

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



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.

Concept Note

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 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) well underway, young people’s participation and empowerment should be understood as both a means and an end in itself. However, many young people are still facing barriers in accessing their rights set out under [the European Social Charter](#), [the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), and other human rights treaties.

With over [1.2 billion individuals aged 15-24](#), [the global youth population is at an all-time high](#). The impacts of the global cost of living, pandemic and climate crises on young people and their social rights are wide-ranging and severe – both in terms of their present lives and their future ones.

[The 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Reykjavík](#) (Iceland) underlined the importance of including a youth perspective in the Organisation’s work and in decision-making processes.

Similarly, in the [Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3](#), the Secretary General of the United Nations calls for Member States to expand and strengthen youth participation in decision-making at all levels and make meaningful youth engagement a requirement in all United Nations decision-making processes.

As youth are increasingly demanding more just, equitable and societal solutions, the need to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people in terms of their social rights such as unemployment, inadequate educational opportunities, inadequate housing, and social exclusion have become more pressing than ever.

Despite international frameworks like those provided by the Council of Europe and the United Nations, significant gaps remain in the realisation of these rights. To bridge this gap, it is essential to strengthen and implement international mechanisms that ensure the social rights of youth – both of current generations and of future ones – are realised.

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

Event Objectives

- [Assess Current Frameworks](#): Briefly 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 realizing 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.

Event Structure

The event will be organised as a **75-minute session**, featuring high-level panellists from state authorities, international organisations and civil society.

Speakers

- **Mayada ADIL**, United Nations Young Leader, Fashion Designer, Medical Doctor and Co-Founder of La Loupe Creative, Soudan
- **Ismail CHEKKORI**, Director of Global Issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccan Expatriates of the Kingdom of Morocco
- **Joan FORNER ROVIRA**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Principality of Andorra to the United Nations
- **Siobhan MCINERNEY-LANKFORD**, Head of Unit, Equality, Roma and Social Rights, European Union Fundamental Rights Agency
- **Aoife NOLAN**, President of the European Committee of Social Rights, Council of Europe
- **Rytis PAULAUSKAS**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Nations
- **Oliver RÖPKE**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, Advisory Body of the European Union
- **Laura THOMPSON**, Assistant Director-General, International Labour Organisation
- **Uriel TRINIDAD**, Youth Delegate of Mexico to the United Nations General Assembly
- **Rareş VOICU**, President of the European Youth Forum

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

Programme

1. Welcome and introduction

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

2. Opening address

- **Bjørn BERGE**, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe (video address)
- **Joan FORNER ROVIRA**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Principality of Andorra to the United Nations

3. 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?

National governments have committed to upholding the social rights of young people through various international legal frameworks, such as the European Social Charter, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and various UN conventions. Yet, despite these commitments, a significant gap remains between these legal obligations on paper and the everyday experiences of young people -many of whom face barriers with regard to education, employment, social protection, and participation in decision-making. Bridging this gap requires more than just policy declarations. The first question of the panel discussion aims to explain how national authorities can bridge the gap between their commitments to young people and the realities experienced by young people in their day-to-day lives.

- **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?

Youth rights have been receiving particular attention from international organisations lately. Young people played a crucial role in shaping the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognises them as “critical agents of change”. With the Reykjavik Declaration, adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government in May 2023, the Council of Europe is moving forward by integrating a youth perspective into its intergovernmental work and further strengthening the participation of young people in decision-making in democratic life. There is also a growing focus on youth rights on the part of human right monitoring bodies like the European Committee of Social Rights and the UN treaty bodies. Despite these and other positive initiatives, the social rights of young people continue to be affected by the global multiple crises. The second question of the panel discussion focuses on the role and concrete initiatives proposed by international organisations in ensuring that young people's social rights are respected.

- **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, EU Fundamental Rights Agency
- **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?

Youth rights are an essential part of human rights—universal, indivisible, and interdependent. Yet, despite global commitments, these rights often remain unfulfilled. Realising youth rights requires more than passive inclusion; it demands the active, full involvement of young people in shaping the policies and decisions that impact their current and future lives. Without their meaningful participation, there is a risk that the youth rights will go unrealised and that the goals set for youth empowerment in the 2030 Agenda will remain aspirational rather than achievable. The third question of the panel aims to propose solutions on how to amplify young people's voices in laws, policies and other decision-making processes on social rights.

- **Rytis PAULAUSKAS**, *Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Nations*
- **Oliver RÖPKE**, *Oliver RÖPKE*, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, Advisory Body of the European Union
- **Uriel TRINIDAD**, *Youth Delegate of Mexico to the United Nations General Assembly*

4. Interactive Q&A

- Open floor for questions from the audience
- Panellists respond with insights and concrete recommendations.

5. Closing remarks by the moderator

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