

UNECE Regional Conference on ICPD+25
ICPD+25 years later: Recommitting the vision of Cairo

1 minute - personal story about civic engagement

Excellencies, my name is Dario Korolija and my name is Darya Shershun. My friend and I here are pleased to voice some concerns and solutions of young people in the ECE region.

2,5 minutes - focus on youth civic engagement

Young people and youth organisations are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in political and civic life. However, we like the rest of the population, have a right to take part in decision-making. It is bizarre that over half of world's population is under 30, yet less than 15 % of parliamentarians in the region is under 40. Less than 2% of national parliaments have youth representation, there is work to be done internationally too. Tokenistic and ad-hoc mechanisms for youth participation are still common across inter-governmental organisations. To move forward, we need quality standards for youth participation. Investing in the civic skills and capacities of young people and youth organisations to engage in international processes is part of the solution. Ensuring that the participation is meaningful and takes place on all levels and throughout the policy cycle is another. No society can afford losing the voice of its young people or that they lose faith in public institutions, nor can the international society. Particular focus must be given to combat the shrinking space for civil society organisations, including for youth civil society organisations.

There is a need to create and ensure more equal opportunities for all young people, there must be support for our initiatives and ideas. This includes ensuring that there are no legal, political or financial barriers that restrict us just because of our age. It also means supporting us in finding partners across different policy areas from both public and private sector.

We all must do more to ensure that no young person is left behind. Young people are vulnerable due to age-based discrimination and underrepresentation in politics. The situation is even worse for young people from minority groups. For example, young people in rural areas, young people with disabilities or young people belonging to ethnic or sexual minorities are left discriminated and with poor access to services.

The launch of the new UN Youth Strategy last week is an encouraging step to address the many barriers that young people face in accessing their rights. Now, we have the momentum and responsibility to make use of it. Other international organizations should take note, and so should national governments.

Thank you very much!

3 minutes - focus on the thematic areas of the conference

Your excellencies, I am pleased to share ideas and diverse perspectives from young people across the ECE region regarding inequalities, social inclusion, rights, population dynamics, sexual and reproductive health and rights.

[Population dynamics]

Young people face many challenges in labour markets. We are sometimes considered as “cheap workers”. Although we are valuable asset to any organization bringing new energy and ideas, we get paid less than our older peers. This is an example of age-based discrimination and a violation of our rights. Moreover, many young people are still discriminated against based on their gender, religion, nationality, ethnic, cultural and sexual orientation, disability, health or refugee status.

We are often considered as someone inexperienced. However, we can and we want to contribute now, with the knowledge and skills we have. Recognising the skills and competences acquired in youth organisations and through non-formal education is a vital step. Crucially, we are not someone for “the Future” - we are “the Present”. Investing in young people's education, health and employment generates demographic dividends and welfare both now and in the future.

SRHR

We must also recognize that we can't have health without rights.

On the issue of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, the challenges young people face, in particular adolescents and LGBTQI+ persons are often neglected. Across the region young people face barriers in accessing quality youth-friendly services, affordable modern contraceptives, and accurate information. Still, there is a lack of inclusion. This is manifested in multiple ways, such as physical and cultural barriers; discriminatory language and stigma in accessing services, including safe abortion. We also face opposition from conservative groups to our sexual and reproductive health and rights.,cuts to public services for SRHR in general and for youth-related projects in particular.

So, what do we need to do? I'll tell you. First, we must be meaningfully involved in policy making and implementation. Second, governments must promote peer to peer education, implement comprehensive sexuality education, empower young people and adults to exercise their rights, offer more trainings to remove stigma and raise awareness and uphold sexual rights .

Our generation won't be passive and silent bystanders when we see the deterioration of our fundamental rights. We hope that our voices will be heard today because if not ours- then whose? if not now - then when?

Thank you!