

Speech on Green Transition for Major Group Children and Youth

Distinguished delegates, moderators, and fellow stakeholders,

I am Arian Ng speaking on behalf of the Major Group for Children and Youth on the critical importance of ensuring a just green transition that truly leaves no one behind. Our group represents the voices of young people across the UNECE region and beyond, including youth from the Global South who are disproportionately affected by climate change.

The Climate Crisis as a Youth Crisis

Young people face a triple burden in the climate crisis:

First, we are inheriting a planet irrevocably altered by decisions made before many of us were born. The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report confirms that even if all emissions ceased today, we would still face decades of intensifying climate impacts.

Second, the economic disruption of climate change and the transition away from carbon-intensive industries threatens our employment prospects and economic security at precisely the moment we are entering the workforce. The ILO estimates that while the green transition could create 24 million new jobs globally by 2030, many regions still lack comprehensive strategies to ensure youth can access these opportunities.

Third, the impacts of climate change are distributed inequitably, with young people affected specially, considering their most often passive role in the exposure to those issues. to rephrase

The transition to a green economy presents significant opportunities, but young people face structural barriers to participation:

1. **Skills mismatches remain pervasive:** Educational systems are not adapting quickly enough to provide youth with the green skills needed. The OECD estimates that 1.2 billion jobs worldwide will be transformed by green technologies, yet less than 30% of technical training programs have incorporated sustainability competencies.
2. **Geographical disparities are widening:** Green investments are concentrated in urban and already-advantaged regions, leaving rural and marginalized areas behind. In the UNECE region, 73% of green innovation funding is directed to major cities, despite 40% of youth residing in rural or peri-urban areas.

3. **Just transition mechanisms are inadequate:** The shift away from carbon-intensive industries risks leaving many young workers stranded without clear pathways to alternative employment. Young people in the Global South face even greater obstacles due to limited resources, with only 2% of global just transition funding reaching developing nations where youth unemployment rates often exceed 30%.
4. **Access to green finance is limited:** Youth-led initiatives receive less than 0.5% of climate finance despite their demonstrated innovation and effectiveness. Traditional financing mechanisms favor established institutions over youth-led solutions.
5. **Decision-making processes exclude youth voices:** Despite being deeply affected by long-term climate impacts, youth remain marginalized in climate governance. Only 22% of countries have formal mechanisms for youth participation in climate policy development.

A Youth-Centered Just Transition Framework

We call on different stakeholder to implement a comprehensive youth-centered just transition framework based on five pillars:

1. Skills and Education Reform

- Invest in youth-focused green skills programs that specifically target those not in employment, education, or training (NEETs), with special attention to young women and disadvantaged groups where young people can participate .
- Integrate sustainability competencies across all levels of education, from primary school through university and vocational training, inclusive towards lived experiences of the young people and civic society.
- Create cross-border skill recognition frameworks to allow young people to transfer green qualifications across the UNECE region.
- Develop mentorship programs enabling exchange of experiences between professionals and young people entering green sectors.
- Support peer-to-peer learning networks that enable youth to share knowledge and best practices.

2. Climate Finance with Youth Components

- Increase climate finance with dedicated youth components, ensuring that at least 25% of green transition funds support youth entrepreneurship, training, and employment.
- Create accessible microfinance and grant mechanisms specifically for youth-led green initiatives with simplified application procedures.
- Establish youth-specific funding windows within existing climate funds like the Green Climate Fund.

- Implement youth quotas in public procurement for green projects to ensure youth-led enterprises can access government contracts.
- Develop green bonds specifically targeting youth employment and entrepreneurship outcomes.

3. Social Protection and Economic Security

- Establish Youth Green Jobs Guarantees that provide paid work experiences in sustainable sectors for all young people facing prolonged unemployment.
- Expand social protection systems to cover green economy workers, including those in non-standard employment.
- Create transition funds specifically for communities dependent on fossil fuel industries to ensure young people aren't forced to migrate.
- Support youth-centered universal basic income pilots in regions undergoing rapid decarbonization.
- Develop comprehensive career guidance services specialized in green economy pathways.

4. Governance and Participation

- Create meaningful mechanisms for youth participation in green transition policy-making at all levels, from local to international.
- Establish youth climate councils with genuine advisory power and direct input into national climate strategies.
- Support youth delegates in international climate negotiations with funding and capacity building.
- Implement youth impact assessments for all climate and environmental policies.
- Develop digital platforms to enable youth input even from remote or underserved regions.

5. Global South-North Youth Cooperation

- Create dedicated funding for South-North youth exchanges focused on green skills transfer and knowledge sharing.
- Establish regional youth innovation hubs focused on developing climate solutions appropriate for Global South contexts.
- Support technology transfer programs specifically designed to upskill youth in developing regions.
- Develop youth research networks connecting Global South and North researchers on climate solutions.
- Fund fellowship programs enabling Global South youth to participate in international climate governance.

As this roundtable addresses SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, we must recognize that truly sustainable economic development cannot be achieved without ensuring young people can access decent work in the green economy. The guiding questions for this session ask how the green transition can maximize decent job creation while ensuring social inclusion. The answer must include empowering youth as agents of change.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to productive discussions and concrete commitments to ensure a just green transition that truly leaves no one behind.