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Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, persons with disabilities and the family

Policies and programmes involving youth

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/146](#). It provides an overview of the progress achieved in the implementation of the resolution, with a focus on the following three issues: employment and entrepreneurship, health and well-being, and addressing inequalities and marginalization. The report was prepared on the basis of input received from Member States and relevant United Nations entities. The report concludes with key recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

* [A/74/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [72/146](#) on policies and programmes involving youth, the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General submit a report to the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution, to be prepared in consultation with Member States as well as the relevant specialized agencies, funds, programmes and regional commissions, taking into account the work done by the United Nations system. Further to that request, the Secretariat consulted relevant entities and received responses from 26 Member States¹ and 18 United Nations entities² that are members of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development.

2. Section II of the present report focuses on three issues relevant to youth in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely: (a) employment and entrepreneurship; (b) health and well-being; and (c) addressing inequalities and marginalization. These issues, anchored in both the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and the United Nations Youth Strategy, are closely intertwined. For each issue, an overview of the current situation at the global level is provided and followed by a summary of efforts by Member States to address these issues. Where possible, innovations or good practices are highlighted. Sections III is focused on activities and initiatives undertaken by United Nations entities to address these issues and other areas of the resolution.

3. Section IV sets out recommendations related to the content of the report.

II. Thematic overview

A. Youth employment and entrepreneurship³

Overview

4. Youth still struggle to find their place in the labour market and therefore face a heightened risk of economic and social exclusion.

5. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), progress in reducing unemployment has not been coupled with improvements in the quality of work.

¹ Argentina; Australia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Bahrain; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Burkina Faso; Cambodia; Canada; Costa Rica; Ecuador; El Salvador; Ghana; Greece; Israel; Italy; Lebanon; Mauritius; Mexico; Morocco; Nepal; Niger; Peru; Turkey; Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

² Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; International Labour Organization (ILO); United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat; United Nations Development Programme; Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; Economic Commission for Africa; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; United Nations Volunteers programme; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; and the World Health Organization (WHO).

³ The information presented in this section has been drawn from the following sources: ILO, *World Employment Social Outlook – Trends 2018*, available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_615594.pdf; ILO, *World Employment Social Outlook – Trends 2019*, available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_670542.pdf; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, “World economic situation and prospects, April 2019 briefing, No. 125”, available at www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-

Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 8 has also been slower than expected, making its achievement unrealistic for many countries and creating major gaps within and between countries.

6. Youth (aged 15 to 24) continue to face major employment challenges. Indeed, youth are three and a half times more likely than adults to be unemployed in 2019, with a global unemployment rate of 11.8 per cent. The global proportion of youth not in employment, education or training decreased by only 2 per cent between 2005 and 2018 and currently stands at over 20 per cent. Increased efforts to reduce that rate are urgently needed to meet Sustainable Development Goal 8.

7. Moreover, youth are disproportionately represented in the informal economy, which seldom offers social protection and is associated with precarious and hazardous jobs. More than one in three young workers in low and middle-income countries were living in extreme or moderate poverty in 2018, a much higher rate than for adult workers.

8. Given the current outlook, which foresees slowing global growth, there is a risk that it will take even longer than originally expected to close the gap between youth and adult employment.

9. In addition, the impact of climate change on the world of work presents both challenges and opportunities for youth. On the one hand, youth are overrepresented among workers in jobs that are not sustainable or that are damaging the environment and that will be eliminated during the transition to green economies, as well as in seasonal occupations in sectors impacted by climate change. However, ILO estimates that up to 24 million new jobs in the green economy could potentially be created by 2030. Green growth could therefore provide an opportunity to address the youth employment challenge while simultaneously preserving the environment and increasing climate resilience.

10. The fourth industrial revolution offers opportunities to make significant progress towards providing decent jobs for youth. However, if not widely accessible and strategically leveraged, this also has the potential to further disenfranchise groups in vulnerable situations, including youth.

11. As an increasing number of employers are adopting complex technologies, youth who are marginalized, such as those with disabilities, young migrants, rural youth or young women, are at risk of being left behind as they may not be able to access the relevant education and training that this type of work requires. It is sometimes incorrectly assumed that all youth are digital natives and that they therefore have the skills to enable them to participate in the new world of frontier technologies and artificial intelligence. Youth need adapted education and training to reduce the risks of an increasing digital divide. In particular, young women are at risk in the fourth industrial revolution as their level of participation in studies and

[prospects-april-2019-briefing-no-125/](#); United Nations, “Green economy could create 24 million new jobs”, available at [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/04/green-economy-could-create-24-million-new-jobs/](#); Karen McConnell Brooks and others, *Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington D.C., World Bank, 2014); Global Commission on the Future of Work, ILO, *A Brighter Future* (Geneva, ILO, 2019); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the secretariat of the Commonwealth of Nations, “Policy Guide on Youth Entrepreneurship”; [A/71/210](#); Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, “Expert Group meeting: youth social entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda”, available at [www.un.org/development/desa/youth/expert-group-meeting-youth-social-entrepreneurship-and-the-2030-agenda.html](#); ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015: Scaling up investments in decent jobs for youth* (Geneva, ILO, 2015); ILO, *Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships – Volume 1: Guide for Policy Makers* (Geneva, ILO, 2017); ILO, *Overview of Apprenticeship Systems and Issues: ILO contribution to the G20 task force on employment* (Geneva, ILO, 2012).

employment related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics is much lower than among young men.

12. In some countries, youth unemployment rises alongside education levels, as employment opportunities corresponding to higher levels of education are not available. In such situations, the expanding number of highly qualified youth who are unemployed exacerbates migratory pressures, contributing to a depletion of human resources who could channel the power of fourth industrial revolution.

13. Entrepreneurship is increasingly becoming a path for youth to contribute to their own development, as well as that of their community and could also represent a solution as part of a range of measures to address youth unemployment. However, it should not be perceived as a panacea for youth unemployment, as youth should not bear the exclusive responsibility for creating their own employment, especially when there are major skills gaps or when the economy is not well managed. In addition, a significant portion of youth are pushed towards self-employment and entrepreneurship as a last resort.

14. Increased access to the Internet is supporting virtual entrepreneurship, which helps to mitigate some of the risks associated with being a young entrepreneur by reducing the initial investments or by allowing geographical borders to be crossed more easily. However, regional inequalities in digital connectivity and related skills clearly affect the freedom of young people to choose and succeed on the entrepreneurial path.

15. A growing number of youth see entrepreneurship as an opportunity to contribute to the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, social entrepreneurship – entrepreneurship that seeks to have a societal impact – is attracting increasing attention around the globe and may complement strategies and interventions aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty. This also means that young social entrepreneurs can be agents of change while accepting the risks associated with entrepreneurship.

16. Entrepreneurship – and especially social entrepreneurship – comes with its own set of challenges and is far from being the universal cure for youth unemployment. This was one of the key findings of participants in the Expert Group Meeting on youth social entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in preparation for its upcoming World Youth Report on Youth Social Entrepreneurship. The Expert Group Meeting also found that young entrepreneurs often require adapted support to launch and transform their enterprise into a sustainable source of income and social change.

17. Regardless of the path taken, youth regularly struggle in their transition from school to work and many are left behind. Studies demonstrate that the failure to successfully navigate this transition (e.g. periods of unemployment) has a long-term impact on future wages and employment opportunities, and increases the risks of long-term social exclusion. If untapped, the enormous potential of young people in the workforce could create long-term consequences for society as a whole.

18. Given rising concerns over youth unemployment, rapid technological changes and the need to achieve environmental sustainability, technological and vocational education and training could help to ease the transition of youth from school to the workplace. The technological and vocational education and training sector could be a useful tool for fostering sustainable economic growth in an inclusive manner.

19. The availability of quality apprenticeships may also enable successful school-to-work transitions. Quality apprenticeships can enhance youth employability by facilitating the acquisition of relevant skills, personal development and a recognized qualification. The development of an effective and regulated apprenticeship system,

however, relies on a well-coordinated dialogue between several partners and a solid institutional framework and comprehensive data.

20. Progress is needed in youth employment in order to put the global community on a path to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8 and developing universal, inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Efforts of Member States

21. Numerous Member States are focusing on youth employment in a comprehensive manner. Azerbaijan and Morocco launched newly expanded youth employment strategies, and Mexico is supporting economic opportunities for young people through a wide array of approaches, which include training, investment, networks promoting collaboration and solidarity, and enhanced complementarity between government and society.

22. Member States implemented efforts to link apprenticeships, training and sectoral opportunities. Burkina Faso is implementing a large portfolio of initiatives to enhance youth employment, including a project to help young people to obtain their driver's licences and therefore to access employment opportunities in the expanding transport sector. Ecuador seeks to connect youth in higher education institutions with internships in the private and public sectors to provide professional experience and enhance employability. The Niger also offers youth apprenticeships in promising sectors and successful enterprises.

23. Several Member States are investing resources in supporting the transition of young people from school to work. For example, both Australia and Ukraine launched programmes to support that transition through improved synergies between the education system and the labour market. Australia developed a framework to deliver technological and vocational education and training programmes to students in secondary education. The framework aims to seamlessly integrate technological and vocational education and training into secondary schooling and enable such options to be perceived as a valid pathway into a career. This programme also includes special provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students seeking to transition from school to work.

24. Canada supports youth in vulnerable situations in developing the skills needed to find work or go back to school. Canada also launched a programme dedicated to the school-to-work transition of indigenous youth. In addition, Peru developed a project that seeks to solidify the final year of studies for university graduates to ease their transition to work.

25. Member States are also devoting more attention to the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sectors. For example, Bahrain is promoting STEM education among youth through various youth workshops, forums and competitions. Canada has a programme providing support to organizations that offer digital skills training to youth. It also launched a programme to promote work in the STEM sectors among youth who are traditionally underrepresented in these fields. Israel launched a national programme encouraging youth, especially young women, to study mathematics at the highest level.

26. Youth entrepreneurship is also receiving increased attention. Member States (Bahrain, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ghana, Mauritius, Morocco, Nepal and the Niger) support young entrepreneurs through training, funding, networking, incubation and access to markets. Some (Morocco, the Niger) also have programmes entirely dedicated to the promotion of entrepreneurship among women, including young women. Bahrain is supporting young entrepreneurs focusing on home-made products. The Niger is examining and improving its policies to ensure that youth,

especially young women, are adequately supported in their efforts to create and manage an enterprise.

27. Ghana is implementing measures such as offering three to five years' worth of tax breaks to start-up enterprises and setting aside 30 per cent of government procurement to enterprises owned by youth, women and persons with disabilities. Italy set forth an initiative whereby employers who hire youth under the age of 35 receive a substantive payroll tax deduction.

28. Member States (Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ghana, Italy, Morocco and Turkmenistan) have launched initiatives offering support to young people in vulnerable situations who are seeking employment or are tempted to drop out of school. These initiatives include support for rural youth, youth with disabilities, young women and indigenous youth. Cambodia is implementing a youth-focused initiative promoting workplace safety and seeking to prevent the exploitation of young people, while Canada is implementing an initiative that creates green jobs for youth, as well as youth employment opportunities in the heritage sector.

29. Member States are addressing the lack of data on youth employment. Lebanon is improving its collection of data on youth seeking employment. Italy is working on a centralized database that will match job offers and the demands of the labour market for all unemployed people, including youth. Similarly, Turkmenistan seeks to support the employment of young professionals by reforming its data collection and analysis processes.

United Nations efforts

30. United Nations entities have undertaken measures aimed at increasing youth employment. As part of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, ILO, the International Trade Centre, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization arranged the Youth Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Forum in Dakar in November 2018. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the International Telecommunication Union and the Government of Denmark are implementing the African Girls Can Code Initiative for the period 2018–2022, with the aim of fostering a professional interest in information and communications technology. The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in 2018 to mobilize 116 youth volunteers in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, India, Nigeria and Serbia.

31. Several United Nations entities are engaged in efforts to advance technical, vocational and entrepreneurship skills among youth. Generation Unlimited, a multilateral and multipronged initiative aimed at fostering necessary skills for employment, gained further momentum through the alignment of a \$1 billion investment from the World Bank. Led by UNCTAD and Alibaba Business School, the eFounders Fellowship Programme is targeted at 1000 digital entrepreneurs from developing countries. As part of its Integrated Country Approach, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations partnered with the Government of Guatemala to provide a digital platform for young rural farmers.

32. In the Asia-Pacific region, UNDP co-leads the Youth Co:Lab programme with the Citi Foundation, supporting youth-led social innovation and entrepreneurship for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals while promoting the role of youth in their own social and economic self-actualization.

B. Health and well-being⁴

Overview

33. While many countries are making progress toward achieving universal health coverage by 2030, youth continue to face challenges in accessing appropriate health services. Inequalities persist among countries in the provision of youth-appropriate health services, such as those focused on sexual and reproductive health or mental health. Specific groups, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people, face additional barriers in accessing health services.

34. For many youth around the world, adolescence – and the biological changes it brings – opens the door to new health-related vulnerabilities in the areas of physical and mental health, and the intersection between them. Health-related vulnerabilities include exposure to harmful products, such as tobacco, alcohol and other substances, violence (including homicide) and road traffic injuries. Road traffic injuries continue to be the leading cause of death for children and young adults between 5 and 29 years of age. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that, worldwide, 200,000 homicides occur annually among youth between 10 and 29 years of age, which constitutes 43 per cent of the total annual number of homicides. Homicide is the fourth most common cause of death in people between 10 and 29 years of age and 83 per cent of these homicides involve male victims.

35. A study of 40 developing countries showed that an average of 42 per cent of young men and 37 per cent of young women were exposed to bullying during their youth. Bullying has been found to be linked to suicide among youth, with particular groups of youth especially at risk of being targeted, with often serious implications. In the United States of America it was found that, following incidents of verbal or physical harassment, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth were more than two and a half times more likely to self-harm than their heterosexual peers. Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in the United States are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.

⁴ The information presented in this section has been drawn from the following sources: WHO, “Adolescents: health risks and solutions”, available at www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescents-health-risks-and-solutions; A/HRC/29/23; WHO, “Road traffic injuries factsheet”, available at www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/road-traffic-injuries; WHO, “Youth violence”, available at www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence; Brian S. Mustanski, Robert Garofalo and Erin M. Emerson, “Mental health disorders, psychological distress, and suicidality in a diverse sample of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths”, *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 100, No. 12 (2010); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health risk behaviors among students in grades 9-12 – United States and selected sites, 2015”, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports Surveillance Summaries*, vol. 65, No. 9 (August 2016); WHO, “Coming of age: adolescent health”; available at www.who.int/health-topics/adolescents/coming-of-age-adolescent-health; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, “Mental health matters: social inclusion of youth with mental health conditions”, 2014; Global Burden of Disease 2017 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators, “Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 354 diseases and injuries for 195 countries and territories, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017”, *The Lancet*, vol. 392, No. 10159 (London: November 2018); J. Arcelus and others, “Mortality rates in patients with anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders: a meta-analysis of 36 studies”, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 68, No. 7 (2011); E/2017/66; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, *World Fertility Report 2013: Fertility at the Extremes*; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), “Gender equality through school: providing a safe and inclusive learning environment”, available at https://gem-report-2017.unesco.org/en/chapter/gender_accountability_through_school/; WHO, “Adolescent mental health”, available at www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health.

36. Adolescence is also a time when mental health conditions can begin to manifest. Mental health conditions, which include behavioural and mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety disorders (including post-traumatic stress disorder) and disruptive behavioural conditions (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mood disturbances, substance use, suicidal behaviour and aggressive and/or disruptive behaviour), have a significant impact on the development of over a billion youth and their social and economic integration. Often the comorbidity of these mental health conditions exacerbates their impact, as do wider societal pressures and social norms such as body image ideals and peer pressure, including related recreational substance abuse. Eating disorders also continue to be prevalent among youth. Almost 3.4 million youth around the world have anorexia nervosa, which has the highest mortality rate among mental health conditions.

37. Young women face many health-related threats and challenges, in particular when it comes to sexuality, marriage and childbearing. Young women continue to experience issues such as female genital mutilation, forced child marriages or sexual exploitation and violence. Over 750 million women and girls alive today were married before their eighteenth birthday. While female genital mutilation has declined by 24 per cent since 2000, the incidence remains high. In 30 countries with representative survey data, more than one in three girls between 15 and 19 years of age have undergone the procedure, compared with nearly one in two girls around the year 2000. Furthermore, it is reported that approximately 28 per cent of all trafficking victims detected in 2014 were children, with girls outnumbering boys (20 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, of the total number of victims).

38. Young people's good health and well-being is closely intertwined with their capacity to complete their education and seize employment opportunities. For example, access to sexual and reproductive health services could contribute to delaying the age of first childbirth and therefore increase the chances of young women staying in school and securing decent work. The use of youth health services that help to reduce harmful substance use increases the likelihood that youth will graduate and retain employment.

39. There have been improvements regarding education that promotes well-being, such as the inclusion of topics on healthy lifestyles, human rights and sustainable development. However, issues such as sexual and reproductive health and mental health remain absent from a large portion of curricula.

40. Gender equality and empowerment is also largely absent from national education material. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), textbooks increasingly cover gender issues, but progress is insufficient. This contributes to women, including young women, remaining under-represented or, when included, relegated to traditional roles such as housework and childcare. Efforts to ensure that curricula, textbooks and teaching methods do not perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes should be increased.

41. The common assumption that youth are healthy does not help to address these important concerns. There is abundant evidence that the adoption of healthy behaviours during adolescence and youth is critical for the prevention of health problems in adulthood. A comprehensive approach to the health of youth should therefore be undertaken.

Efforts of Member States

42. Young people's health and well-being are not only closely related to youth development, they are also a cornerstone of sustainable development. The Kazan Action Plan (2017) highlights young people as particularly vulnerable to maltreatment, abuse or neglect, impairment to their health and development, and

recommends strategies and practices that produce conditions for healthy and sustainable sport for all (main policy area III.2). The global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030 (Action 2.5) of WHO recommends that member States develop and implement design guidelines for education and childcare facilities that ensure the adequate provision of accessible and safe environments in which children and youth can be physically active, reduce the amount of time they spend sitting and support walking and cycling to and from educational institutions with the provision of appropriate end-of-trip facilities.

43. With that in mind, a few Member States (Argentina, Australia, Cambodia and Nepal) developed awareness and education programmes focused on the entire spectrum of matters impacting the health and well-being of youth, such as sexual and reproductive health, diversity, hygiene, safety, substance abuse, violence-free relationships and mental health, as well as bullying and workplace harassment. Mexico launched a wide-ranging initiative anchored in a peer-to-peer approach to health promotion, including on topics such as gender equality, human rights and healthy leisure time. Youth centres in Bahrain offer prizes in arts and theatre to youth, including youth with disabilities.

44. Member States (Cambodia, Ghana and Mauritius) have also launched comprehensive programmes for adolescents and youth entirely focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Costa Rica and Morocco launched national strategic plans for the prevention of HIV and AIDS that include youth as a target group. Argentina established a counselling platform for young women with unintended pregnancies.

45. Canada is supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights in developing countries by ensuring that women – including young women – are able to access quality health care, modern contraception and the sexual education and prevention services they need to retain control over their bodies and exercise their rights.

46. In recent years, various Member States (Argentina, Australia, Morocco and Peru) have begun to focus on mental health and have launched programmes promoting the mental health of children, adolescents and youth. This is particularly important as half of all mental health disorders experienced by adults begin by the age of 14, with most cases remaining undetected and untreated.

47. Member States are also promoting young people's well-being through mechanisms such as sports, music and arts. As an example, young peoples' participation in sports is supported by several Member States (Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Costa Rica, Lebanon, Mexico, Nepal, Peru and Turkey). In particular, Canada is undertaking initiatives to increase the presence and leadership of women (including young women and girls) in sports.

48. The work of Canada in this area also includes a focus on sports for groups in vulnerable situations, including indigenous youth, youth with disabilities and youth who are not in education, employment or training. Bahrain has established centres in environmentally friendly buildings that offer sports programmes for young women and youth with disabilities, as well as safe learning and leisure spaces for young women.

49. Mexico is encouraging youth creativity through a music and art project that also seeks to enhance healthy communication among youth.

50. Mauritius has created an intergenerational dialogue project for family members, an active listening phone line where youth can share their concerns and a life skills education programme specifically for youth.

51. Ghana and Peru launched programmes focused on substance abuse among young people. Bahrain offers youth a drug abuse prevention programme, which is based on a peer-to-peer approach. Italy is implementing a programme aimed at preventing substance abuse, including driving under the influence, as well as the responsible use of the Internet.

52. In collaboration with ILO, Argentina manages a platform on health and safety in the workplace dedicated entirely to adolescents and youth. El Salvador continues to advance tattoo removal programmes for youth who are former members of criminal gangs.

United Nations efforts

53. In efforts aimed at improving the health and well-being of youth, United Nations entities have engaged in a multipronged strategy. WHO is engaged in a variety of youth-related health initiatives. In 2017, WHO, in collaboration with the secretariat of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UN-Women, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank, finalized the guidance to support country implementation for the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents. The framework and guidance assist governments in their national responses to the health needs of adolescents. The Strategic Guidance on Accelerating Actions for Adolescent Health for the South-East Asia Region (2018–2022) provides a way forward to countries to build upon the existing national adolescent health plans and adapt strategic elements from the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents. In line with the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents framework, the WHO Regional Office for Africa launched a flagship programme for adolescent health in 2017.

54. WHO is also supporting the implementation of the *Global Standards for Quality Health Care Services for Adolescents* and core competencies for adolescents in a growing number of countries. WHO is working on the UNICEF, UNFPA, UN-Women Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, the Family Planning 2020 initiative, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to strengthen policies and programmes on adolescent sexual and reproductive health with a focus on child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and HIV.

55. WHO is also establishing a United Nations H6 partnership technical working group on adolescent health and well-being. WHO continues to host the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, which is the world's largest alliance for the health and well-being of women, children and adolescents. The Pan American Health Organization adopted the Plan of Action for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health 2018–2030.

56. UNFPA hosts Every Woman Every Child, a multi-stakeholder movement to implement the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030). The Global Strategy provides a road map for ending all preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths, including stillbirths, by 2030, and improving the overall health and well-being of women, children, and adolescents.

57. In addition, UN-Women, UNESCO and UNFPA partnered with the “advancing resilience” team programme under its initiative to empower adolescent girls and young women through the provision of comprehensive sexuality education and a safe learning environment in Nepal. UNICEF has supported China and Kazakhstan in implementing national mental health intervention packages aimed at adolescents.

C. Addressing inequalities and marginalization⁵

Overview

58. Youth face significant social and economic challenges, yet they are regularly excluded from relevant decision and policymaking processes. Some youth, for example young migrants or young people from minority groups, often face heightened levels of exclusion. This erodes the fabric of social cohesion, as it affects the ways in which a sense of belonging is fostered. To prevent and address this, policy and programmatic approaches must be fully inclusive of youth and reflect the full range of youth identities and aspirations.

59. For example, young women may not experience development improvements at the same pace as young men. Young women represent three quarters of all young people not in employment, education or training and, in developing countries, four out of five such young people are young women. This suggests the participation of young women in the labour market is constrained by institutional barriers and an uneven share of unpaid household work.

60. Young women are also more likely than men to be out of the labour market or overrepresented in the informal economy, rendering them more likely to face multiple forms of insecurity. The social protection of young women, including young mothers, is crucial to supporting higher education completion rates and access to decent employment and to improving health outcomes.

61. Globally, gender parity in primary and secondary education enrolment rates is progressing well; however, significant differences exist at the regional and national levels. In several regions, young women are more likely to be excluded from

⁵ The information presented in this section has been drawn from the following sources: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018; *ibid.*, *Report on the World Social Situation: Promoting Inclusion Through Social Protection* (2018); ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a better working future* (Geneva, ILO, 2017); ILO, *World Employment Social Outlook – Trends 2018*; ILO, “Issue brief No. 4 – Cluster 2: Bringing an end to pervasive global women’s inequality in the workplace”, available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---cabinet/documents/publication/wcms_618166.pdf; UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report, 2017/18: Accountability in education: meeting our commitments* (Paris, UNESCO, 2017); UNESCO, document FS/2017/LIT/45; UNESCO, “Women must be fully engaged in Technical and Vocational Education and Training”, available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/women-must-be-fully-engaged-technical-and-vocational-education-and-training?language=fr>; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, “Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world”; UNESCO, *Cracking the code: girls’ and women’s education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)* (Paris, UNESCO, 2017); Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, “HIV prevention among adolescent girls and young women”, available at www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_HIV_prevention_among_adolescent_girls_and_young_women.pdf; UNICEF, “25 million child marriages prevented in last decade due to accelerated progress, according to new UNICEF estimates”, available at www.unicef.org/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented-last-decade-due-accelerated-progress-according; UNICEF, “Child marriage”, available at www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities*, 2018; E/C.19/2013/3; United Nations, “Indigenous peoples’ right to education”; available at www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/pdf/Backgrounder_Indigenous_Day_2016.pdf; United Nations, “Discriminatory pressures confronted by indigenous youth, traditional land rights of peoples, among issues highlighted as permanent forum continues session”, available at www.un.org/press/en/2016/hr5300.doc.htm; Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action; UN-Women, “Facts and figures: humanitarian action”, available at www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/facts-and-figures; A/72/761-S/2018/86.

education than boys, especially at the upper secondary level. Globally, young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years are 3 per cent less likely to be literate than young men.

62. The Incheon Declaration emphasizes quality education and lifelong learning for all, including equitable and increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training and to higher education and research, especially for young women who are less likely to enrol in and complete these types of programmes. Often, technological and vocational education and training systems are gender-biased; this affects not only access and participation rates for young women, but also the choice by students of specific programmes. This phenomenon contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequalities in labour markets and in society at large.

63. Young women also face challenges in receiving quality education that can support their lifelong empowerment. Education curricula that are focused closely on power dynamics, social norms and rights are key to the completion of education, access to decent work and capacity for lifelong learning.

64. In some regions, the low number of female teachers, especially in upper secondary education and in subjects relating to STEM, diminishes the prevalence of relatable role models for girls and young women. Only 35 per cent of STEM students in higher education globally are women. This gender disparity is alarming, especially given that future jobs, including those that will support sustainable development and inclusive growth, will be closely linked to STEM fields.

65. Disparities between young men and women are also seen in terms of health outcomes. Globally, young women between the ages of 15 and 24 are most vulnerable to HIV, experiencing infection rates two or three times as high as young men, depending on regions.

66. In addition, despite a decline in the prevalence of early marriage, the overall numbers remain high. Globally, one out of every five young women gets married before she turns 18, while in some regions this rate rises to one in three young women. Early marriage often interrupts education, limits employment opportunities, results in early pregnancy and increases the risk of domestic violence and social isolation.

67. Young women experience varied forms of violence, including cyberharassment and -bullying, for which the highest prevalence rate is among young women between the ages of 18 and 29.

68. Youth with disabilities are among the most marginalized and poor in society, often experiencing profound socioeconomic inequalities and unable to enjoy their full human rights on an equal basis with others. Youth with disabilities face barriers to accessing truly accessible education, employment and health services. This contributes to the disproportionately high rates of poverty among persons with disabilities, as well as to isolation and even abuse.

69. Indigenous youth face numerous challenges related to the intergenerational effects of colonization and assimilation policies, as well as ongoing discrimination and a lack of recognition of their heritage and rights. For example, indigenous youth seldom have access to culturally appropriate education in their own languages. Moreover, indigenous youth often have to leave their traditional communities and move to urban areas to pursue employment opportunities. Once in the cities, they can be subjected to increased discrimination, which may have devastating effects and generate various health and social problems.

70. While age-disaggregated data is lacking, evidence suggests that youth constitute a large proportion of those displaced by conflicts and disasters worldwide. With limited access to education and livelihood opportunities, youth in humanitarian

situations are often unable to chart a clear path for their future. There are inspiring examples of youth demonstrating resilience and adaptability in such situations. However, in general, the ability of young people to transition to stable adulthood – as well as their capacity to reach their full potential – is in jeopardy if they are not sufficiently supported psychologically, socially and economically. When it comes to young women, their safety is also at risk as sexual and gender-based violence, as well as human trafficking, are more prevalent within displaced populations.

71. Globally, one in four young people are affected by violence or armed conflict in some way. However, the level of participation of youth in peace-related policymaking and political efforts is dismal and the preventive role of youth in building and sustaining peace has often been undervalued and underleveraged. This deprives youth of their agency and their capacity to drive change.

72. While youth often face barriers to inclusion, they are often very well placed to help build communities in which all persons can peacefully share in opportunities and live in dignity. Youth frequently possess the skills, networks and awareness necessary to reach out to other youth who are in vulnerable situations and foster mutual understanding and, eventually, inclusion.

73. Youth is the life stage when social norms, self-awareness and self-efficacy are formed and where individuals make a series of transitions based on decisions that will affect their lives and their communities. These choices are directly influenced by the quality and relevance of the knowledge, skills and competencies they possess in that specific moment, as well as by the information, counselling, support and opportunities provided.

74. In view of this, policies and initiatives seeking to reduce and remove barriers to youth development and empowerment need to take the full heterogeneity of youth into careful consideration. Accurate, timely and high-quality data disaggregated by age and gender is essential for the development of evidence-based youth policies and programmes, especially for marginalized and vulnerable youth.

Efforts of Member States

75. Member States are increasingly aware of the issues faced by young women and are implementing various initiatives to help reduce the inequalities they face. For example, Argentina launched a gender parity initiative that seeks to identify and address the inequalities caused by the social conception of gender, including those experienced by youth.

76. Canada launched a comprehensive gender equality initiative for youth with a view to assessing how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people experience policies, programmes and initiatives. As part of this initiative, a series of national conversations on gender equality with young Canadians are being held and young men are engaging in the promotion of gender equality.

77. Mauritius is offering a theatre tool to raise young people's awareness of stereotypes and attitudes that impede the empowerment of girls, young women and women. Mauritius also organized capacity-building workshops for young ambassadors on gender issues to raise the awareness of youth of concepts related to gender.

78. Ghana created a programme seeking to empower young women and support their participation and leadership in national development.

79. Peru established guidelines focused on girls and young women to ensure that students are able to complete their education in safe and violence-free environments.

Israel now includes gender equity in the criteria for the professional development and evaluation of teachers.

80. Italy recently opened a centre dedicated to young members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community which offers psychological and legal support, and conflict mediation services and organizes cultural activities and initiatives to prevent discrimination.

81. Canada recently increased its funding for multiculturalism and anti-racism programmes and is investing in research on more culturally-focused mental health services for the Black Canadian community.

82. Mexico implemented a programme for youth in vulnerable situations that focuses on the reconstruction of the social fabric and the promotion of responsible citizenship.

United Nations efforts

83. Several United Nations entities are contributing to the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into youth development efforts. UN-Women organized a youth advocacy platform during the 2017 and 2018 sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation jointly run a field project seeking the empowerment of Syrian female refugees in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon for the period 2018–2020. UNICEF has assisted the Government of Zambia in the provision of career club and internship placements for secondary school girls.

84. Many United Nations entities are channelling their efforts into various initiatives benefiting young people who have been marginalized by conflict, violence and crime. United Nations entities and the European Union have partnered to implement the Spotlight Initiative, aimed at ending violence against women and girls. The third incarnation of the Young Peacebuilders programme, an educational initiative, was launched by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Agencia extremeña de cooperación internacional para el desarrollo in the Middle East and North Africa region in February 2019. The Youth Forum of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) took place in March 2019, bringing together policymakers and youth participants from 26 countries.

85. The “Frontlines” global report was prepared by UNDP, in collaboration with the Oslo Governance Centre and with the support of the Government of Norway. The report synthesizes data, a mapping of youth-led actions, a global literature review and a global survey on youth and countering and preventing violent extremism for practitioners in order to better understand young people’s aspirations and perceptions and improve programming.

86. Several United Nations entities are working to empower youth marginalized through displacement. The Secondary and Youth Education Programme (2019–2023) of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is aimed at the inclusion of refugees in national secondary educational systems. Since 2017, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations has organized PEACEapp workshops in Morocco, Spain and Tunisia, bringing together local young people and young migrants in the development of digital literacy skills and intercultural understanding. UNV and UNHCR, in conjunction with the Government of Germany, is implementing a project involving refugee volunteers in the promotion of security and protection.

87. Several United Nations entities continue to be engaged in efforts aimed at empowering young people who have been marginalized owing to their disabilities. UNICEF has supported Kyrgyzstan in the development of disability-friendly

educational materials on menstrual hygiene. ESCWA helped to facilitate a national consultation in Egypt in November 2018 on violence against women and girls with disabilities. The UNDP-UNV Talent Programme for Young Professionals with Disabilities, in conjunction with the Government of Germany, oversaw the deployment of two United Nations volunteers. Lastly, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean are cooperating on a capacity development project with the Governments of Argentina, Ecuador and Peru to develop specific initiatives to support the increased participation of young people with disabilities in education and the labour market.

III. United Nations youth development efforts at the international, regional and national levels

A. United Nations Youth Strategy

88. The United Nations Youth Strategy,⁶ adopted and launched in 2018, envisions a world in which the human rights of every young person are realized, that ensures every young person is empowered to achieve his or her full potential and that recognizes young people's agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change. Through its Youth Strategy, the United Nations seeks to become a leadership example, knowledge and innovation pioneer, an investment and solution catalyst and an accountability leader to strengthen its ability to deliver for youth. The Strategy further calls for the United Nations to strengthen efforts in five priority areas: engagement, participation and advocacy; informed and healthy foundations; economic empowerment through decent work; youth and human rights; and peace and resilience-building. Led by the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the High-level Steering Committee for the United Nations Youth Strategy held its first meeting on 27 February 2019. The Committee agreed to create a joint working group for the strategy's implementation.

B. Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council

89. As the largest annual global convening of young people at the United Nations, the Economic and Social Council Youth Forum affords youth leaders the opportunity to engage in policy discussions with Member States. The Youth Forum is based on the premise that the recognition of youth is essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The eighth Youth Forum, entitled "Youth: empowered, included and equal", took place on 8 and 9 April 2019 and focused on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 4 (quality education), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities), 13 (climate action) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). The outcome of the Youth Forum will contribute to other United Nations processes, including the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the 2019 Sustainable Development Goal summit.

C. Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, World Youth Report and International Youth Day

90. The Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development facilitates cooperation on youth development among United Nations entities. It aims to identify joint priorities, share good practices and ensure effective coordination. Succeeding the United

⁶ See <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>.

Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) as rotating Co-Chair, together with the permanent Co-Chair, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNESCO hosted the annual meeting of the Inter-Agency Network at its Paris headquarters in 2019. The meeting provided an opportunity to assess progress and identify new avenues for inter-agency cooperation on youth development. To increase youth engagement, the Network decided to add a third Co-Chair – a youth caucus – which will represent youth organizations working with the Network.

91. The *World Youth Report 2018*, prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which acts as the focal point on youth for the entire United Nations system, examines the mutually supportive roles of the new agenda and current youth development efforts. The report provides insight into the role of young people in sustainable development in the context of the 2030 Agenda and related frameworks, in particular, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Programme of Action for Youth. The statistical annex of the *World Youth Report* details available data by compiling the data at the global and regional levels on the Sustainable Development Goal indicators relevant to youth, as well as the World Programme of Action for Youth indicators. Among the 90 youth-related indicators of the 232 indicators in the global framework, data is not available for 48 at the global and regional level.⁷ The report asserts that bridging the gaps in data availability and addressing data inequalities between and within countries will require capacity-building, substantial financial investment and innovative approaches, especially in the least developed countries.

92. International Youth Day 2018 was celebrated under the leadership of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UN-Habitat. The theme of the day was “Safe spaces for youth” and a day of events was held in Nairobi.

93. The official celebration of International Youth Day 2019 will focus on “Transforming education” as a contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 4, highlighting the importance of ensuring that education is inclusive, relevant and equitable. It will be hosted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNESCO and be available online to ensure broad attendance.

D. Support for the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth 2019 and Youth Forum Lisboa+21

94. Portugal, together with the Portuguese National Youth Council, organized the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth 2019 and Youth Forum Lisboa+21 in June 2019 in Lisbon. The Conference was endorsed by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ILO, UNFPA, UNICEF, the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and UNESCO. The outcome of the conference was a renewed Lisboa+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes under the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

E. Additional United Nations efforts in the area of youth

95. United Nations entities continue to incorporate data and evidence in youth development efforts. Building on the statistical annex prepared for the *World Youth Report 2019*, the *World Youth Report 2020*, under preparation by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, will include country-level data. WHO, together with the secretariat of UNAIDS, UN-Women, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World

⁷ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018.

Bank, is supporting governments to provide youth with evidence-based health-care policies through the Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents programme. UNICEF and Gucci are running a fundraising platform aimed at generating data for evidence-based responses to challenges facing adolescents. In 2018, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific concluded data collection through questionnaires on 10,000 young people in Cambodia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This research provided unique information, directly from young people, regarding their concerns and hopes on pressing issues impacting their inclusion in social, economic and civic domains.

96. United Nations entities continue to advance the technical capacity of policymakers and practitioners working in youth development through the formulation of guidelines and toolkits. UNESCO, together with UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and UN-Women, contributed to the 2018 revision of the publication *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*. In 2018, UNCTAD partnered with the secretariat of the Commonwealth of Nations to publish a toolkit report on youth entrepreneurship. In 2019, UNODC and UNESCO collaborated on guidelines for strengthening the rule of law through education.

97. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs launched a new project in 2018, with support from the Government of Italy, to increase the capacities of governments and youth-led civil society organizations to formulate, implement and evaluate effective national youth policies and action plans that promote conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the youth, peace and security agenda. The project is being implemented in three countries – Lebanon, Liberia and Kenya.

98. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has also been implementing a project entitled “Evidence-based policy action on youth development in Africa: young people’s contributions to peace and security” for the period 2016–2019. This project is aimed at strengthening the capacities of governments and civil society, including youth and youth-led organizations, for the evidence-based formulation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes that address the concerns of Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) on youth, peace and security. Capacity development workshops to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 have been held in Togo, Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. These have brought together participants drawn from members of youth-led civil society organizations and have also benefited from the participation of senior government officials and colleagues from the United Nations system, including representatives of United Nations resident coordinators. The young participants have subsequently constituted themselves in national networks for peace and security and the Goals.

99. United Nations entities continue to conduct research and publish reports on a wide range of issues affecting young people. UNDP, UNICEF, UN-Women and WHO have provided input to the Global Challenges Research Fund of the UK Research and Innovation Council initiative on accelerating the advancement of African youth across a number of domains. The youth, peace and security study entitled “The missing peace: independent progress study on youth and peace and security” ([A/72/761-S/2018/86](#)) was published in 2018 under the coordination of UNFPA and the Peacebuilding Support Office.

100. The youth delegate programme of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs remains an important channel enabling youth to participate in United Nations processes by joining their national delegations at intergovernmental meetings. More than 60 youth delegates from over 35 Member States participated in the seventy-third session of the General Assembly in 2018, while over 55 youth delegates from more than 30 countries participated in the seventy-second session in 2017.

101. UNDP has developed YouthConnekt Africa, in partnership with Rwanda, to provide solutions for the global South and support the implementation of relevant South-South initiatives to empower youth. YouthConnekt has been launched in twelve countries (Cameroon, Cabo Verde, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). The African Union's Executive Council officially endorsed YouthConnekt Africa as a continental platform to coordinate youth empowerment initiatives.

102. UNDP, with the support of Italy, launched the new "16x16" global initiative to recognize, value and support the positive role that 16 youth organizations, movements and networks in all regions of the world play in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 16, promoting young people's meaningful participation in the implementation, monitoring and accountability of Goal 16 at the global, regional and country-levels. The 16x16 led global consultations and presented the "Rome Youth Call-to-Action" at the Sustainable Development Goal 16 preparatory conference held prior to the high-level political forum on sustainable development 2019.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

103. The present report has highlighted the progress achieved as well as the persistent challenges faced by youth as they seek to reach their own full potential and participate in their country's development. It concludes that the meaningful political, civic, social and economic inclusion of youth is critical to the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the inclusion of youth helps to ensure the provision of systems, institutions and practices that reduce the chances of multiple social groups facing marginalization and disempowerment in the future.

104. The report tackled three issues at the heart of the development and participation of youth: employment and entrepreneurship, health and well-being and inequalities and marginalization. The need for evidence and data has also been highlighted. Based on the information and analysis provided above, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration by Member States:

(a) Intensify efforts to address the high rates of youth underemployment and unemployment, with a focus on improving synergies between the education and employment sectors through quality apprenticeships, responsive technical and vocational education and training programmes, and on better preparing young people for jobs in the green economy. In addition, attention should be paid to helping young people to transition from the informal to the formal sector, better supporting young entrepreneurs and enhancing data collection for the analysis of current and future labour market needs;

(b) Provide access to safe, effective, sustainable, non-discriminatory and appropriate health-care services, including treatment and counselling for mental health conditions, and strengthen health education and literacy with the aim of improving health outcomes for young people over their lifetimes;

(c) Ensure that no young people are left behind by developing and implementing policies and programmes that include the perspectives of all young people, including those from marginalized groups, and foster their equal access to opportunities to contribute to sustainable development;

(d) Strengthen evidence-based policies and programmes for youth by supporting the generation, collection and use of data disaggregated by age, gender and disability.