

OUR FUTURE STARTS TODAY

Youth Statement on the Post-2015 Development Goals - Europe & Central Asia

In our future, there is no poverty and there is social justice. In our future, everyone feels protected by their human rights. In our future, every adolescent and youth gets quality education. In our future, every person gets the healthcare they need. In our future, everybody is free to express his or her cultural heritage without being discriminated. In our future, all people are treated equally, regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, abilities, cultural background, social status, sexual orientation, visual appearance and HIV/AIDS status.

In our future, people are able to share what needs to be shared, especially amongst the most marginalized. In our future, there is no hunger. In our future, there is no war. In our future, no-one is left behind. In our future, every person has the freedom to speak. In our future, every person has access to the labor market. In our future, we have responsible governments that include all voices equally. Our future is a sustainable future. This is the future we dream of. THIS IS THE FUTURE WE HAVE TO START BUILDING TODAY – THIS IS THE WORLD WE WANT.

We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in this Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 development agenda. We request that every adolescent and youth be given an opportunity to express themselves and to become partners in the post-2015 development agenda and its implementation.

We, the youth representatives from Europe and Central Asia, all came together with different stories, but with the same aim. From the 1st to the 6th September 2013, we met in Istanbul to discuss our priorities for the post-2015 development agenda. Even though our group was incredibly diverse, we were able to reach consensus about the future we want.

We, the youth representatives of Europe & Central Asia, recommend the following actions.

EDUCATION

In future we want all children and youth have access to education. Many youth and adolescents in our region do not have access to education. While we see improvement in participation in primary education, there are still many youth who do not have access to secondary education; many young people from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds, drop out of secondary and higher education. In most countries youth do not get the opportunity to be involved in designing and implementing education policies. We call on our leaders and our fellow youth to:

- Establish systems to engage youth in the process of monitoring education quality;
- Increase the usage of information technologies by ensuring that all young people have access to computer courses in their schools;
- Improve education quality by incorporating a stronger emphasis on life skills and key competences in national curricula and other education policy documents;
- Ensure access to inclusive, high-quality and empowering education and life-long learning opportunities for every child and youth with a disability and all children from marginalized groups; and
- Offer teachers continuous training to improve the quality of their education and their practice.

HEALTH

In the future we want, youth receive proper information about health issues and have universal access to healthcare. Today marginalized groups of young people have lower access to health services. We know of many cases of adolescent pregnancy in the region and frequent use of abortion. It is critical that governments and non-governmental services address health issues affecting youth, so that they can live up to their full potential. Health, a right and value in itself, is also a precondition for economic prosperity. We call on our leaders and our fellow youth to:

- Provide universal access for young people to quality and youth friendly healthcare, including exemption from costs for those living beneath the deprivation index;
- Implement public policies that ensure a healthy lunch for every student in school;
- Offer youth with addiction problems access to psycho-social services to help them reintegrate into society;
- Include health education that builds young people's knowledge and life skills on key health issues in formal school curricula; and
- Invest in non-formal, peer-to peer education on health issues for youth.

EMPLOYMENT

There is a trend of high unemployment rates for youth and disadvantaged minorities in Europe & Central Asia. Women tend to have lower access to labor markets and decent jobs. Youth with less education have more trouble finding a job, but even youth with high levels of education have trouble. We call on our leaders and our fellow youth to:

- Improve the communication between educational institutions and employers;
- Establish a systematic way of reviewing curricula at basic and higher education levels in relation to the current labor market;
- Integrate courses about entrepreneurship in education systems;
- Include relevant practicums and work experience in education programmes through voluntary work and recognize such programmes as part of work experience in the labor market; and
- Establish national and regional entrepreneurship networks to create more opportunities for youth to develop entrepreneurial skills by providing financial support and guidance by.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY & WATER

In order to encourage sustainable development, it is crucial that governments raise awareness regarding environmental issues. Some of the main issues for the region are poor energy efficiency and an increase of carbon emissions per capita. Also we do not have good systems in place for recycling and the awareness of youth on the need for recycling is low. These challenges can have enormous health and economic consequences. We call on our leaders and our fellow youth to:

- Encourage youth to start free range and sustainable food production businesses in partnership with non-governmental organizations;
- Invest in recycling systems for natural waste, paper and plastic products, starting with deposits for PET bottles;
- Ensure access to clean water and sanitation facilities for all, especially at educational institutions, and educate youth about the importance of water issues through peer education; and
- Provide special governmental bonuses and smaller taxes for those who use renewable energy.

PROTECTION AGAINST CRIME & VIOLENCE

All young people must be protected by human rights, including the right to live free from violence and abuse. Illicit and addictive drugs and organized crime are among the fastest-growing threats to political and economic stability and the health of people living in the region. Young people are especially hit hard by drug abuse. Drug use is fueling other epidemics, such as HIV and Hepatitis C. Other criminal activities are growing fast in the region as well, including low-risk and high-profit activities like human trafficking and migrant smuggling. We call on our leaders and our fellow youth to:

- Establish community-based youth centers that provide services to young people to raise awareness on avoiding and preventing violence and crime;
- Launch awareness-raising campaigns about preventing violence and abuse against young people in schools and communities;
- Use educational curricula to modify discriminatory social, cultural, religious and economic patterns of behavior; and
- Provide education on the role of alcohol and drug use in violence.

DISCRIMINATION & EQUALITY

It is critical that we end all forms of discrimination against minority ethnic groups, young people with disabilities, and women and men, including early marriage. We need social change to eliminate gender inequality and discrimination. Political commitment and the allocation of resources at national and international levels are essential to implementing changes towards gender equality, women's empowerment and the fight against gender discrimination. We call on our leaders and our fellow youth to:

- Implement targeted awareness raising programs to promote tolerance and combat stigma and discrimination against marginalized groups of young people;
- Include explicit references to girls and women's right to go to school in national laws.
- Promote gender equality and respectful social norms in education by improving the attitudes of teachers and giving special attention on the inclusion of adolescent girls and young women from marginalized groups; and
- Increase investment in young-women-led organizations and networks.

Together with you, we want to take our responsibility to make this world a better place. We are ready to take action now. We pledge an equal partnership with you in the implementation of the Post-2015 Development Goals. The only way to make sure the post-2015 development agenda will be a reality, is if we start working all together. It is time for solutions, action and partnership.