



Virtual Side Event - 2026 ECOSOC Partnership Forum

Partnerships with academia as an accelerator for local innovation and sustainable communities

Date & time: 26 January 2026 at 9am ET

Register here: <https://luma.com/9h09yzre>

Context:

The [2026 Partnership Forum of the Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#) will be held on 27 January 2026 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York under the theme, *“Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for a sustainable future for all.”*

Full list of organizing partners

1. International Association of Universities (IAU)
2. United Nations Academic Impact, UN Department of Global Communications
3. Education and Academia Stakeholder Group
4. Global Student Forum
5. York University Canada
6. De Montfort University UNAI #11 UNAI SDG Hub
7. SDG Academy

Short description:

Higher education institutions, together with their student and civil society networks, are critical partners for delivering transformative, equitable, and innovative action on the SDGs beyond a narrow “SDG 4 only” lens. This session highlights how universities, youth-led civil society, and SDG hubs are co-creating solutions for SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, and 17 through place-based partnerships, futures thinking, and whole-institution approaches. A short keynote by a global youth governance leader will frame higher education as a societal actor responding to polycrisis, followed by case studies from an SDG 11 UN Academic Impact Hub university, an SDG 4 International Association of Universities HESD cluster university, and other global higher education networks. The session will foreground universities and local communities as co-creators of just and sustainable futures, and explore how ECOSOC processes can more effectively leverage these partnerships in the lead-up to 2030 and beyond.

Speakers

Keynote – Youth / civil society governance leader:

Nudhara Yusuf, Co-Chair, Coalition for the UN We Need and Fellow, Princeton University, United States (SDGs 11, 16, 17)

United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) SDG 11 Hub:

Mark Charlton, United Nations Academic Impact SDG 11 Hub Chair Lead & Associate Professor of Sustainable Development, De Montfort University, United Kingdom (SDGs 9, 11, 17)

De Montfort University:

ZamZam Yusuf, De Montfort University (SDGs 9, 11) – *title TBC*

International Association of Universities (IAU) – SDG 4 Cluster:

Robert Didham, UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Lifestyles, University of Inland, Norway (SDGs 4, 6, 7, 11, 17)

SDG Academy / SDSN:

Abel Kinyondo, SDG Academy and University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Tanzania (SDGs 7, 9, 11, 17)

Student representative:

Jacob Blasius, Executive Director, Global Student Forum (SDGs 4, 16, 17)

Closing:

Jayashri Wyatt, Chief, Education Outreach Section, Department of Global Communications, United Nations (SDGs 4, 11, 17)

Co-Moderators:

Isabel Toman, International Association of Universities (SDGs 4, 17)

Katrin Kohl, York University (SDGs 11, 17)

Objectives

- Reposition higher education as a societal actor advancing SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, and 17 beyond an education equals SDG 4 framing.
- Showcase partnership models where universities, youth, cities, and civil society co-create water, energy, infrastructure, and urban sustainability solutions.
- Highlight youth leadership and governance innovations linking local action with global processes such as ECOSOC and HLPF.
- Identify practical levers for ECOSOC to engage higher education and student networks in coordinated and equitable SDG action.

SDGs addressed:

- SDG 4 Quality Education for All
- SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals