

**OHCHR Study on Impacts of COVID-19 on Youth Rights**  
**Submission by the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth**  
**3 March 2022**

- 1) *Can you provide information on any programs or activities your agency has implemented regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people?*
  - The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (here and after: OSGEY) brought attention to lesser-known stories of youth rising to meet the challenge of the pandemic. Through a total of **13 blog posts published on Medium**, OSGEY highlighted different young leaders and youth organizations from **66** countries and territories. A total of **130** stories of young people and youth organizations were shared between March and August 2020. Several articles focused on marginalized young people most often left furthest behind — including young people with disabilities, young LGBTIQ+ people and young refugees.
  - Through the [#CopingwithCOVID webinar series](#) — organized in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF — OSGEY provided a platform to thousands of young people worldwide, including **45** young speakers from **35** different countries, to share and connect on their mental health concerns during a time of increased stress and anxiety.
  - On International Human Rights Day, OSGEY partnered with Amnesty International's Global Youth Collective to publish a [blog](#) featuring insights and perspectives from 10 young human rights defenders globally who are adapting to COVID-19.
  - In support of UN75, OSGEY hosted an essay competition titled: "The Future We Want, the UN We Need" which gathered more than 800 submissions with ideas, solutions and suggestions on how the UN can [#LeadTheNewNormal](#) to build a better future (the winning essay was [published in Devex](#)).
  - On the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, OSGEY hosted an Instagram Live conversation on the experiences and challenges of LGBTIQ+ youth during COVID-19, featuring leadership from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and two youth activists.
  - OSGEY co-published an article with the ILGA World Youth Steering Committee titled [“Don't let the pandemic marginalize LGBTIQ+ people further”](#) on the World Economic Forum's website.
  - On International Refugee Day, OSGEY supported the [#ForYou](#) social media campaign by the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council, highlighting positive contributions by displaced youth in the context of COVID-19.
  
- 2) *Based on your work, what are the main challenges that young people face in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to it? If any age-disaggregated data has been collected in this regard, please include it in your response.*
  - **Shrinking civic space:** As the [Global Report on Protection of Youth in Civic Space](#) has shown, COVID-19 had a negative impact on young people's ability to exercise their right to participate in public and political affairs. Youth were forced to interrupt their work and were unable to exercise their freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. There were also fewer opportunities to be heard and young people encountered difficulties in documenting human rights violations in their communities, which require field research and personal contacts.
  - **Financial instability in civic space:** Although the majority of youth-led organizations have always worked with limited resources and funding, the [Development Alternative series](#) led by young people documented that this issue was further exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making long-term, sustainable and flexible funding for youth in civic space more urgent than ever.
  - **Mental health issues:** In the [Global Report on Protection of Youth in Civic Space](#), many youth respondents highlighted emotional anxiety, feeling of unhappiness, lost confidence, increased

stress and general worries about life and survival, which made it difficult for many to continue their everyday activities. During the [#CopingwithCOVID webinar series](#), young people also noted feelings of anxiety due to political inaction, repressive policies implemented during the pandemic, and uncertainty regarding their future education and employment opportunities. In a [survey](#) conducted by OSGEY in collaboration with the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations members (in the lead up to the webinar series) 61.89% of young people shared that it is not easy to access mental health services in their country.

- **Disrupted education, employment or training:** In a survey conducted by the International Labor Organization [Youth & COVID-19](#), over 73% of young people surveyed (18-29) were impacted by closures of education institutions and training centers, with over 65% of young people reporting less learning opportunities. It was also noted that young workers who lost their job were almost twice as likely to be affected by probable anxiety or depression as those who continued to be employed.
- **Digital divide:** Although technology and innovation have provided new opportunities for education, learning, training, digital and civic engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic for some groups of young people, the [Believe in Better: From Policy to Practice](#) report documented that youth without access (due to a lack of infrastructure, money, or ICT skills) are being left behind.
- **Compounded barriers for the most marginalized youth:** Young people are not a homogenous group, and are therefore impacted by COVID-19 differently, depending on their background. Although most marginalized youth have showcased immense resilience during the pandemic, they have also encountered numerous challenges.

For example, [quarantine measures have isolated many LGBTIQ youth](#) from supportive services and peer support centers, forcing many of them to be in isolation with abusive, violent families and partners ([if not experiencing homelessness](#), which was also prevalent); young trans women, gender-diverse youth of color and young LGBTIQ migrants and refugees have been particularly impacted by an increase in violence.

All types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, [have intensified](#) since the onset of COVID19. Due to movement restrictions and closure of civic space, many young women have moved their civic activism to the digital sphere to reach wider audiences; however, this has also exposed them to an increase in online harassment, online hate speech and smear campaigns.

The pandemic, the limited usability of digital platforms and materials in inaccessible formats have contributed to young people with disabilities [missing out on education opportunities](#), as well as [access to crucial information](#) on the pandemic. During lockdown, they have suffered a further loss of privacy, [higher risks of domestic and gender-based violence](#) (especially, women and girls with disabilities) and a higher risk of falling at or below the poverty line (it has become [harder to obtain and maintain employment](#), especially one that pays a living wage).

Most displaced youth populations (young refugees, migrants, IDPs, stateless youth) are often [excluded from national support and protection measures](#), and are therefore at risk of higher rate of labor exploitation and abuse during the pandemic. [Access to essential health information](#), shelter, water and other services is limited due to living in informal settlements. Moreover, with increased distance learning, [access to education and opportunities for learning the languages of their host countries](#) is also limited due to lack of necessary digital technologies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated existing humanitarian crises and conflicts, all of which has a disproportionately negative effect on young people living in conflict and recent post-conflict settings. Youth in conflict settings have limited access to essential institutions for

their development, including for educational and health purposes (forthcoming: Secretary-General's Annual Report on Youth, Peace and Security).

3) *Can you share any good practices to support young people and ensure the full implementation of their rights during and after the pandemic?*

**Promoting accountability in working with and for young people:**

- [Youth2030](#), the first-ever system-wide youth strategy of the UN, was launched in 2018 by the UN Secretary-General with the ambitious aim of scaling up global, regional, and national actions with and for youth. The strategy has been an essential element for supporting the role of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in ensuring the full implementation of young people's rights during and after the pandemic.

Now in its fourth year, implementation has expanded greatly across the UN system, with **49 UN entities** and **all 130 UN Country Teams** (UNCTs) contributing to the strategy. Two scorecards for performance measurement and accountability have been introduced for routine annual reporting by UN Country Teams and UN entities. The scorecards include Key Performance Indicators across all priority pillars of Youth2030, including youth and human rights and COVID response and recovery. All 130 UN Country Teams have reported against the scorecard in 2020 and in 2021; 49 UN entities have reported for the first time against the scorecard, in 2021. In April 2021, OSGEY launched the first-ever progress report on the United Nations Youth Strategy, Youth2030: Progress Report 2021, together with members of the Youth2030 High Level Steering Committee and its Joint Working Group. The report and its data companion, the UN Snapshot Series, provides rich data and insights on UN's work for and with youth across the pillars of the strategy, highlighting the key achievements and gaps in implementation. The second progress report is to be launched in April 2022. Some data highlights from 2020 (in Progress Report 2021) include:

- **UNCT action on youth and COVID:** 80%\* UNCTs included youth in their actions on COVID-19 response and recovery at least in one area/ sector/ criteria; Top areas supported include Policy support (95%), "Leave No Youth Behind" (95%) and Data availability and quality (75%), Investments in youth-led solutions for COVID (75%)

In addition to covid response and recovery, UNCTs supported routine actions on Youth and Human Rights as below:

- 82 out of 130 UNCT Joint Work Plans cover programmatic activities in Priority Area 4: Youth and Human Rights
- 56 out of 130 UNCTs activated campaigns in Priority Area 4: Youth and Human Rights in their Joint Communication and Advocacy strategy

**Promoting interagency collaboration and collective ownership:**

- OSGEY regularly contributes to UN system-wide initiatives to ensure that young people are meaningfully included, and their needs reflected. Through consultations, mapping exercises, advocacy and participation in task forces, OSGEY supported several notable initiatives since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, including, but not limited to: The development of [Our Common Agenda](#) – a transformative vision on the future of global cooperation which prioritizes young people's meaningful inclusion; [Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights](#) which pays special attention to the needs and experiences of young people, especially in relation to their participation, protection and prevention in civic space; and supporting the initiatives of the UN Working Groups on Addressing Racism, to improve responses to racial injustice issues at the UN that affect young people.

In partnership with OHCHR and UNESCO, in 2020 OSGEY launched the fourth phase of the [World Programme for Human Rights Education](#) (WPHRE), focusing on human rights education for, with, and by youth. In 2021, WPHRE partners advocated and promoted human rights and human rights education principles to youth; highlighted the importance of human rights education for youth and their role, as well as global support to this end; and encouraged youth engagement in human rights education, providing relevant guidance.

### **Promoting decent work**

- In 2020, OSGEY ended unpaid internships, introducing a new fellowship programme, developed in collaboration with UN Volunteers (UNV) and explicitly designed to provide more meaningful and paid employment opportunities for young people at the UN. So far, OSGEY introduced two classes of fellows and encouraged other UN teams to put an end to unpaid internships as well.

OSGEY also published an op-ed with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) titled “[Resilience and Strength Shine Brightest – COVID-19 recovery offers the chance to create a more just, compassionate and sustainable economy for history’s largest generation of youth.](#)” which focused on the need for greater investment in mental health and labor market policies for young people to be able to succeed in the aftermath of the pandemic.

### **Condemning violence during youth-led protests**

- In October 2020, together with the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, and the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions — the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth published [a joint statement](#) in response to recent violent escalations during youth-led protests around the world. The statement reaffirmed OSGEY’s solidarity with all young people protesting peacefully around the world and called for their inclusion in meaningful dialogues so that their grievances and demands for more just societies will be heard.

### **Collecting and promoting age-disaggregated data collection and reporting:**

- In 2020, in partnership with Action Aid Denmark and supported by Restless Development and the Major Group for Children and Youth, OSGEY launched **Believe in Better** — a working paper on young people’s inclusion in national follow up, review, and accountability processes of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a follow up to this initiative, in 2022, OSGEY with partners launched [Believe in Better: From Policy to Practice](#) report, which demonstrates how the UN is supporting young people to be meaningfully included in decision-making spaces at multiple levels of governance across a range of countries, with differing challenges and opportunities.

In 2020, OSGEY supported the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, mobilizing various stakeholders to provide humanitarian actors with [operational guidance on working with and for young people during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). The guidance is based on five key action areas – services, participation, capacity, resources and data – to guide practitioners in the development of an adolescent and youth-focused and inclusive COVID-19 response.

### **Promoting young people’s right to meaningfully participate in decision-making**

- OSGEY co-organized with the Inter Parliamentary Union **a virtual conference on Young Women’s Political Participation and Leadership**. The event promoted young women’s political participation by placing young women leaders at the center stage to identify, in cooperation with other key stakeholders, concrete steps to be taken to enhance young women’s engagement in political decision-making. The

event saw the active participation of over 50 people, of which about 1/3 were members of parliament.

Another example of promoting young people's right to participate in decision-making processes is ECOSOC Youth Forum, happening on an annual basis and supported by OSGEY. The Forum provides the largest global platform for a candid dialogue among Member States and young leaders from around the world on solutions to challenges affecting youth wellbeing, and serves as a unique space for youth to share their visions on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

**Ensuring safe online spaces by promoting accountability and awareness about risks related to online youth participation:**

- OSGEY partnered with Twitter to develop a [Youth Activist Checklist](#) - a guidance on digital safety and online participation for young people. Launched on International Youth Day 2021, the Youth Activist Checklist was initiated to equip young people with youth-friendly tools that will help them navigate different ways of staying safe online, as well as ensure youth to continue to meaningfully engage throughout the process.
- 3) *Based on your work on the topic, what role have young people had in COVID-19 response, vaccination, and recovery efforts, and how has that role been valued/encouraged?*
- As shown through the **13 blog posts published on Medium**, young people were at the forefront of addressing the COVID-19 impact through community support, art, technology and innovation. Whether they were [creating community support systems](#) through facilitation of communal wealth distribution in Indonesia, [providing response teams](#) with helplines to provide support for girls at increased risk of sexual abuse in Nigeria, or [launching virtual platforms](#) to offer psychosocial support to youth in Venezuela, young people were and still are the key agents of change and support in their communities during the COVID-19 recovery.
  - Their roles were rarely recognized or supported, and young people and their efforts were instead overshadowed by harmful stereotypes. In the [Global Report on Protection of Youth in Civic Space](#), young people in all world regions reported that when they took to the streets to protest against discriminatory practices and political inaction during COVID-19, they were presented in the media as violent, troublemaking, with a tendency to avoid their obligations, such as attending school. Such stereotypes were common even before the onset of the pandemic. However, as the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has noted in her various speeches, the media has focused during the pandemic on "[the small minority of young people who acted irresponsibly and recklessly, while completely sidelining thousands of young people taking actions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.](#)"
  - Young people also hold a key role in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts by being solutions makers that contribute to the COVID19 recovery efforts for SDGs. OSGEY highlighted this important role of young people as well as their solutions during International Youth Day last year at the #YouthLead Innovation Festival. Their solutions were amplified through the multistakeholder discussions and solutions presentation at the Festival itself, as well as under the [#YouthLead Solutions compendium](#) that can be accessed by visiting our webpage.
  - Since the onset of the pandemic, The Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has recognized young people's courageous leadership and innovation, as well as the challenges they face, in numerous speeches and discussions with government representatives, academia, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, such as: During a [briefing to the UN Security Council](#) at the Open Debate on Youth, Peace and Security; the first-ever [Intersessional Seminar](#) on Youth and Human Rights; the General Assembly Consultations on Our Common Agenda, and many others.