



YOUTH VISION FOR SDGS IN BELARUS

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Introduction

On the eve of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the General Assembly, to be held on 18-19 September 2023 (“the 2023 SDG Summit”), on 29 August 2023, 26 young people gathered together to voice their vision for Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”) implementation in the Republic of Belarus.

The objective of the youth dialogue was to give young people an opportunity to share their vision on the SDG progress in Belarus, including gaps, and suggest actions and projects that can contribute to SDG acceleration in Belarus.

The consultations of the SDG Youth Ambassadors, representatives of the UNICEF Adolescent Advisory Group, and volunteers were organized in the form of group discussions. Youth, based on their own decision and interests, were split into four groups around four SDG accelerator platforms: Green transition for inclusive and sustainable growth; Future generation orientation; Digital transformation and social innovation; Gender equitable society.

During the discussions, young people conducted a SWOT analysis on the SDG implementation in Belarus with a focus on opportunities, i.e., initiatives that can and should be implemented. The results of consultations were presented by the youth to the invited high-level representatives of state bodies and United Nations in Belarus.

As a preparatory step, on 22 August 2023, an online meeting with the participants was organised to ensure that they fully understood the format, purpose, and objectives of the consultation.

In addition, participants completed a poll on their vision on SDG progress in Belarus and youth involvement in SDG implementation, prepared by the United Nations Office of the Resident Coordinator in the Republic of Belarus.

The youth consultation was organized with the support of the United Nations Office of the Resident Coordinator in the Republic of Belarus, the United Nations Children's Fund in the Republic of Belarus, the National SDG Coordinator, the Ministry of Education, and the Belarusian State Pedagogical University named after Maxim Tank.

Results of the Poll Youth Vision for SDGs in Belarus

An anonymous online poll included 8 substantive questions to capture youth vision on the opportunities for their contribution to SDG implementation, SDGs that need further acceleration, and SDGs that are on track to be achieved by 2030 in Belarus.

In total, 28 young people, including those who were not able to join in-person discussions, completed the survey. Participants consisted of the youth representatives, that know firsthand what SDGs are, namely, the SDG Youth Ambassadors, representatives of the UNICEF Adolescent Advisory Group, and volunteers.

In accordance with the poll results, **71 per cent of participants** (20 people) believe that **youth have enough opportunities to contribute to SDG implementation in Belarus**, while 93 per cent (26 people) think that they are contributing to SDG realization.

The following **TOP 3 SDGs** are **of interest** for young people:

1. **SDG 4 Quality Education** – 24 per cent;
2. **SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being** – 13 per cent;
3. **SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities** – each 10 per cent.

At **the bottom** of ranking per their interest were:

1. **SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 14 Life below Water** – each 0 per cent;
2. **SDG 2 Zero Hunger** – 1 per cent;
3. **SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities** – each 2 per cent.

Pic. 1. Poll results on the question: Indicate top 3 SDGs that you are interested in:



However, **82 per cent (23 people)** consider that **Belarus will not be able to achieve all SDGs by 2030.**

Young people in Belarus think that **TOP 3 SDGs that need acceleration are the following:**

1. **SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth** – 15 per cent;
2. **SDG 5 Gender Equality** – 12 per cent;
3. **SDG 13 Climate Action** – 11 per cent.

Pic. 2. Poll results on the question: Indicate SDGs (max 3) that you think Belarus needs to work on more:



Nevertheless, youth believe that **TOP 3 SDGs that Belarus will be able to achieve by 2030 are:**

1. **SDG 4 Quality Education** – 21 per cent;
2. **SDG 2 Zero Hunger** – 18 per cent;
3. **SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being** – 11 per cent.

Pic. 3. Poll results on the question: Indicate SDGs (max 3) that you think Belarus will achieve by 2030:



Even though no one thought that Belarus would achieve SDG 14 Life below Water and SDG 15 Life on Land, only 1 per cent of those surveyed indicated these SDGs as the ones that need further acceleration. As for SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being almost the same number of people suggested that Belarus needs to devote additional efforts to its implementation, while it will still achieve it by 2030.

During the in-person consultations after receiving information on the results of the poll, **21 out of 26 participants reconfirmed their agreement on SDGs that need additional acceleration**, while only **14 of them still believed that Belarus would be able to achieve identified SDGs**, which can be interlinked with their critical view of the possibility of achieving SDGs by 2030.

Notably, while identifying SDGs to which they can contribute now, **SDG 4 Quality Education** (23 per cent), **SDG 5 Gender Equality** (13 per cent), and **SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production** (12 per cent) had the highest number of **young people ready to act now**; while **SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy** (0 per cent), **SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth** (0 per cent), **SDG 1 No Poverty** (1 per cent), **SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation** (1 per cent), **SDG 9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure** (1 per cent) – **the lowest**.

Pic. 4. Poll results on the question: Think about areas where you can act now and choose SDGs (max 3) to which your action can contribute to.



All in all, the results of the poll clearly indicate that youth view for SDGs is that **SDGs need more action and acceleration now**, while they can actively contribute to the SDG adventure.

Groups Discussions Outcomes

4 groups conducted a SWOT analysis on the SDG implementation in Belarus around 4 SDG accelerator platforms.

26 young people participated in the in-person consultations on Youth Vision for SDGs in Belarus, including SDG Youth Ambassadors, representatives of the UNICEF Adolescent Advisory Group, and volunteers.

Following their interests, young people split into four groups around four SDG accelerator platforms: Green transition for inclusive and sustainable growth; Future generation orientation; Digital transformation and social innovation; Gender equitable society. In these groups youth conducted a SWOT analysis on the SDG implementation in Belarus with a focus on opportunities, i.e., initiatives that can be implemented.

The results of the group discussion are provided below.

Green transition for inclusive and sustainable growth	
<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementation of projects on Smart Cities in Belarus• Well-established legislative framework to facilitate green transition• Support to innovative projects• Waste management• National commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions• Extensive partnerships	<p><i>Weaknesses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow development of environmental responsibility in society• Lack of extensive waste recycling infrastructure• High level dependency on traditional sources of energy, while recognising expansion of alternative sources of energy• Insufficiency of highly specialised experts
<p><i>Opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green laboratories, that will draft relevant methodological framework, conduct information campaigns, find potential partners and specialists• Sustainable art exhibitions	<p><i>Threats</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of interest• Insufficiency of developed infrastructure in regions• Shortage of highly specialised experts

Future generations orientation

Strengths

- Increased engagement with youth in regions
- Availability of civic and patriotic education
- Voices of youth are heard
- New approaches to professional orientation
- State support to youth (e.g., young professionals)
- State support to young families
- Availability of grants
- Improved system of additional education
- Inclusive environment
- Accessible education
- PPP for youth
- Support to youth sport and science

Weaknesses

- Everything is fine, but not everywhere
- Everything is here, but I do not know where to find it
- I want everything, but I will not be able to do everything

Opportunities

- **Soft Skills Trainings**
- **One day with... in...** - shadowing
- **Unified database of best practices** of youth engagement and project ideas

Threats

NONE, WE JUST NEED TO ACT NOW!

Digital transformation and social innovation

Strengths

- State programmes enshrining measures on digitalization
- Developed usage of modern payment systems
- Introduction of biometric documents
- Incorporation of innovative measures in the service sector

Weaknesses

- Insufficient digital literacy, especially among older people
- Relative weaknesses of industrial and technological base
- Decentralised work with citizens

Opportunities

- **LearnLife** - series of YouTube lectures from Belarusian professors
- **Shlyah** (means path in Belarusian) – programme to improve digital literacy of older people

Threats

- LearnLife – lack of interest from professors
- Shlyah – Mistrust from the side of older people
- Financing, especially to purchase equipment

Gender equitable society

<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to women entrepreneurship • Increasing number of women on senior level positions • 3 years of paid maternity leave • Efforts to counter gender-based violence • Substantial number of women completed higher education (including master's degrees) 	<p><i>Weaknesses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender stereotypes • Fathers still have limited time and possibilities to be more involved in upbringing of their children • Lack of accurate relevant information shared with pupils enrolled in secondary education • Potential impact of gender stereotypes on career choices • Lack of societal encouragement for fathers to get paternity leave • Shortage of social advertisement
<p><i>Opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHE in art and life: technologies and traditions with a focus on non-traditional areas of women empowerment (e.g., women working in non-traditional roles) • Extensive Trainings on gender equality and countering gender-based violence followed by an in-person conference (can be a part of 16 days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence) 	<p><i>Threats</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low numbers of potential participants • Financing

Each group has highlighted some challenges pertaining to social behavior, overcoming of which requires time and increased knowledge sharing. At the same time, ideas proposed by young people correlate to the national endeavors and work of the United Nations in Belarus. Hence, it presents an additional opportunity to expand meaningful youth engagement by considering and incorporating their proposals in existing and future projects.

Notably, voting on the most interesting project proposal showed that youth is highly interested in implementing the ideas of **One day with... in...** and **Green Laboratories**.

Possible Next Steps

Youth is one of the main actors and agents of change for sustainable development. In Belarus, youth is energetic and eager to contribute to SDG implementation. Hence, it is vital to ensure that their ideas are heard, supported, and made come true.



Proactive information and knowledge sharing

Organize workshops and awareness raising campaigns focusing on the less popular SDGs to increase interest and understanding among youth.



Intensification of youth engagement on SDGs

Advocate to continue intensification of youth engagement in the implementation of SDGs, particularly in areas that require acceleration from the youth's perspective.



Keep youth informed and updated

Regularly update and consult youth on the progress of SDGs implementation to keep them engaged and informed.



Strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships

Continue to encourage collaboration between youth, government, United Nations, and non-governmental organizations to work on SDGs.

Conclusion

Youth in Belarus have a strong vision and desire to contribute to SDG implementation. Hence, it is vital to remain open and be ready to be “challenged” and motivated by youth to accelerate SDGs.



Youth consultations and discussions have emphasized the importance of proactive information and knowledge sharing, intensification of youth engagement, involving youth in projects implementation and keeping them informed on its progress, strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships.



Youth is doubtful that it will be possible to achieve all SDGs by 2030, while SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 5 Gender Equality, and SDG 13 Climate Action might require additional acceleration.



The group discussions have identified specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in relation to SDG implementation in Belarus. Social behaviour was mentioned in each group, changing of which requires more time. These insights can be used to guide future projects and initiatives to address the challenges and maximize the opportunities for youth engagement in SDG implementation.

Challenges can be mitigated, but we need to act NOW!

Acknowledgements

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Act now to accelerate SDGs!

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