The World Conference on Youth (WCY)

Members of WCY:

- Australia
- Bahrain
- China
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Croatia
- Equatorial Guinea
- Estonia
- France
- Indonesia
- Kuwait
- Mexico
- New Zealand
- Peru
- Russian Federation
- Singapore
- South Africa
- Thailand
- United Kingdom
- United States of America
- Venezuela
- Vietnam

Purview:

The World Conference on Youth considers global issues that are of particular importance to young people, as well as the role that youth play in global issues. Typical issues for the World Conference include education, health, employment, the environment, and the role of youth in global leadership. Many Member States include youth in their official delegations to the Conference or solicit the views of youth prior to attending the Conference. The goal of this conference is not only to provide for the needs of youth, but to give them the opportunities to be leaders for change.

Topics:

Promoting healthy lives and access to quality health care

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being." In 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognized "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health." Yet many people, particularly youth, across the world lack access to the means to enjoy a healthy life. Youth are defined by the United Nations as those between 15 and 24. Because youth are still developing mentally and physically, poor health can have lifelong consequences. They are often more vulnerable to disease and may lack access to food, housing and social services needed for a healthy life. The World Health Organization estimates that 1.3 million youth die each year; the majority of these deaths are from preventable or treatable causes. For example diseases including HIV/AIDS heavily affect the youth population. An estimated 2.1 million youth suffer from HIV, with deaths nearly tripping since 2000. Mental heath issues and suicide also are on the rise among youth, and the lack of mental health resources around the globe have made addressing these issues difficult. Member State have committed to addressing youth health issues, but a great deal of work still remains.

The United Nations first prioritized youth issues when it established the International Youth Year in 1979. The first International Youth Year highlighted the needs of youth and their potential contributions to the international community. In 1985 the United Nations General Assembly expanded its definition of youth by recognizing that youth are far from a homogenous group. The needs of disabled, young women and those in rural and urban environments have a wide range of needs that were not recognized. The United Nations first focused on the specific health needs of youth in 1995, when it created the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY). The Programme identified eight key action items to support youth health. One such area is 'the provision of basic health services," as described by the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. 'Elimination of sexual abuse of young people' also built upon other international

declarations to target and eliminate sexual abuse of youth including rape, prostitution and child pornography. This action item also calls for the elimination of female genital mutilation across the globe. Finally, 'combating malnutrition among young people' called for the growth of healthy eating practices of youth. It also highlighted the need for school lunch programs to eliminate gaps in nutrition. All of these target action items laid the foundation for international work to address youth health needs going forward. These proposals outlined international efforts, as they gave target areas for Member States to address youth health needs. Where this Programme was successful in creating a conversation around youth health, it lacked input from those who would benefit most from improved services and resources.

During the 2014 World Conference on Youth, Member States and youth representatives built upon the work of the WPAY with the Colombo Declaration on Youth. Though Member State representative ultimately voted upon the declaration, youth representative provided a great deal of insight and input when determining the target goals of the declaration. This document recognized the work achieved by the WPAY and other international efforts towards youth health. The Declaration also recognized that additional work is needed after the 2015 Development Agenda. The Declaration recognized that there is work yet to be done in several areas. First, access to essential medicines and basic healthcare remains an issue for youth in developing countries and rur al areas around the globe. States recognize the need for access to healthcare but often fail to acquire and mobilize resources needed to address this disparity. Second, mental health has come to the forefront of the discussion as youth struggle with depression, anxiety and other issues. Governments have failed to recognize these issues in youth and need to address how youth can access mental health resources. Finally, the Declaration called for Member States to recognize the harmful effects that political and social determinants of health for young people. This issue particularly arises in conflict zones. The Declaration called for youth to be integrated into the healthcare sector as advisors and be encouraged to seek careers in the medical field.

Since the World Conference on Youth in 2014, the international community has continued to focus on youth health. Though the 2014 conference targeted many important health goals, a lack of resources and the complexity of some issues have made addressing them difficult. Some of the current challenges include mental health, non communicable diseases and access to healthcare. These

have become major targets for international efforts to address youth heath. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes several key targets including access to basic healthcare, addressing the needs of mental health, maternal health (particularly for young mothers) and sexual education. This Agenda provides a foundation for the World Conference on Youth to build upon.

Several issues still need to be addressed. First, youth still play a minor role in determining healthcare priorities and policy, especially in developing and rural areas. States have struggled to integrate youth input in healthcare development due to a number of challenges. Youth lack education on health topics, voting rights of youth vary across States, and they have a lack of time to be involved in policy making. If States better address these issues, youth could be more involved in the policy making process. Youth continue to deal with health issues including vulnerability to infectious diseases, especially sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and non communicable diseases including obesity, diabetes and asthma. Much of this can be attributed to lack of proper medical care and low access to nutritional meals. Mental health concerns run high in youth and a lack of education and resources have made anxiety and depression a major issue for youth around the globe. By targeting areas such as these, Member States will be able to better address the health of youth.

Questions to Consider:

- How can Member States address the different health issues that affect urban and rural youth?
- How can the United Nations assist Member States in facilitating discussions and involving youth in decision making regarding quality health care and promoting healthy lives?
- How can the international community better address communicable and noncommunicable diseases and mental health concerns in youth?

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Empowering marginalized youth emphasizing the most at risk young people

Today's youth population—defined as ages 15-24—is the largest ever, and many Member States' demographic profiles have a "youth bulge," a significant increase in the proportion of the population that qualify as youth. Youth make up the

majority of populations that are affected by armed conflict. Youth are particularly likely to experience marginalization—defined by the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) as being excluded from participating fully in society.

Marginalization of youth takes three key forms. First, political marginalization is where efforts are made to suppress youth participation in politics. Some ways this occurs include suppression of youth voting or disrupting youth movements. Economic marginalization occurs when youth have their opportunities limited within an economy. This often occurs in the form of limits on access to high-quality jobs. The World Youth Report of 2018 showed that youth unemployment rose to nearly 15 percent around the globe in 2017. Regions such as North Africa saw youth unemployment as high as 30 percent. Finally, social marginalization occurs when youth are limited in social interaction and social capital solely because of their age. These three sources of marginalization can severely limit youth and their capacity within society. Marginalization is also problematic as it undermines the credibility of political and economic systems and threatens social cohesion. Political marginalization often occurs in non-democratic governments because youth are seen as a threat to the ruling power. Youth are also vulnerable to extremist ideologies and may participate in armed conflicts due to marginalization, so marginalization is linked to radicalization. Marginalization may also heavily restrict economic growth and weaken social safety nets.

The 1995 World Programme of Action on Youth (WPAY) first sought to empower marginalized and at-risk youth. The WPAY tried to engage marginalized youth by addressing their needs and proposing that all youth be given a direct voice in political, social and economic life. The WPAY argued that, in order to address marginalization, Member States needed to empower youth to address their own basic needs. While the WPAY provided specific actions for other areas like healthcare and education, it did not prescribe steps to address marginalization. During the 2014 World Conference on Youth, Member States and youth representatives build upon the work of the WPAY with the Colombo Declaration on Youth. When it comes to marginalization, the Declaration targeted specific ways to better empower youth. One such target is for Member States to create means for youth to become more involved in local and national policy making. The Declaration also called for youth to create national youth organizations to better organize marginalized groups, particularly those who are also members of minority groups.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) launched the UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017 to address youth marginalization politically and socially. The Strategy saw that youth who are not engaged or are actively suppressed, are more likely to engage in extremist behavior. It also recognizes that different demographics within youth face different obstacles. For example, women continue to face gender inequality that limits their capacity to influence social and political change. Traditional gender roles and wage gap marginalize young women at a higher rate than young men.

The international community saw engagement in global policy as a means to address youth marginalization. The UN Security Council recently passed Resolution 2419 in June 2018 that called on all relevant actors to consider ways of increasing youth representation within negotiations and peacekeeping by recognizing that the marginalization was detrimental in countering violence and creating sustainable peace. The Council also called on Member States to prevent violence within educational institutions and make them accessible to all youth, taking steps to address young women's equal right to be educated. Further, the Council requested that the Secretary-General report on progress made in increasing youth participation in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. They also called for the Secretary-General to consider mechanisms that would provide more opportunities for youth participation in the work of the United Nations.

In 2018, The UN set its agenda for 2030, which includes the United Nations Strategy on Youth. The strategy has a vision that human rights for every youth is realized and young people are empowered to achieve their full potential. The objective of the UN Youth Strategy is to increase impact and expand actions to address the needs, provide support agencies, and advance the rights of youth. The role of the United Nations in this plan is to protect and support youth and become a platform to address their needs and allow for them to be engaged and heard. The priorities of the strategy are engagement, participation, and advocacy of youth; informed and healthy foundations; economic empowerment through decent work; youth and human rights; and peace and resilience building.

Looking forward, a report by the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2419 is due by May 2020. The Youth2030 initiative plans to accomplish its goals through a number of actions including involving mainstream functions of the United Nations, expanding opportunities for youth, engaging youth in intergovernmental forums, setting standards for youth

participation, and amplifying the voices of active youth. The plan is to span twelve years, with an initial plan of action that will last four years. After that it will be reviewed under the supervision of the Senior Management Group.

Questions to consider:

- How can Member States actively engage youth in decision making? What steps or policies would prove most effective in ensuring youth voices are incorporated?
- What steps should Member States take to ensure all youth have rights guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
- How can the international community work with youth to encourage effective social change without destabilizing peace?

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