanese doctor, fashion designer, and advocate for women's and refugee rights. Based in France, she fights against gender-based violence, especially female genital mutilation in Sudan and Mali. In 2021, she represented Sudanese youth at the Paris Conference for Sudan, addressing President Emmanuel Macron on youth roles in democratic and economic reforms. She also spoke at the Generation Equality Forum, pushing for the inclusion of refugee women in French communities. Co-founder of LaLoupeCreative, a platform connecting refugee artists, Ms. Adil offers training programs and "art clinics." As a climate advocate, she supports Crtve Development's We!Are campaign, promoting climate justice, gender equality, and peace.



**Ismail
CHEKKORI**

Mr. Chekkori has served as Head of the Department of Global Issues at Morocco's Ministry of Foreign Affairs since July 2017. His responsibilities span a wide range of security and social issues, including transnational organized crime, counterterrorism, corruption, NATO relations, non-proliferation, disarmament, human rights, climate change, and sustainable development. His career includes significant international roles, such as Minister Plenipotentiary at Morocco's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York (2006-2013), where he managed legal affairs and chaired the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (2012-2013). Mr. Chekkori holds degrees in public management and diplomacy from the Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Rabat.



**Joan FORNER
ROVIRA**

Mr. Rovira is the Permanent Representative of Andorra to the United Nations in New York. He has held several diplomatic roles, including Permanent Representative of Andorra to the Council of Europe and previously serving as Chargé d'affaires at the United Nations office in Geneva. During his last mandate at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, he also served as President of the Group of Rapporteurs on Social Issues (2022-2023). His career spans various positions in Andorra's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specialising in legal and multilateral affairs, human rights, and international conventions. Academically, Mr. Forner Rovira holds a Master's degree from New York University and has diplomas in law and marketing from institutions in Barcelona and Strasbourg. He is fluent in five languages: Catalan, Spanish, English, French, and Italian.



**Siobhán
MCINERNEY-
LANKFORD**

Ms. Mcinerney-Lankford is Head of Unit for Equality, Roma, and Social Rights and an expert in EU human rights law and international development. From 2002 to 2023, she worked as an operational and advisory lawyer at the World Bank's Legal Department, advising on the Human Rights Trust Fund and representing the Bank in human rights fora at the UN, EU, and OECD. Previously, she worked in private practice in Washington, D.C., and taught as an adjunct professor at American University, also lecturing at Harvard and the UN Summer Academy. She holds law degrees from Trinity College Dublin, Harvard Law School, and Oxford University, and is admitted to practice in Rhode Island and Washington, D.C.



**Aoife
NOLAN**

Ms. Aoife Nolan is the President of the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights joining in 2017 and serving as Vice-President (2021-2022). She is a Professor of International Human Rights Law and Director of the Human Rights Law Centre at the University of Nottingham. Professor Nolan has extensive experience in human rights and constitutional law, with a focus on social and children's rights. She has advised governments and international organizations, including UN bodies, the Council of Europe, and the World Bank. Professor Nolan has held visiting positions at academic institutions worldwide and is an Academic Expert at Doughty Street Chambers, co-leading the Children's Rights Group.





**Rytis
PAULAUSKAS**

Mr. Paulauskas is the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations since May 2021. Prior to this, he served as Director of Information and Public Relations at Lithuania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2016 to 2021. He was Lithuania's Permanent Representative to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva (2012-2016) and Vienna (2003-2008). From 2008 to 2012, he led the OSCE Chairmanship Department and Task Force at the Ministry. Mr. Paulauskas holds a law degree from Vilnius University and completed advanced studies at the Academy of International Law in The Hague, as well as a joint master's program at Tufts University's Fletcher School and Harvard's J.F. Kennedy School of Government.



**Laura
THOMPSON**

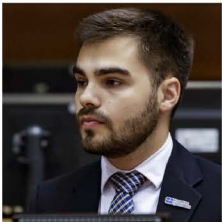
Ms. Thompson has held prominent political and managerial roles, including serving as Deputy Director-General of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for 12 years. Previously, she was Costa Rica's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva. She co-founded and directed the Centre for Innovation in Global Politics and Economics (CIGPE) at IE University, where she also taught as an adjunct professor. Ms. Thompson has led high-level political negotiations at bilateral and multilateral levels, holding leadership roles in several international organizations. Ms. Thompson holds advanced degrees from the Graduate Institute (IHEID) and the Universidad de Costa Rica and has completed executive programs at Harvard and INSEAD. She is fluent in Spanish, English, French, and Greek.





**Uriel Trinidad
HERNÁNDEZ**

Mr. Hernández is a senior International Relations student specialising in regional economic integration in Europe and North America. He is researching trade negotiations between the European Union and Mercosur. In 2023, he participated in a mobility program at Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris and won the MUEMEX award, attending a seminar on European integration at the College of Europe, Bruges. He has worked on human rights research with the Inter-American Human Rights System and the EU Delegation in Mexico. Currently, he is interning at “México, ¿cómo vamos?”, contributing to the North American Project, promoting regional integration for social progress.



Rareș VOICU

Mr. Voicu has been involved in the field of youth and child participation since the age of 15 and he currently serves as the President of the European Youth Forum. Over the past seven years, he has successfully led various youth organisations at the local, national, and international level, tirelessly advocating for the rights of his peers and empowering them to have their voices heard by decision-makers. He has previously served as a Board Member of the European Youth Forum and has worked for UNICEF in the field of child and adolescent engagement, supporting the participation of children in decision-making processes



The main organiser and sponsor of the side event is the Council of Europe. The event is co-sponsored by Andorra, Lithuania, Mexico, the Kingdom of Morocco, in partnership with the International Labour Office, the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency and the European Youth Forum.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.