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United Nations Population Fund Background Guide 2021

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2021 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This year's staff is: Directors Andrew Marriott (Conference A) and Melissa Salgado (Conference B). Andrew is completing a Master of Public Policy degree at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and is writing a capstone project on digital privacy in Canada. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Anthropology from MacEwan University in Edmonton. Melissa is a graduate of the The University of Texas at Tyler where she earned her Bachelors and her Masters. She is currently working as a lecturer of Political Science.

The topics under discussion for UNFPA are:

- I.Promoting Access to Family Planning in Developing States
- II.Increasing Youth Leadership and Participation in Society

The UNFPA is a UN agency which works across 150 countries and strives to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Addressing HIV is integral to UNFPA's goal of achieving Sustainable Development Goal(SDG) Target 5.6 to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health. The Agency helps countries use population data to prepare policies and provides technical guidance, training and support to empower its partners in the field. Delegates should understand the mandate, governance and work of the UNFPA In order to simulate the committee and address the topics and agenda at hand.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) on 1 March 2021 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN•NY Position Papers](#) website.

Two resources, available to download from the [NMUN website](#), that serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions are the:

1. [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#) - explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not start discussion on the topics with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) - include the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the Conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretaries-General for the HRHA Department, Ismail Dogar (Conference A) and Tobias Dietrich (Conference B), at usg.hrha@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sincerely,

Conference A

Andrew Marriott, *Director*

Conference B

Melissa Salgado, *Director*

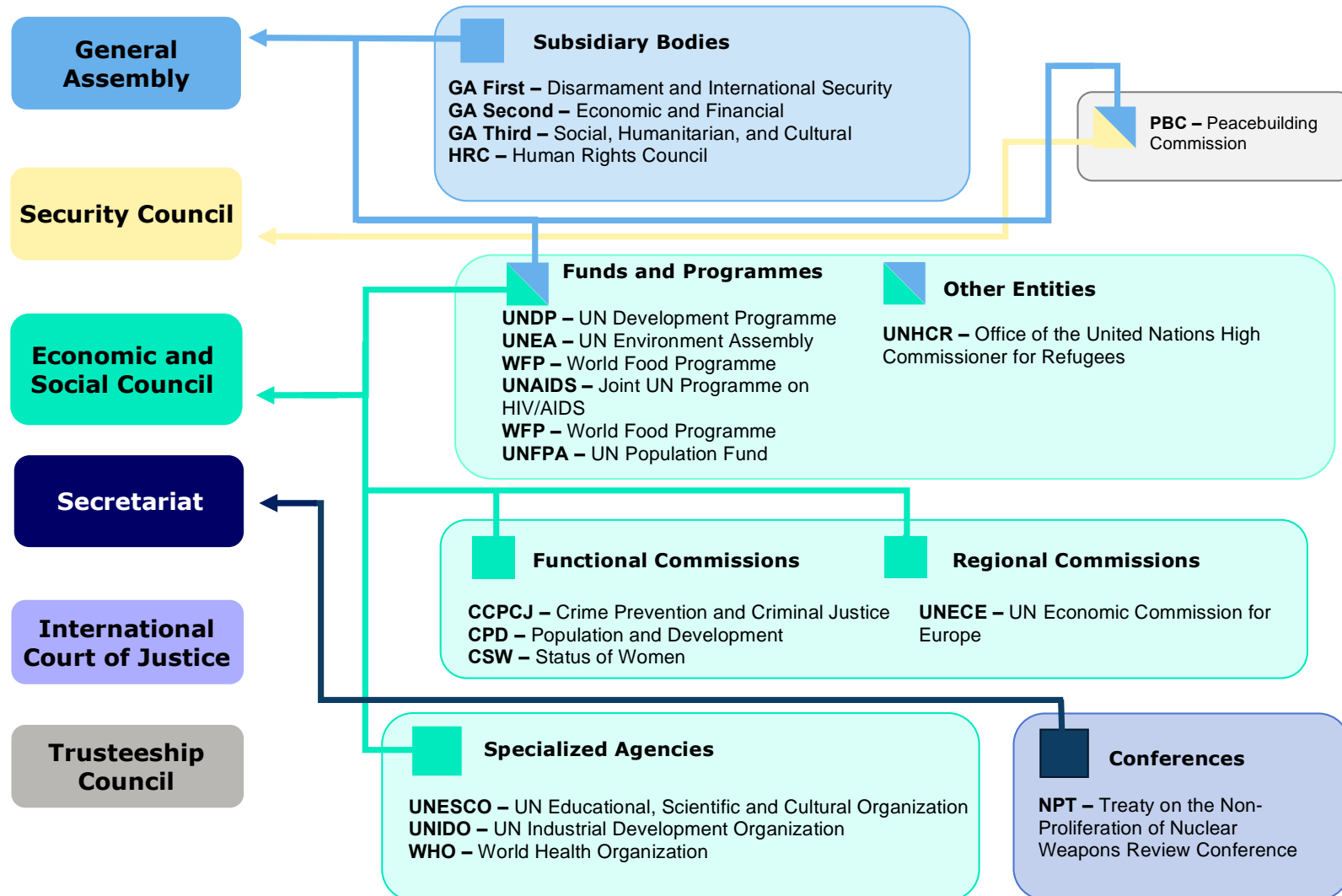


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United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the UN system simulated at NMUN•NY and demonstrates the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee's position, purpose, and powers within the UN system.



Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was established in 1967 as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and formally began its operations in 1969, the year that the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared the right of parents to plan their families, an issue in which the UNFPA directly assesses.¹ With an emphasis on protecting human rights, especially for vulnerable populations, UNFPA has a key role in the UN's population initiatives by supporting safe childbirth, family planning, and by promoting gender equality, with emphasis on women and girls' rights to sexual and reproductive health.² To reflect its leadership in addressing population policy issues within the UN system, UNFPA was officially renamed the United Nations Population Fund in 1987, while retaining its original acronym.³ UNFPA's *Strategic Plan 2018-2021* prioritizes four core areas of interconnected work: sexual and reproductive health rights and services, adolescent and youth empowerment, gender equality and women's empowerment, and population data for development.⁴ These core areas include issues such as family planning and contraception, emergency and humanitarian crisis situations, obstetric fistula, HIV infections, and poverty.⁵ Across the globe, UNFPA supports reproductive health care services and provides materials for over 20 million women a year in 150 Member States.⁶ Additionally, UNFPA works to end sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which affects one in three women globally, and female genital mutilation (FGM), which affects 3 million girls annually.⁷ UNFPA also supports efforts to end child marriages and unwanted teen pregnancies.⁸

Governance, Structure, and Membership

In 1993, UN General Assembly resolution 48/162 changed the reporting mechanisms for UNFPA.⁹ Where it had previously reported to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA began reporting directly to the General Assembly with additional policy guidance from the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹⁰ Further governance and structural shifts resulting from General Assembly resolution 48/162 included transforming the UNDP and UNFPA's joint 48-Member State Governing Council into a 36-member Executive Board.¹¹ The Member States on the board serve on a rotating basis of two years with representation from each regional block.¹² The regional block memberships consist of eight African states, seven Asia-Pacific states, four Eastern European states, five Latin American and Caribbean states, and 12 Western European and other states.¹³ The Board holds an annual session, regular sessions, and pre-session consultations.¹⁴ It is the responsibility of the Board to provide administrative, financial, and intergovernmental support and to supervise programs and activities within its thematic areas.¹⁵

¹ UNFPA, *About Us*, 2020; UNFPA, *Frequently Asked Questions*, 2020.

² UNFPA, *Frequently Asked Questions*, 2020; UNFPA, *How We Work*, 2020.

³ UNFPA, *Frequently Asked Questions*, 2020.

⁴ UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2018.

⁵ UNFPA, *Humanitarian Action 2017 Overview*, 2017; UNFPA, *About Us*, 2020; UNFPA, *Frequently Asked Questions*, 2020.

⁶ UNFPA, *About Us*, 2020.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ UN General Assembly, *Further Measures for the Restructuring and Revitalization of the United Nations in the Economic, Social and Related Fields (A/RES/48/162)*, 1994.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² UNFPA, *Executive Board*, 2020; UNFPA, *Members of the Executive Board*.

¹³ UNFPA, *Members of the Executive Board*, 2020.

¹⁴ UNFPA, *Schedule of Meetings*, 2020.

¹⁵ UN General Assembly, *Further Measures for the Restructuring and Revitalization of the United Nations in the Economic, Social and Related Fields (A/RES/48/162)*, 1994.

Financially, UNFPA is fully supported by voluntary contributions from Member States, intergovernmental organizations, private sector groups and foundations, and individuals; it does not receive funds from the UN regular budget.¹⁶ In 2018, total contributions made to UNFPA reached \$1.255 million, the highest gross contribution revenue made by the UNFPA to date.¹⁷ Of the total, \$872 million went toward UNFPA's core programmatic efforts, such as the UNFPA Supplies program and the UNFPA Maternal Health Thematic Fund, which incorporates the Campaign to End Fistula.¹⁸ In its efforts to be transparent, UNFPA publishes how it allocates funds to its core areas of work annually.¹⁹ In 2018, gender equality initiatives were allocated the most resources of any core area and accounted for approximately 44.4% of UNFPA's expenditures.²⁰

To be an effective UN development agency, UNFPA contributes to intergovernmental and inter-agency processes by participating in debate and by giving policy recommendations on approximately 150 relevant agenda items in the General Assembly.²¹ UNFPA also participates in regional intergovernmental commissions of ECOSOC and collaborates with other entities such as the World Health Organization.²² UNFPA is one of four founding members of the UN Development Group created in 1997 by the Secretary-General to improve coherence of UN development efforts at the Member State level.²³ UNFPA is also a member of the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which meets twice annually and serves as the main instrument within the UN system to coordinate the actions and policies of the executive heads of various entities.²⁴ Additionally, UNFPA works with civil society organizations, including faith-based and women's advocacy organizations, through the Civil Society Advisory Panel that was formed in 2013.²⁵ These partners serve as policy advocates, healthcare providers, and sources of up-to-date scientific research to guide UNFPA's work.²⁶

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

ECOSOC resolution 1084 (XXXIX) (1965) and UN General Assembly resolution 2211 (XXI) (1966) both highlight that the challenges in reproductive health services, as they relate to socio-economic development and population growth in developing countries, should be addressed through a specialized agency within the UN.²⁷ In response to these observations, the Secretary-General established UNFPA to address population matters for the international community.²⁸ Adopted in ECOSOC resolution 1763 (1973), UNFPA's mandate calls for gathering knowledge, recommending policies, and building capacity to assist national, regional, and interregional responses to global population needs and family planning.²⁹ The mandate empowers UNFPA to raise awareness and provide aid to developing countries to address population challenges and implement strategies in accordance with national plans and priorities.³⁰ The mandate also underscores UNFPA's efforts in data collection and developing context-specific approaches

¹⁶ UNFPA, *Funds and Funding, 2020*; UNFPA, *Frequently Asked Questions, 2020*.

¹⁷ UNFPA, *UNFPA Supplies, 2020*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ UNFPA, *Funds and Funding, 2020*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ UNFPA, *UNFPA in the UN System, 2020*.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ UNFPA, *Partnering with Civil Society, 2020*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ UN ECOSOC, *Work Programmes and Priorities in Population Fields (E/RES/1084(XXXIX))*, 1965; UN General Assembly, *Population Growth and Economic Development (A/RES/2211(XXI))*, 1966.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ UN ECOSOC, *United Nations Fund for Population Activities (E/RES/1763(LIV))*, 1973.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; UN ECOSOC, *United Nations Fund for Population Activities (E/RES/1763(LIV))*, 1973; UN General Assembly, *Population Growth and Economic Development (A/RES/2211(XXI))*, 1966.

and programs, both of which act as crucial steps to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³¹

In 1994, Egypt hosted the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), one of the largest intergovernmental conference on the topic, with 179 Member States and over 11,000 participants from governments, UN specialized agencies and organizations, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the media.³² The outcome of the conference was the ICPD *Programme of Action (PoA)*, which focuses on improving lives of individuals through strengthened global partnerships, which address sustainable development and advocate for sexual and reproductive health services and rights.³³ This built upon previous initiatives, including the 1984 International Conference on Population held in Mexico City, the outcome documents from the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, and the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights.³⁴ Through a set of 15 principles, the ICPD PoA provides guiding actions for Member States that support the mandate of the ICPD to uphold human rights and gender equality, achieve sustainable lifestyles and development, and implement appropriate population-related policies regarding economic development and poverty challenges.³⁵

Guided by the aforementioned conferences and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda)*, UNFPA particularly focuses on SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 5 (gender equality).³⁶ Insufficient maternal healthcare is the leading cause of death of women and girls in many developing countries, thus UNFPA has focused its attention on SDG 3 by implementing training for midwives and providing education and resources to prevent sexually transmitted infections.³⁷ Relatedly, under SDG 4, its mandate to build knowledge, and its capacity under ECOSOC resolution 1763 (1973), UNFPA is committed to bringing “comprehensive sexuality education” to all girls and boys.³⁸ Such education includes body self-awareness, safe sex and contraception alternatives, and healthcare during pregnancy.³⁹ UNFPA recognizes that knowledge is a crucial tool not only to promote healthy sex and pregnancy, but also to combat SGBV.⁴⁰ Under SDG 5, UNFPA uses education and advocacy campaigns to work towards its goals of ending child marriage and FGM, two practices that limit progress towards the full realization of human rights of women and girls.⁴¹ UNFPA’s emphasis on education in addition to care access highlights the organization’s priority of youth engagement, because teaching and providing care for girls (and boys) sets youth on a path for improved sexual health and gender equality in the long-run.⁴² UNFPA has also created a *Strategic Plan* that aligns directly with the 2030 Agenda and focuses on ending unmet need for family planning, ending preventable maternal deaths, and ending gender based violence and harmful practices.⁴³ Its *Strategic Plan* has three different segments to span from 2018 to 2030, with the first segment being the *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, and is the main basis for UNFPA’s work on the *2030 Agenda*.⁴⁴

³¹ Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, *Report of the Annual Session 2017 (DP/2017/28)*, 2017; Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, *Report of the First Regular Session 2017 (DP/2017/13)*, 2017; UNFPA, *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2020.

³² UNFPA, *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*, 2014.

³³ UNFPA, *International Conference on Population and Development*; UNFPA, *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*, 2014.

³⁴ UNFPA, *International Conference on Population and Development*.

³⁵ UNFPA, *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*, 2014.

³⁶ UNFPA, *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2020.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2020.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

In July 2019, UNFPA published an updated *Strategy for the 2020 Round of Population and Housing Censuses (2015-2024)*, with the intent to leverage this data for future development strategies.⁴⁵ As the world population continues to grow, UNFPA is grappling with ways to promote family planning in ways that simultaneously are culturally-sensitive and respect human rights.⁴⁶ One such program UNFPA supports is Egypt's "Two Is Enough" campaign, which uses financial incentives and family planning education to encourage citizens to keep the birth rate close to the replacement rate of 2.1 children per couple.⁴⁷ Such initiatives highlight the delicate balance that UNFPA seeks as it pursues goals of managing population dynamics while respecting both human rights and different cultural values regarding family.⁴⁸ In 2020, UNFPA published the *Humanitarian Action 2020 Overview*.⁴⁹ The Overview summarizes 2019 finances and results as well as outlines the necessary funding, action items and plans, and country snapshots for 2020.⁵⁰ Women are at the forefront of 2020's goals, with UNFPA aiming to reach 48 million women and girls around the globe, offering assistance in areas that are facing emergencies, such as Bangladesh and Yemen.⁵¹ Of the 48 million that UNFPA aims to reach and offer assistance to, 34 million are of sexual reproductive age and 4 million of those women are pregnant.⁵² In 2020, UNFPA published *Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights* to examine the global progress towards achieving SDG targets 5.6.1 and 5.6.2 by analyzing the establishment of legal and regulatory frameworks for sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as women's reproductive decision-making in Member States.⁵³ While significant barriers still remain across Member States' legal systems, one of the key take-aways is that there has been significant improvement in laws regarding women's sexual and reproductive rights.⁵⁴ UNFPA was slated to hold meetings and sessions in April 2020, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sessions and informal meetings were forced into different formats.⁵⁵ Originally scheduled for June 1st UNFPA instead held its annual meeting on May 15th on a virtual platform.⁵⁶ During this meeting, the UNFPA evaluation office presented the *Annual Report on the UNFPA Evaluation Function* which detailed the various formats in which UNFPA evaluates its work on Agenda 2030.⁵⁷ One important aspect of this report is UNFPA working towards creating a user friendly database and improving how they determine progress on the work done towards the 2030 Agenda.⁵⁸ UNFPA also presented the *Evaluation of the UNFPA Capacity in Humanitarian Action (2012-2019)* which observes UNFPA's work through case studies in a few different countries.⁵⁹ This report includes recommendations with reinforced evaluation efforts which include, developing strategic frameworks specifically for humanitarian action, reviewing data to check for bottlenecks, including corporate guidance in the field and in helping with distribution of supplies and other recommendations as well.⁶⁰

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNFPA released *COVID-19: A Gender Lens*, a guidance memo that provides recommendations for international actors to protect sexual and reproductive health and

⁴⁵ UNFPA, *UNFPA Strategy for the 2020 Round of Population and Housing Censuses (2015-2024)*, 2019.

⁴⁶ UNFPA, *Culturally Sensitive Approaches*, 2020.

⁴⁷ Masri, 'Two Is Enough,' Egypt Tells Poor Families as Population Booms, *Reuters*, 2019; Michaelson, Experts Urge Egypt to Rethink Two-child Population Strategy, *The Guardian*, 2019.

⁴⁸ UNFPA, *Culturally Sensitive Approaches*, 2020.

⁴⁹ UNFPA, *Ensure Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights*, 2020.

⁵⁰ UNFPA, *Humanitarian Action 2020 Overview*, 2020.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ UNFPA, *Ensure Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights*, 2020.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ UNFPA, *Executive Board*, 2020.

⁵⁶ UNFPA, *Annual Report on Evaluation and Evaluation of the UNFPA Capacity in Humanitarian Action (2012-2019) Presented to the Executive Board*, 2020.

⁵⁷ Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, *Annual Report on the Evaluation Function*, 2019, 2020.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ UNFPA, *Humanitarian Evaluation Report*, 2020, pp. XI-XII.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

rights, and promote gender equality.⁶¹ The memo emphasizes how disease outbreaks and pandemics “make existing inequalities for women and girls and discrimination of other marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty, worse.”⁶² Additionally, UNFPA has also published a *Global Response Plan* which addresses the socioeconomic areas that are going to be severely affected by the pandemic.⁶³ This plan details how UNFPA is going to complete its work within the restrictions of the pandemic while also working towards meeting the *Strategic Plan*.⁶⁴ UNFPA has also published the 2020 *State of the World Population* which further details progress in UNFPA’s *Strategic Plan* as well as outlining further goals to be met by 2030.⁶⁵ The *State of the World Population* focused on ending harmful practices against women and girls and ending efforts that undermine equality.⁶⁶ Women and girls are an integral part of UNFPA’s work and the focus on further increasing their rights also includes encouraging governments to end harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriages.⁶⁷ This report also goes into explicit detail on UNFPA’s goal of having zero harmful practices on women and girls as it highlights focus areas tied to FGM and child marriages such as undernutrition, force feeding, son preferences, and addressing taboos related to menstruation.⁶⁸ In June of 2020, UNFPA published its *2019 Annual Report*. This report is a series of global highlights on UNFPA’s *Strategic Plan* goals of meeting “zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal death, and zero gender based violence.”⁶⁹ This annual report shows the progress made in 2019 for these three goals including preventing over 14 million unintended pregnancies, successful distribution of over 1 billion contraceptives of difference types, providing more access to medical services to women and girls subjected to violence and improving access to facilities that provide emergency obstetric care.⁷⁰ In August of 2020, UNFPA has held meetings looking into the future, one is a briefing on the second phase of the strategic plan process, *Strategic Plan 2022-2025*. Moving beyond the current strategic plan the next phase is what is referred to as the “most critical period” and the decade of action focusing on diminishing any potential risks or weaknesses in the current process.⁷¹

Conclusion

From UNFPA’s mandate to the 2030 Agenda, leaving no one behind requires a focus on a human rights-based approach to health and population, as well as providing financial support and programmatic contributions in the areas of gender equality, population management, and sexual and reproductive health.⁷² UNFPA continues to serve as the leading entity within the UN system for population management by providing a platform for discussion and collaboration on population dynamics, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and sustainable development.⁷³ Through programs and strategies such as the *Strategic Plan 2018-2021* and the UNFPA Maternal Health Fund, UNFPA will continue to support the 2030 Agenda as it provides assistance to millions of marginalized families, women, and young girls with a focus on UNFPA’s core four strategic areas.⁷⁴

Annotated Bibliography

⁶¹ UNFPA, *COVID-19: A Gender Lens*, 2020.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ UNFPA, *Global Response Plan*, 2020.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ UNFPA, *State of the World Population*, 2020.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 22-25.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 13, 30-34.

⁶⁹ UNFPA, *Annual Report*, 2020, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-6.

⁷¹ UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2022-2025 Development Concept Note*, 2020, p. 3.

⁷² UNFPA, *State of World Population 2019*, 2019.

⁷³ Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, *Report of the First Regular Session 2017 (DP/2017/13)*, 2017; UNFPA, *About Us*, 2020; UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2018.

⁷⁴ UNFPA, *About Us*, 2020; UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2018.

United Nations Population Fund. (2018). *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*. Retrieved 5 April 2020 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/18-044_UNFPA-SP2018-EN_2018-03-12-1244.pdf

This document outlines UNFPA's priorities and goals for 2018-2021 and provides important background information on the most pressing issues that fall under UNFPA's mandate. This is first new strategic plan UNFPA has adopted since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. In order to work towards achieving SDGs 3, 4, and 5, the plan pays particular attention to the topics of: 1) sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights; 2) adolescent and youth empowerment; 3) gender equality and women's empowerment; and 4) population data for development. Delegates can use the strategic plan to develop an understanding of current UNFPA initiatives as they discuss their own proposals at the conference.

United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *Evaluation of the UNFPA Capacity in Humanitarian Action (2012-2019)*. Retrieved 9 July 2020 from:

https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/Final_Humanitarian_Evaluation_Report_pages.pdf

This document outlines how UNFPA has been successful and where it needs to improve in their humanitarian efforts from 2012 to 2019. The evaluation was done through country visits and desk reviews in different countries where UNFPA does its work, ranging across the different regions. This document is vital as it looks at UNFPA's work of the last eight years and will be useful to delegates as it covers a range of topics, relevant to what they discuss in committee and can help guide their process as they review where UNFPA needs to improve.

United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic: UNFPA Global Response Plan*. Retrieved 17 July 2020 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA_Global_Response_Plan_Revised_June_2020_.pdf

The UNFPA Global Response Plan is UNFPA's plan of action regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic is going to affect UNFPA's work. This document outlines how the pandemic will affect efforts in access to contraceptives, health services, and is set to increase gender-based violence. The plan details UNFPA's priorities while also highlighting some of the work that has been done by countries already on handling the pandemic. As the global community moves forward during the pandemic having a response plan is important to continue the work UNFPA is trying to achieve. Delegates can use this document to help guide them in determining how UNFPA can continue to progress towards its goals during a pandemic and in a post-pandemic world.

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I. Promoting Access to Family Planning in Developing States

Introduction

Family planning, as defined by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is the “information, means, and methods that allow individuals to decide if and when to have children.”⁷⁵ This includes education on sexual and reproductive health, and access to contraceptives, and adequate health care.⁷⁶ In developing states, 217 million women do not have access to modern or reliable contraceptives despite wanting to delay or prevent getting pregnant.⁷⁷ Increasing access to these resources and vital information is difficult due to a variety of reasons, including a lack of resources, lack of funding for supplies, difficulty travelling to health facilities, and social barriers.⁷⁸ These barriers are problematic because having access to family planning services contributes to individual and collective safety, empowers women, creates economic benefits, and contributes to gender equality.⁷⁹ Methods that require direct male participation, such as male sterilization, male condoms, and the withdrawal method, account for only 27.4% of contraceptive practice worldwide, further highlighting that an inequitable burden of contraceptive use is placed on women.⁸⁰

Between 2000 and 2017, access to family planning services helped decrease the number of maternal deaths worldwide by 37%, lowering the rate from 342 to 211 deaths per 100,000 live births.⁸¹ Although a significant improvement, 99% of maternal deaths are in developing countries and 830 women die each day from complications which could have been prevented with the expansion of services related to family planning.⁸² Additionally, complications during pregnancy and birth for adolescent girls aged 15 -19 is the primary reason for death in this vulnerable group.⁸³ These girls often face enormous barriers accessing the necessary information and resources to prevent dangerous pregnancies.⁸⁴ Family planning can have a cultural stigma, and there is a lack of resources to fund and increase educational services for family planning.⁸⁵

UNFPA supports family planning by providing a reliable supply of contraceptives, assisting governments in strengthening their national health systems, advocating for national and international policies that support family planning services, and by helping gather and disseminate data on this issue.⁸⁶ In 2019, UNFPA provided eight different contraceptive methods to 46 countries that had the potential to avert 8 million unintended pregnancies and 24,000 maternal deaths.⁸⁷ However, with 9% of women worldwide and 16% of women in least developed countries unable to meet their contraceptive needs, this gap must close to provide healthier reproductive opportunities to and for women around the world.⁸⁸

International and Regional Framework

The importance of the family unit is enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948).⁸⁹ Article 16 of the UDHR states “Men and women of full age...have the right to marry and found a family. The family is a natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by

⁷⁵ UNFPA, *Family Planning*, 2020.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ UN DESA, *Contraceptive Use by Method 2019*, 2019, p. 12.

⁸¹ UNICEF, *Maternal Mortality*,

⁸² UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018 - 2021*, 2017, p.1.

⁸³ UNFPA, *Family Planning*, 2020.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ UNFPA, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2016.

⁸⁶ UNFPA, *Family Planning*, 2020.

⁸⁷ UNFPA, *UNFPA Supplies Annual Report 2019*, 2020, pp. 4, 8.

⁸⁸ UNFPA, *World Population Dashboard*, 2020.

⁸⁹ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948, p. 5.

society and the State.”⁹⁰ This right to create a family is further outlined and explained in terms of family planning in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) (1979), which has been adopted by 189 Member States.⁹¹ Article 10 of CEDAW emphasizes that women specifically have the right to decide the spacing of when to have children or to decide not to have children.⁹² The *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1966) declares that States Parties should ensure that traditional or harmful social practices do not reduce access to pre- and post-natal care or family planning.⁹³ Family is emphasized in the context of having safer and healthier sexual and reproductive services to help improve maternal reproductive health.⁹⁴

One of the most important frameworks on family planning is the *International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action* (POA).⁹⁵ Created in 1994, this landmark document outlined the significant impact family planning can have on an individual, and on families, which encourages access to safe methods of modern contraception.⁹⁶ As the first document to address the needs revolving around family planning, the POA continues to be the leading document in the international sphere on family planning.⁹⁷ Furthermore, since its inception, the POA has been updated to align with the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) and the subsequent *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).⁹⁸ The inclusion of these goals is outlined in the *Framework of Actions for the follow up to the Programme of Action* (2015), which details not only the progress already made, but the progress necessary in moving forward with the POA.⁹⁹

Additionally, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) also addresses the importance of meeting family planning needs.¹⁰⁰ SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 5 (gender equality) address reducing the global maternal mortality, increasing universal access to sexual and reproductive health care, and ensuring rights to reproductive and sexual care.¹⁰¹

Role of the International System

UNFPA works in over 150 countries and has provided reliable access to contraceptives to 20 million people a year.¹⁰² UNFPA’s Supplies Program, which provides steady and reliable access to contraceptives, medicine, and other supplies to improve family planning efforts has helped prevent an estimated 14 million pregnancies and averts 3.9 million unsafe abortions.¹⁰³ The Supplies Program primarily operates in 46 countries who have some of the highest rates of unmet needs for planning.¹⁰⁴ UNFPA’s 2018-2021 strategic plan emphasizes the “one vision, three zeroes” initiative.¹⁰⁵ This initiative aligns with SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 5 (gender equality) by aiming to have zero

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹¹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: Optional Protocol (A/RES/54/4)*, 1999.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

⁹⁴ UN ECOSOC, *Substantive Issues Arising in the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, 2000.

⁹⁵ *Explainer: What is the ICPD and why does it matter?*, UNFPA, 2019; UNFPA, *Programme of Action: Adopted at the International Conference and Population Development*, 1994, pp.64-65.

⁹⁶ UNFPA, *Programme of Action: Adopted at the International Conference and Population Development*, 1994, pp. 64-65.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 64-67.

⁹⁸ UNFPA, *Framework of Actions for the Follow up to the Programme of Action of the ICPD*, 2015.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² UNFPA, *About Us*, 2020.

¹⁰³ UNFPA, *Annual Report 2019*, 2020, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ UNFPA, *UNFPA Supplies*, 2020.

¹⁰⁵ UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018 - 2021*, 2017, pp. 5-6.

preventable deaths, zero gender-based violence, and zero unmet need for family planning by 2030.¹⁰⁶ To achieve this goal, UNFPA seeks to make quality contraceptives more accessible, and provide further support for family planning initiatives.¹⁰⁷ UNFPA further seeks to reduce to zero by 2030 the number of women that wish to prevent or delay pregnancy, but are not currently using contraceptives.¹⁰⁸ UNFPA is the custodian for SDG indicators 5.6.1 and 5.6.2 and is responsible for compiling and verifying data relating to the proportion of women who make their own decisions regarding sexual and reproductive health care choices, as well as the number of countries that guarantee full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health care and education.¹⁰⁹

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and its POA were revolutionary in advocating for access to voluntary family planning and comprehensive reproductive health care.¹¹⁰ It represented an official recognition that women's rights and empowerment cannot continue to improve if women do not have access to adequate reproductive care and education.¹¹¹ In November 2019, advocates, governments, and others met at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 to mark the 25th anniversary of the ICPD.¹¹² This summit issued the Nairobi Statement and accompanying Nairobi Commitments.¹¹³ These constituted a commitment to uphold existing agreements, including the POA, address financial and resource gaps that restrict progress, and create realistic implementation timelines for initiatives that leave no one behind.¹¹⁴ ICPD25 also provided the results of a joint study between John Hopkins University and UNFPA that determined it would cost US\$264 billion to meet the goals included in the "one vision, three zeroes" initiative within a decade.¹¹⁵ The current resource gap is US\$222 billion over the next ten years.¹¹⁶

Regionally, the African Union (AU) with their *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (2015) is working towards increasing access to family planning.¹¹⁷ Agenda 2063 focuses on ending all harmful social practices, especially female genital mutilation and child marriages.¹¹⁸ Additionally, Agenda 2063 aims to lower high fertility rates by addressing the unmet need of family planning, and enhancing maternal and newborn health.¹¹⁹ The AU had previously created the *Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* (2006), known as the *Maputo Plan of Action*, which aimed to improve access to health services, including family planning, and addressed ending unmet need for family planning.¹²⁰

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has also made a commitment to do the same through their *Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development* where they emphasize family planning as a means to help further gender equality.¹²¹ The High Commissioner for Human Rights recognizes family as a human right, and partners with UNFPA, the World Health Organization (WHO), and others to ensure that a human rights-based approach is followed when providing supplies and help with family planning.¹²² WHO has recently launched an app that helps

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ UNFPA, *Annual Report 2018*, 2019, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ UNFPA, *Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights: Measuring SDG Target 5.6*, 2020, pp. 2-4; 20-29

¹¹⁰ *Explainer: What is the ICPD and why does it matter?*, UNFPA, 2019.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, *About the Nairobi Summit*, 2019.

¹¹³ UNFPA, *Accelerating the Promise: The Report on the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25*, 2020, pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 54-57.

¹¹⁵ UNFPA, *This is how much it will cost to realize the world we want*, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ African Union, *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, 2015.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ African Union, *Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth*, 2017, pp. 19-20.

¹²⁰ African Union, *Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*, 2006, p. 12.

¹²¹ UN ESCAP, *Report of the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference*, 2013.

¹²² UN OHCHR, *Human Rights Based Approaches to Women and Children's Health*, 2019

family-planning providers determine the most safe and accessible methods of family planning.¹²³ Additionally, to address the needs in improving sexual and reproductive health, WHO, UNFPA, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank created the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction whose main purpose is to research human reproduction and to bring together scientists, healthcare providers, and policymakers to work together on sexual and reproductive health.¹²⁴

UNFPA and its partners work alongside non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose focus is also on family planning.¹²⁵ The leading NGO on increasing access to family planning is the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), which works with populations living in extreme poverty.¹²⁶ The main objective of the IPPF is to provide contraceptives as a means of family planning, though they also provided gynecological, obstetric, and pediatric services.¹²⁷ Women and girls are the primary recipient of those services, with 84% of all services provided in 2018 benefiting them.¹²⁸ One global partnership aiming to increase access to suitable family planning services is Family Planning 2020 (FP2020).¹²⁹ An outcome of the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, FP2020’s main goal is to expand access to family planning services to all, including providing contraceptive services to women and girls in 69 of the world’s poorest countries, by 2020.¹³⁰ One of their main projects is the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) which provides small grants to fund time-sensitive projects or projects where there may not be sufficient funds or help in their focus countries who are in need of an immediate intervention.¹³¹ Additionally the H6 partnership, formed in 2008 and composed of UNFPA, UNICEF, World Bank Group, WHO, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, emphasizes the work of the Every Woman, Every Child Global Strategy.¹³² This strategy addresses major health challenges facing women, girls, and adolescents around the world by providing technical support, bringing together national and international stakeholders, and advocating for the strengthening of national healthcare systems.¹³³

WHO has also created evidence-based guidelines on the safety and delivery of different contraceptive methods.¹³⁴ WHO provides online curriculum which can be used by curriculum developers or facilitators who work in family planning to provide high-quality training and education regarding family planning.¹³⁵ In November of 2012, the 11th International Conference of National Human Rights was held in Amman, Jordan to discuss the “Human Rights of Women and Girls, Gender Equality: The Role of National Human Rights Institutions.”¹³⁶ The outcome of this conference was the adoption of the *Amman Declaration and Programme of Action* which commits to monitoring Member States’ commitments to fulfilling human rights obligations relating to women, girls, and gender equality including protecting reproductive rights and the right to choose the spacing and timing of their children.¹³⁷

¹²³ WHO, *New App for WHO’s Medical Eligibility Criteria for Contraceptive use*, 2019.

¹²⁴ WHO, *About HRP*, 2019.

¹²⁵ UNFPA, *About Us*, 2008.

¹²⁶ International Planned Parenthood Federation, *Women & Girls*, 2019.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Family Planning 2020, *About Us*, 2019.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Family Planning 2020, *Rapid Response Mechanism*, 2019.

¹³² UNFPA, *H6 Partnership*, 2020.

¹³³ UNFPA, *H6 Joint Programme Report 2012-2019*, 2020, p. 11.

¹³⁴ WHO, *Family Planning/Contraception*, 2019.

¹³⁵ UNFPA, *Training Resource Package for Family Planning*, 2019.

¹³⁶ UN OHCHR, *11th National Conference*, 2012.

¹³⁷ UN OHCHR, *Amman Declaration and Programme of Actions*, 2012, pp.3-8

Strengthening National Capacities to Provide Safe Family Planning Services

As a part of their *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, UNFPA is committed to ensuring governments increase access to family planning services.¹³⁸ Four critical areas have been identified by UNFPA that must be addressed by UNFPA and its partners locally and globally.¹³⁹ These include access to sexual and reproductive health services, codified reproductive rights, adolescent and youth empowerment, gender equality, and accurate population data for development.¹⁴⁰ In 2019, UNFPA spent over US \$900 million on country programs and global and regional interventions.¹⁴¹ For example, UNFPA provides support to developing countries that are conducting national censuses to ensure population data is accurate and accessible.¹⁴² UNFPA has continuously emphasized the importance of governments collaborating with UNFPA, each other, and the private sector in understanding how vital family planning services are in developing countries.¹⁴³ Two obstacles to increasing safe family planning services in developing countries include cultural barriers, which hinder a populations understanding of the need for services, and lack of access to contraceptives, as well as having sufficient resources and access to create and procure the services required to address those needs.¹⁴⁴

One course of action by UNFPA is encouraging governments to create or implement policies on family planning such as expanding access to effective contraception.¹⁴⁵ Implementing these policies and keeping them in place, however, is a financial burden many developing countries have trouble maintaining.¹⁴⁶ In many developing states, funding for family planning services comes from external sources like UNFPA, Family Planning 2020, WHO, UNICEF, and other organizations which provide aid.¹⁴⁷ Most of UNFPA's funding comes from voluntary contributions which they use for their "core" programs, but funds are also available for special programs such as the UNFPA Supplies program.¹⁴⁸ Although helpful when provided, developing countries remain at risk of having a sudden loss of resources and family planning programs due to inconsistent funding for programs.¹⁴⁹

Financial stability in developing countries remains a serious obstacle to rights-based family planning.¹⁵⁰ Partnerships with key stakeholders, such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), are essential in helping developing countries create rights-based family planning support policies.¹⁵¹ For example, the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF), encourages governments to increase domestic spending in areas of health and nutrition to match the SDGs.¹⁵² The focus of the GFF is to foster help both financially and in policy advising governments in determining how to finance sexual and reproductive help to women, children, and adolescents.¹⁵³ Additionally, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has partnered with the Family Planning 2020 coalition and committed to increase quality contraceptive access to 120 million women in the poorest countries by supporting governments that have committed to FP2020's agenda by providing financial and policy advising assistance.¹⁵⁴

¹³⁸ UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018- 2021*, 2017, p. iv.

¹³⁹ UNFPA, *Strategic Plan*, 2020, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ UNFPA, *Annual Report 2019*, 2020, p. 7.

¹⁴² UNFPA, *Strategic Plan*, 2020, 2020.

¹⁴³ UNFPA, *Strategic Plan 2018- 2021*, 2017, p. v.

¹⁴⁴ UNFPA, *State of the World Population 2019*, 2019, p. 104-105.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 104-105.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁴⁸ UNFPA, *Funds and Funding*, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ UNFPA, *State of the World Population 2019*, 2019, p. 112.

¹⁵⁰ WHO, *Family Planning Evidence Brief*, 2018, p. 6.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² UNFPA, *State of the World Population 2019*, 2019, p. 114; Global Financing Facility, *About Us*, 2017.

¹⁵³ Global Financing Facility, *About Us*, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, *What we do: Family Planning*, 2019.

Governments can also act by acknowledging the misconceptions that surround family planning and contraceptives.¹⁵⁵ This has been done through information, education, and communication (IEC) and mass media efforts to spread information on family planning specifics, such as the benefits of contraception or what contraceptives are actually used for.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, IEC also encourages improving communication between couples, communication with health-care workers, and communication with religious leaders in developing countries.¹⁵⁷ Other routes governments can take requires creating health-care worker programs whose main focus is to provide services on family planning. or integrating family planning with other health services already focusing on reproductive health.¹⁵⁸ Governments must also re-evaluate policies that require women and adolescents to have third-party consent to receive contraceptives or health services, as these can disincentivize women seeking medical care, leading to unsafe pregnancies..¹⁵⁹

Increasing Education on Family Planning to Adolescents

In many developing states a lack of understanding by populations of what family planning is presents a problem.¹⁶⁰ Family planning is often challenged with either a cultural stigma or misinformation about what family planning is.¹⁶¹ Most of the misconception on family planning is centered on contraceptives and a mistaken belief they are a form of terminating a pregnancy.¹⁶² Education on family planning is important because women and adolescents in developing regions are at most risk of unmet family planning needs, and are generally less informed on the benefits of family planning, including the safe use of contraceptives.¹⁶³ When women and couples are empowered and able to determine when they want to start a family, women have increased educational and economic opportunities and additional autonomy.¹⁶⁴ A main barrier to providing greater access to sex education are cultural beliefs surrounding family planning, especially shame surrounding the use of contraceptives.¹⁶⁵ General access to information on health and sexual reproduction stems from a lack of resources to give the information, or is due to a lack of educators.¹⁶⁶

1. In developing countries, 20,000 adolescent girls under the age of 18 give birth every day.¹⁶⁷ Adolescent access to family planning is vital because teenage pregnancies often prevent girls from attending and completing their education and is a root cause of poverty.¹⁶⁸ Many unplanned pregnancies are due to a lack of information on contraceptives and education on other family planning services.¹⁶⁹ Part of UNFPA's work includes offering classes both in and out of school settings for adolescents to show the effectiveness of contraceptives, such as male and female condoms.¹⁷⁰ Out-of-school programs include community-based training and education that focus the curriculum toward those who are at most risk, such as married adolescent girls, refugees, homeless youth, and youth in rural areas.¹⁷¹
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¹⁵⁵ WHO, *Family Planning Evidence Brief*, 2018, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ UN OHCHR, *Contraception and Family Planning*, 2014, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ UNFPA, *State of the World Population 2019*, 2019, p. 104.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ UNFPA, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2016.

¹⁶⁴ UNFPA, *Family Planning*, 2020.

¹⁶⁵ UNFPA, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ UNFPA, *Myths, Misperceptions, and Fears: Addressing Condom Use Barriers*, 2007.

¹⁶⁷ UNFPA, *Adolescent pregnancy*, 2020.

¹⁶⁸ *Youth Advocates for Family Planning Break Taboos in the Maldives*, UNFPA, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ UNFPA, *Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 2016.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

To further help adolescents in creating their own futures, UNFPA has launched the “My body, my life, my world” strategy which aims at encouraging youth to feel empowered in making decisions for themselves.¹⁷² Meeting unmet need for family planning would reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies for youth by 6 million.¹⁷³ This would allow adolescents to increase their chances at planning an education and having an economically secure future.¹⁷⁴ Decreasing adolescent risk cannot be done without the inclusion of men and boys through education.¹⁷⁵ With this in mind, UNFPA partnered with EngenderHealth to create a guide that addresses gender norms when discussing health and health programs.¹⁷⁶ This guide, *Engaging Men in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Including Family Planning*, aims to educate men on reproductive health and gender equality, and addresses stereotypes on masculinity and risky behavior.¹⁷⁷ The overall goal of the guide is to increase men’s understanding and increase male support for gender equality.¹⁷⁸

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Family Planning

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has severely constrained the resources of public health systems, with movement restrictions and lockdowns contributing to an inability to provide adequate family planning resources.¹⁷⁹ The pandemic has the potential to disproportionately affect women and girls through several means, including causing an increase in gender-based violence, harming women in precarious employment, and creating increased risk in health care workers that are primarily female.¹⁸⁰ UNFPA estimates that an additional 31 million cases of gender-based violence could occur during six-month lockdowns and an additional 2 million cases of female genital mutilation and 13 million child marriages could occur over the next decade.¹⁸¹ Disruptions to supply chains and overburdened medical systems have caused constraints in how family planning programs are delivered.¹⁸² UNFPA estimates that six months of pandemic-related disruptions could result in 47 million women in low- and middle-income countries not having access to contraceptives and an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies.¹⁸³

Progress already made towards the 2030 goals of ending gender-based violence, ending preventable maternal mortality, and providing unmet need for contraceptives is expected to be significantly curtailed.¹⁸⁴ In response, UNFPA is instituting a US\$187.5 million COVID-19 response that targets countries with insufficient public health and social support systems and has publicly called for additional financial support.¹⁸⁵ Countries with widespread humanitarian issues, such as Syria, are even more vulnerable to disruptions in services.¹⁸⁶ UNFPA and other organizations are leveraging established mechanisms to anticipate disruptions in contraceptive supplies and prioritize at-risk areas.¹⁸⁷

UNFPA’s global response plan has three strategic priorities: the continuation of sexual and reproductive health services; tackling gender-based violence; and ensuring a supply of modern contraceptives.¹⁸⁸

¹⁷² *Helping Young People Take Charge of Their Bodies, Their Lives, Our World*, UNFPA, 2019.

¹⁷³ WHO, *Family Planning Evidence Brief*, 2018, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ EnGenderHealth, *Engaging Men in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Including Family Planning*, 2017.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ UNFPA, *COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020.

¹⁸⁰ UNFPA, *COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions*, 2020.

¹⁸¹ UNFPA, *Millions more cases of violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, unintended pregnancy expected due to the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020.

¹⁸² UNFPA, *UNFPA Supplies Annual Report 2019, 2020*, p.5.

¹⁸³ UNFPA, *Putting the brakes on COVID-19: Safeguarding the health and rights of women and girls*, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ UNFPA, *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage*, 2020.

¹⁸⁵ UNFPA, *COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020.

¹⁸⁶ UNFPA, *Putting the brakes on COVID-19: Safeguarding the health and rights of women and girls*, 2020.

¹⁸⁷ UNFPA, *UNFPA Supplies Annual Report 2019, 2020*, p.5.

¹⁸⁸ UNFPA, *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19 Pandemic) UNFPA Global Response Plan*, 2020, p. 2.

UNFPA has also identified four ‘accelerator innovators,’ using a gender equity lens, that are critical for its response.¹⁸⁹ These include leaving no one behind, having accessible and accurate data, effective risk communication and engagement with communities, and prioritizing youth engagement.¹⁹⁰ UNFPA is appealing to donors to help raise US \$370 million that will fund its response until December 2020.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

Family planning is an important service that women and adolescents in developing states can use to create healthier futures.¹⁹² With the creation of the ICPD in 1994 the international community made a commitment to improve the life of women, girls, and adolescents who are often overlooked when it comes to development.¹⁹³ Although UNFPA and its partners have made great strides increasing access to family planning, there is still much work that needs to be done.¹⁹⁴ Those with the most need are the ones who have the most trouble in accessing these services.¹⁹⁵ Creating programs, and having access to family planning and especially contraceptives, continues to be a challenge in the areas that need it the most.¹⁹⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has created further challenges that need to be addressed.¹⁹⁷ With millions of people still in need of family planning services, and with the goal of “zero unmet need” approaching, the international community must continue to work together on this issue.¹⁹⁸

Further Research

As delegates begin researching this topic they should consider: How can UNFPA and its partners help developing states create stable family planning programs? Should it be a more policy-based approach focused on family planning or focused on resources needed? How can the creation and provision of necessary supplies, such as contraceptives, be made more cost effective? How can UNFPA, NGO’s, and CSO’s help governments create financial stability with health services? In addressing cultural barriers, how can UNFPA make women and adolescents feel more comfortable discussing family planning services? How can Member States address the stigma and taboo surrounding family planning in developing countries to have populations understand the benefits of family planning? How has the COVID-19 pandemic harmed the ability of international bodies, NGOs, and countries to deliver family planning services? How can this disruption be addressed?

Annotated Bibliography

United Nations Population Fund. (1994). *Programme of Action: Adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development*. Retrieved 15 July 2020 from:

https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/programme_of_action_Web%20ENGLISH.pdf

The ICPD Programme of Action is a landmark program to address needs in family planning, population growth, health and reproductive rights and more. This document outlines promises to make changes in growth in these areas, especially in developing countries where access to help on these issues is not always available. Delegates can use this document to understand the areas of need regarding family planning and to see what the international community has done on this topic so far.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 12

¹⁹² UNFPA, *Family Planning*, 2020.

¹⁹³ *Explainer: What is the ICPD and why does it matter?*, UNFPA, 2019.

¹⁹⁴ UNFPA, *Family Planning*, 2020.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ WHO, *Unmet Need for Family Planning*, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ UNFPA, *COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020.

¹⁹⁸ WHO, *Unmet Need for Family Planning*, 2019.

United Nations Population Fund. (2014). *Framework of Actions for the Follow up to the Programme of Action*. Retrieved 15 July 2020 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ICPD_beyond2014_EN.pdf

The first Programme of Action UNFPA helped create was done so in 1994. Since then the follow up to the Programme of Action was created to expand the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development. This document along with reporting on milestones of the first Programme of Action detail what was missed, and what UNFPA plans to do in the future to reach end goals by 2030. This document is just as important as the Programme of Action, as delegates research the topic, they can learn about the direction of the future of family planning and create innovative ideas in further improving access to family planning.

United Nations Population Fund. (2017). *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*. Retrieved 15 July 2020 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/18-044_UNFPA-SP2018-EN_2018-03-12-1244_0.pdf

UNFPA's Strategic Plan is a document that highlights what UNFPA plans on working towards between the years of 2018-2021. The plan showcases UNFPA's three main objectives, as well as outlining where they want to work on these issues, why they want to, and how they plan to do so. Additionally, this document details UNFPA's plan in aligning their goals with the Sustainable Development Goals. As delegates further research this topic, this document is vital in understanding what UNFPA's goals regarding this topic are.

United Nations Population Fund. (2019). *State of the World Population 2019*. Retrieved 22 August 2020 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_PUB_2019_EN_State_of_World_Population.pdf

Similar to the Annual Report, UNFPA produces a yearly document to showcase not just family planning, but other issues affecting the world's population. A helpful aspect of this document is it goes into detail about the history of the international efforts on family planning. Delegates can use this document to understand not only the history of UNFPA, family planning, but to understand how governments have fit into the process as well.

United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *Accelerating the Promise: The Report on the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25*. Retrieved 18 July 2020 from: <https://www.nairobisummiticpd.org/sites/default/files/Corrected%20Final%20copy%20nd%20June%2020%20UNFPA-NairobiSummitReport.pdf>

This report by UNFPA provides a summary of the November 2019 Nairobi Summit on ICPD25: Accelerating the Promise. It outlines the objectives of the summit, the importance of reaffirming commitments to the ICPD Programme of Action, several recurring themes that will define the global effort to increase access to family planning in the future, and the Nairobi Statement that is a call to action. This source will allow delegates to understand the exact actions UNFPA is undertaking globally, how the topic is evolving, and the connections with other global issues.

United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *Annual Report 2019*. Retrieved 18 July 2020 from: <https://www.unfpa.org/annual-report-2019>

This is the most current annual report from UNFPA. It highlights the progress made in addressing the three transformative goals of zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal death, and zero gender-based violence. It acknowledges the unprecedented difficulties that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on family planning goals and programs. Delegates should be mindful of pandemic related operational and capacity difficulties in the future but should be familiar with the progress made to date in achieving family planning goals in developing countries.

United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *State of the World Population 2020*. Retrieved 18 July 2020 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_PUB_2020_EN_State_of_World_Population.pdf

This report by UNFPA has a thematic focus on defying and ending the practices that harm women and girls and undermine equality. It emphasizes the need to end harmful practices by 2030 and highlights the progress and obstacles relating to these goals. The report contains broad actions that should be incorporated within any response to these issues. Delegates will find the detailed, data-driven, and personal stories contained in this report a useful introduction to the issues that face women and girls around the world and be able to connect these practices with wider issues in family planning.

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II. Increasing Youth Leadership and Participation in Society

Introduction

Youth between the ages of 10 and 24 account for 1.8 billion people in the world today, making up almost a quarter of the world's population.¹⁹⁹ One-fifth of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 currently are neither working nor studying, which represents both a loss of potential and a loss of economic revenue for societies.²⁰⁰ Many young people in this age group work, albeit without pay, a situation that is more prevalent among young women.²⁰¹ Additionally, as of 2017, over 500 million youth between the ages of 15 and 24 struggle to survive on less than \$2 per day.²⁰² These hindrances often impede youth participation in issues that affect them such as health, education, employment, and sustainable development.²⁰³

While there are no universally accepted definitions of adolescence and youth, the United Nations (UN) commonly defines adolescents as persons aged 10-19 years and youth as those between 15 and 24 years old.²⁰⁴ Those aged 10-24, encompassing both adolescents and youth, are generally referred to as young people.²⁰⁵ Although UNFPA recognizes these definitions, many UNFPA and UNFPA-supported publications, including those related to youth participation and leadership, tend to use the terms 'youth' and 'young people' interchangeably.²⁰⁶ UNFPA utilizes both 'youth' and 'young people' in reference to those between the ages of 10 and 24.²⁰⁷ UNFPA also supports a definition of youth participation from the United States National Commission on Resources for Youth, which is, "Involving youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunity for planning and/or decision-making affecting others, in an activity whose impact or consequences extends to others – outside or beyond the youth participants themselves."²⁰⁸

While youth involvement in society has increased internationally and within the UN, young people continue to be excluded from formal political and economic aspects of society.²⁰⁹ For instance, engagement in institutional political processes such as voting and participating in party politics continues to decline in democracies around the globe for youth between the ages of 18 and 25.²¹⁰ Relatedly, the inability or unwillingness of governments to address the issues of young people has led to widespread dissatisfaction with institutional political organizations.²¹¹ The fact that many young people feel as if their voice is not being heard has led to an increase in other forms of democratic participation such as protests and demonstrations.²¹² Although both informal and formal participation in politics are important within a democracy, elected officials often ignore the preferences of non-voters, meaning that the issues of young people often go unaddressed due to age-related imbalances within formal politics.²¹³ Additionally, the lingering effects of the global economic crisis and high rates of youth unemployment impact young people's economic participation.²¹⁴ When youth are able to find employment, it often comes in the form of

¹⁹⁹ UN News, *World's 1.8 Billion Youth Must 'Have a Say in the Future of the Planet'*, 2019.

²⁰⁰ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the Future of Jobs*, 2020, p. 13.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ UNFPA, *Adolescent and Youth Demographics: A Brief Overview*, 2012, p. 1.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Family Health International, *Youth Participation Guide: Assessment, Planning, and Implementation*, 2008, p. 23.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ UNDP, *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future*, 2014, p. 17.

²¹⁰ UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth Civic Engagement*, 2016, p. 64; UNDP, *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future*, 2014, p. 5.

²¹¹ UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth Civic Engagement*, 2016, p. 14.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Iyengar & Jackman, *Technology and Politics: Incentives for Youth Participation*, 2003, p. 1.

²¹⁴ UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth Civic Engagement*, 2016, p. 30.

a low-paying or unpaid internship, or an unstable job with few benefits where they fear participating in trade unions.²¹⁵ Meanwhile, in some cases, young people who feel disenfranchised and ignored in the political decision-making processes have been known to resort to violent forms of protest such as rioting, public disorder, or in extreme cases, joining violent extremist groups.²¹⁶ Although political marginalization contributes to the likelihood of youth joining violent extremist groups, geographic proximity to conflict, economic vulnerability and rampant inequality, discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or identity, as well as exposure to extremist propaganda, all increase youth vulnerability to terrorist recruitment.²¹⁷ That being said, each of these factors significantly affects many young people, and the combination of any of these circumstances with political or social marginalization may lead to a young person joining a violent extremist group.²¹⁸

Recognizing the unique challenges, perspectives, and contributions of youth, UNFPA aims to empower youth and provide them with opportunities to be effective drivers of change.²¹⁹ In order to do so, UNFPA partners with young people to help them participate in decision-making processes and strengthen their ability to advance human rights and positively affect development issues.²²⁰

International and Regional Framework

Beginning with the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948), the UN declared that everyone has the right to participate in government, including youth.²²¹ However, it was not until 1979 that the UN adopted another resolution regarding youth leadership and participation.²²² General Assembly resolution 34/151 (1979) designated 1985 as “International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace” and stressed the importance of the direct participation of youth in shaping the future.²²³ With the adoption of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the UN further emphasized the rights of youth and adolescents to fully participate in society.²²⁴ Chapter 25 of *Agenda 21* (1992) from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development calls for advancing the role of young people in sustainable development and actively involving them in the protection of the environment and the promotion of economic and social development.²²⁵ The *World Programme of Action for Youth* (WPAY) (1995) reflected the themes of the first International Youth Year in 1985 with a focus on the full and effective [participation](#) of youth in society and decision-making.²²⁶ Implementation of the WPAY-proposed actions included improving access to information, encouraging increased exchange between youth organizations, and asking governments to include youth representatives in their national delegations to the General Assembly.²²⁷ Adopted in 2015 and 2018, respectively, Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018), called on Member States to incorporate youth in peace-building and disarmament processes.²²⁸ In December 2019, three different General Assembly resolutions further detailed ways to foster youth societal participation.²²⁹ General Assembly resolution 74/121 (2019) notes

²¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 33-35.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

²¹⁷ Darden, *Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth*, 2019, p. 7; UN General Assembly, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security (A/72/761)*, 2018, p. 13.

²¹⁸ Darden, *Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth*, 2019, pp. 7-11.

²¹⁹ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

²²² UN General Assembly, *International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace (A/RES/34/151)*, 1979, p. 175.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

²²⁵ UNCED, *Agenda 21*, 1992.

²²⁶ UN DESA, *World Programme of Action for Youth*.

²²⁷ UN DESA, *Participation WPAY*.

²²⁸ UN Security Council, *Maintenance of International Peace and Security (S/RES/2250 (2015))*, 2015, pp. 4-5; UN DGC, *Adopting Resolution 2419 (2018), Security Council Calls for Increasing Role of Youth in Negotiating, Implementing Peace Agreements (SC/13368)*, 2018.

²²⁹ UN General Assembly, *Policies and Programmes Involving Youth (A/RES/74/121)*, 2019.

that Member States and governments, as the primary actors responsible for ensuring youth are involved in society, should consult with youth, youth-led and youth-focused organizations as the best approaches to create policies and programs aimed at them.²³⁰ General Assembly resolution 74/170 (2019) addresses the incorporation of physical activities into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies.²³¹ This resolution suggests Member States collaborate with relevant stakeholders, most importantly the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to design strategies that promote sports as a way to deter delinquent behavior among youth.²³² General Assembly resolution 74/64 (2019) exhorts relevant UN agencies to provide fellowship, mentoring, or internship opportunities for youth to discuss disarmament and non-proliferation strategies.²³³

It was not until 2005 with the publication of *The Case for Investing in Young People* that UNFPA began to focus more on how the agency can support governments in reducing poverty and simultaneously address the needs and rights of young people.²³⁴ Since then, UNFPA has continued to promote youth participation in society with publications such as the *UNFPA Framework for Action on Adolescents & Youth* (2007), which named four key areas for the direction of the Fund, one of which was Young People's Leadership and Participation.²³⁵ Within that area, meaningful youth participation was described as "involving, recognizing, and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities for youth to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and systemic levels."²³⁶ Further, UNFPA's *State of the World Population: The Power of 1.8 Billion* report (2014) focuses solely on adolescents and youth and recognizes the importance of meaningful participation and leadership of youth in relation to the future of sustainable development.²³⁷ UNFPA's 2019 Global Strategy, *My Body, My Life, My World*, reaffirmed the agency's commitment to guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for young people.²³⁸ The strategy's three main goals are: to eliminate preventable maternal deaths, provide family-planning services to all who need them, and end gender-based violence.²³⁹ To achieve these goals, the strategy provides information on how to make knowledgeable choices regarding SRHR and how to be an active member of society.²⁴⁰ As the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions across a number of areas concerning youth, UNFPA released an updated version of its 2019 Strategy in June 2020, *My Body, My Life, My World Through a COVID-19 Lens*.²⁴¹ Its purpose, beyond orienting Member States in upholding the SRHR of youth as COVID-19 continues to upend young people's lives, is to empower youth to become agents of positive social change despite global challenges.²⁴²

Likewise, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015) acknowledges the need to empower and enable people who are vulnerable, including all children and youth, to participate in society.²⁴³ The SDGs contain 20-youth specific targets found explicitly and implicitly in SDG 2 (combating hunger), SDG 4 (providing education), SDG 5 (reaching gender parity), SDG 8 (granting decent work), SDG 10 (eradicating inequality), SDG 13 (tackling climate change), SDG 16 (creating peaceful, just and inclusive societies) and SDG 17 (building partnerships).²⁴⁴ Target 2.2, for instance, aims to eliminate all forms of malnutrition and address the nutritional needs of adolescent

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ UN General Assembly, *Integrating Sport into Youth Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Strategies* (A/RES/74/170), 2019.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ UN General Assembly, *Youth, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation* (A/RES/74/64), 2019.

²³⁴ UNFPA, *The Case for Investing in Young People*, 2005, pp. 5-6.

²³⁵ UNFPA, *UNFPA Framework for Action on Adolescents & Youth*, 2007, pp. 37-40.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

²³⁷ UNFPA, *State of the World Population: The Power of 1.8 Billion*, 2014, pp. 89-91.

²³⁸ UNFPA, *My Body, My Life, My World Through a COVID-19 Lens*, 2020.

²³⁹ UNFPA, *Rights and Choices for All Adolescents and Youth: A UNFPA Global Strategy*, 2019, p. 3.

²⁴⁰ UN DGC, *My Body, My Life, My World! – A Brand new Rallying Cry for the SDG Generation*, 2019.

²⁴¹ UNFPA, *My Body, My Life, My World Through a COVID-19 Lens*, 2020.

²⁴² UNFPA, *Rights and Choices for All Adolescents and Youth: A UNFPA Global Strategy*, 2019, p. 3.

²⁴³ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1), 2015, p. 7.

²⁴⁴ UNDP, *Fast Facts: Youth as Partners for the Implementation of the SDGs*, 2017.

girls.²⁴⁵ Target 4.4 works towards increasing the number of youth who possess skills that will prepare them for the labor world.²⁴⁶ Target 13.B seeks to promote better planning to fight climate change with a special focus on youth living in least developed countries and small island developing states.²⁴⁷ Moreover, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) adopted the *UN Youth Strategy (2018)*, in which the Member States pledged to break down the barriers that keep young people from participation and to engage youth in decision-making processes.²⁴⁸ The strategy, *Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People*, specifically aims to increase the agency and rights of young people in a way that ensures their participation in the implementation of the SDGs, along with other relevant global frameworks and agendas.²⁴⁹ In order to do so, UNDP recognized five priorities of the strategy, including: engagement, participation, and advocacy; informed and healthy foundations; economic empowerment through decent work; youth and human rights; and peace and resilience building.²⁵⁰ In stepping up their efforts in the aforementioned areas, UNDP hopes to engage and empower young people.²⁵¹

Role of the International System

In 2017, UNFPA reaffirmed its position on youth leadership and participation in society in the *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021* by promising to promote the right of young people to participate in politics and civil society.²⁵² UNFPA works to uphold this pledge by supporting youth-oriented policies, promoting youth-led projects and groups that endorse equal participation, and creating partnership platforms for young people's participation in the SDGs.²⁵³ UNFPA also partners with and supports several youth networks, including the Youth Peer Education Network (Y-Peer), the African Youth and Adolescent Network on Population and Development (AfriYAN), Young Positives, and EvalYouth.²⁵⁴ UNFPA assists each of these networks in developing the access, skills, and leadership needed to represent and advocate for youth at local, regional, and international levels.²⁵⁵

Within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) aims to increase the effectiveness of UN work in youth development by strengthening collaboration and conversation between all relevant UN entities.²⁵⁶ IANYD advocates for, supports, and reviews progress on the implementation of youth-related UN resolutions and conventions, as well as the SDGs.²⁵⁷ UN DESA also oversees the Youth Delegate Program, which allows youth representatives from Member States to participate in intergovernmental meetings at the UN.²⁵⁸ Most recently, on 2 July 2020, UN DESA, Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD), released *The World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda*.²⁵⁹ The report is part of the biennial DISD publications that address youth issues, analyze policy gaps, and propose possible policy responses.²⁶⁰

²⁴⁵ UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Goal 2: End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture*.

²⁴⁶ UN SDGs, *Goal 4: Quality Education*.

²⁴⁷ UN SDGs, *Goal 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and its Impacts*.

²⁴⁸ UNFPA, *UN Youth Strategy Commits Support to a New Generation of Leaders*, 2018.

²⁴⁹ UNDP, *Youth 2030: Working with and for Young People*, 2018, p. 5.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2018, p. 9.

²⁵² Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (DP/FPA/2017/9)*, 2017, p. 14.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵⁴ UNFPA, *Youth Leadership & Participation*, 2020.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; UNFPA, *UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth*, 2013, p. 9.

²⁵⁶ UN DESA, *UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development*.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ UN DESA, *UN Youth Delegate Program*.

²⁵⁹ UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2020.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Elsewhere within the UN system, the *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017* was designed to complement and reinforce the *UNDP Strategic Plan 2014–2017* by deepening the youth focus across all areas of work.²⁶¹ It also supported the work of the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth and IANYD, including support for the implementation of the *United Nations Systemwide Action Plan on Youth* (UN Youth-SWAP) in the areas of employment, political inclusion, civic engagement, and protection of rights.²⁶² *UNDP’s Strategic Plan, 2018-2021* is the agency’s most recent plan delineating its vision and mission. This outline is meant to additionally assist Member States in orienting their policies towards sustainable development via poverty eradication and resilience-building.²⁶³ Although as of September 2020 no youth strategy accompanies *UNDP’s Strategic Plan, 2018-2021*, it is worth mentioning that youth are considered vital to the goals set in the document.²⁶⁴ Additionally, the *Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (Y-GPS) 2016-2020* is UNDP’s “first global programmatic offer for youth empowerment for sustainable development and peace.”²⁶⁵ Through its four thematic areas of work, civic engagement and political participation, peacebuilding and resilience-building, economic empowerment, and youth as partners in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, UNDP seeks to establish the conditions of youth empowerment.²⁶⁶ UNFPA also works in close collaboration with UNDP and UN DESA on the UN Global Initiative on National Youth Policies (GINYP), surrounding youth empowerment at the global level.²⁶⁷ GINYP supports the development and enactment of youth policies through technical assistance, advocacy, and sharing of expertise.²⁶⁸

Youth and the Sustainable Development Goals

The unprecedented number of adolescents living today, mostly concentrated in developing countries, means that today’s young people will be the ones who have to live with the results of the SDGs.²⁶⁹ SDG 1 (no poverty) is particularly relevant to young people, as 500 million youth live in poverty, and 156 million of those youth live in extreme poverty despite being employed.²⁷⁰ SDG 3 (good health and well-being) is also applicable to young people, as they face disproportionately high rates of HIV and generally struggle with access to reproductive information and healthcare.²⁷¹ In addition, with around 103 million young people deficient in basic literacy, many of those affected by the issues reflected in SDG 4 (quality education) are young people.²⁷² Similarly, SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) are pertinent to young women and girls, who are often denied participation in education solely because of their sex.²⁷³ Connected to both SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), young people continue to struggle to find decent, stable work.²⁷⁴ Finally, SDG 13 (climate action) is of great importance to youth, not only because they will have to live with the consequences of action or inaction on climate change, but also because women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die in a natural disaster.²⁷⁵ Advances made in quality education and decent work and economic growth are mutually reinforcing; therefore, success in these areas may lead to the realization of the remaining SDGs and improve life circumstances for many youth.²⁷⁶

²⁶¹ UNDP, *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future*, 2014, p. 3.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Executive Board of the UNDP, the UNFPA and the UNOPS, *UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021*, 2017, p. 1.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁶⁵ UNDP, *Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace 2016-2020*, 2016, p. 2.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁶⁸ UNDP, *1st Global Forum on Youth Policies: Report*, 2014, p. 22.

²⁶⁹ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

²⁷⁰ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017; UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 2.

²⁷¹ UNFPA, *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2020.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 65.

²⁷⁴ UNFPA, *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2020.

²⁷⁵ UN-Women, *SDG 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and its Impacts*.

²⁷⁶ UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 64.

With that in mind, UNFPA, sometimes alongside other UN agencies, works to not only help carry out the SDGs, but to do so in a way that involves youth for the increased likelihood of achieving the SDGs.²⁷⁷ UNFPA's *Strategic Plan (2018-2021)*, in line with the Executive Board's 2017 decision, commits UNFPA to working with UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.²⁷⁸ In their collaboration, although they do take multiple SDGs into consideration, as the UN agency designated with promoting access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, UNFPA's strategic plan is particularly focused on the goal of achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and reproductive rights for women, adolescents, and youth.²⁷⁹ The plan also lays out a model to achieve said goal, in which the participation and empowerment of adolescents and youth is vital.²⁸⁰ Additionally, UNFPA helped launch the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth and the Joint Programme on Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education, which focus on decent work and quality education, both of which help deliver results concerning the other SDGs.²⁸¹

With the understanding of how the SDGs considerably affect young people, youth have unique perspectives and ideas when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs.²⁸² Additionally, the UN DESA *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2018) emphasizes the importance of increasing youth participation in sustainable development efforts for successful implementation of the SDGs.²⁸³ Research shows that young people have positively contributed to the fulfillment of the SDGs by developing partnerships, networks, and alliances; influencing their communities and governments; contributing toward development policies; and helping create initiatives for the SDGs.²⁸⁴ Diverse sectors and youth have partnered to alleviate the effects of COVID-19 on the SDGs. Directly relevant to SDG 3 and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), Restless Development supports Local Youth Corner Cameroon, a youth-led non-profit that throughout the pandemic has distributed thousands of bottles of hand sanitizer in communities without access to running water.²⁸⁵ Soup-erHeroes and Community Action Networks are partnering with young leaders to launch initiatives that support vulnerable groups in local communities via the delivery of food and medicine.²⁸⁶ These efforts are directly linked to attaining SDG 3 and SDG 2.²⁸⁷ Young people are further contributing to the fight against COVID-19 by mitigating the effects of disinformation online through videos that promote how social distancing and additional health measures work.²⁸⁸ These efforts not only slow down the worst effects the pandemic has on SDG attainment, but also shed elucidate how crucial it is that world leaders invest in young people to increase youth participation and build more resilient and inclusive societies.²⁸⁹

²⁷⁷ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017; UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 64.

²⁷⁸ Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (DP/FPA/2017/9)*, 2017.

²⁷⁹ UNFPA, *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2020; Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (DP/FPA/2017/9)*, 2017, p. 3.

²⁸⁰ Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS, *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (DP/FPA/2017/9)*, 2017, pp. 7-10.

²⁸¹ Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP, *Working with Adolescents and Youth to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2017, pp. 8-9.

²⁸² UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

²⁸³ UN DESA, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 3.

²⁸⁴ Plan International UK, *What's the Evidence? Youth Engagement and the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2018.

²⁸⁵ University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business Press Office, *Young People can Lead the Response to Covid-19*, 2020.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; UN DESA, *Protecting and Mobilizing Youth in COVID-19 Responses*, 2020.

²⁸⁷ University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business Press Office, *Young People can Lead the Response to Covid-19*, 2020, 2020; UN DESA, *Protecting and Mobilizing Youth in COVID-19 Responses*, 2020.

²⁸⁸ UN DESA, *Protecting and Mobilizing Youth in COVID-19 Responses*, 2020.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Supporting Involvement of Marginalized Girls and Young Women

Girls and young women often face additional educational and societal barriers when it comes to acting as leaders or participants, solely because of their gender or sex.²⁹⁰ For example, one-third of the more than 500 million adolescent girls currently living in developing countries are married before the age of 18.²⁹¹ Child marriage, often followed by pregnancy, not only endangers the lives and health of young women and girls, but it also limits their future prospects, including participation in education.²⁹² Girls who are forced into marriage are also often forced into dropping out of school to fulfill their domestic duties within the household, thus hindering young women's social participation.²⁹³ In least developed countries, around 63% of girls complete primary school and only 29% enroll in secondary school.²⁹⁴ Similarly, girls who are not in school suffer from worse health and economic circumstances than if they would have remained in school, which further contributes to diminished participation in society.²⁹⁵ UNFPA works to empower girls vulnerable to child marriage by promoting education, supporting programs that build life skills, providing sexual and reproductive healthcare, and improving economic well-being.²⁹⁶ UNFPA also works with governments to foster supportive policies and legislation that promote the rights of married and unmarried girls.²⁹⁷

Girls and young women also face high risks of having poor sexual and reproductive health as a result of being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).²⁹⁸ In addition to SGBV, girls and young women are also exposed to further practices that are harmful to their health such as female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and sex trafficking.²⁹⁹ The aforementioned practices further limit how young women and girls participate fully in society.³⁰⁰ Due to COVID-19, programs that work towards ending child marriage and FGM are not being implemented promptly.³⁰¹ An UNFPA analysis has found that a two-year delay in the implementation of FGM-prevention programs could cause 2 million women being harmed using this practice within the next decade.³⁰² Failure to intervene in relation to ending child marriage within the next year could result in 13 million child marriages between 2020 and 2030.³⁰³ This represents a direct setback for SDG 5, and an indirect one for SDGs 1, 3, 4, 8, and 10. UNFPA's commitment has not waned, as seen by the agency's continued support of those in territories that lack appropriate health and social protection systems and the simultaneous attention to crises emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰⁴ For instance, in Somalia, UNFPA has ceaselessly provided optimal life-saving essential sexual and reproductive health services in tandem with promoting the establishment of facilities for COVID-19 testing.³⁰⁵ In West and Central Africa, UNFPA has ensured to maintain a steady supply of contraceptives, particularly focusing on in countries where the pandemic might endanger contraceptive provision.³⁰⁶

²⁹⁰ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² UNFPA, *Child Marriage*, 2020.

²⁹³ Ibid.; UN DESA, *International Youth Day 2019*, 2019.

²⁹⁴ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

²⁹⁵ UNFPA, *Child Marriage*, 2020.

²⁹⁶ UNFPA, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012, p. 53.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

²⁹⁹ UNFPA, *Giving Special Attention to Girls and Adolescents*, 2020; UNFPA, *The State of World Population 2020: Against my Will, Defying the Practices that Harm Women and Girls and Undermine Equality*, 2020.

³⁰⁰ UNFPA, *The State of World Population 2020: Against my Will, Defying the Practices that Harm Women and Girls and Undermine Equality*, 2020.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ UNFPA, *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic UNFPA Global Response Plan*, 2020, p. 3.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

In an attempt to shield girls and young women from some of these problems, in partnership with UNICEF and the World Health Organization, UNFPA is involved in an initiative to provide girls with the same opportunities and rights as boys.³⁰⁷ Included in this initiative, which is tailored to the needs of 13 specific countries such as Senegal, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and India, are the goals to keep girls in school, develop vocational training for adolescent girls, and engage girls in social, political, and economic aspects of life.³⁰⁸ In order to achieve these goals, UNFPA and its partners are providing girls with comprehensive education and training in income-generating skills as well as educating local communities about the reproductive health needs of adolescent girls.³⁰⁹ UNFPA also encourages the leadership and participation of marginalized girls through programs such as Action for Adolescent Girls (AAG).³¹⁰ This program enables girls and young women to protect themselves by connecting them with resources that help them to know and understand their rights.³¹¹ The AAG initiative was launched in Rajasthan, India, in 2015 and reached approximately 12,000 to 14,000 adolescent girls in 600 villages in the form of peer-led girl groups focused on education.³¹² UNFPA also supported community events addressing issues faced by girls as part of the program, which reached over 87,000 community members in about 580 events.³¹³ UNFPA's and UNICEF's joint effort to combat FGM, the Joint Programme on FGM, is present in 17 Member States in Africa and the Middle East to guide the implementation of regional and worldwide initiatives to curb this form of violence.³¹⁴ UNFPA's commitment to eradicate practices that harm young women and girls, such as child marriage, are evidence-based and aim to prepare them in their transition to adulthood.³¹⁵ As of March 2020, 3.3 million girls and women in Member States participating in this partnership, among them Burkina Faso, Egypt, Somalia, and Yemen, have been protected through services to prevent FMG.³¹⁶ Most notably 13 participating countries have begun developing legal frameworks to ban FGM, and national budgets have been drafted in more than a dozen countries to fund services and programs that will protect women against FGM.³¹⁷

Conclusion

Despite some progress in the rates of youth participation in society, young people are still vastly underrepresented in the political sphere and civil society.³¹⁸ While UNFPA and other UN bodies such as UN DESA, UNDP, and UN-Women continue to push the importance of youth leadership and participation in society, many young people still face educational, economic, social, and political barriers to reach full participation.³¹⁹ The obstacles are even more challenging for girls and young women, who may face SGBV, child marriage, and a lack of adequate access to sexual and reproductive healthcare.³²⁰ Still, UNFPA aims to increase youth participation and leadership by understanding the issues that young people face; building networks of governments, youth-led organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders; developing the skills of young people; and involving young people in policymaking.³²¹

Further Research

As delegates continue their research on this topic, they should consider the following questions: How can UNFPA work with Member States and other UN entities to facilitate the full participation of young people

³⁰⁷ UNFPA, *Giving Special Attention to Girls and Adolescents*, 2020.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² UNOPS, *UNFPA's Action for Adolescent Girls, Rajasthan, India / United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) / January 2015 - June 2016*.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ UNFPA, *Female Genital Mutilation*, 2019

³¹⁵ UNFPA, *Child Marriage*, 2020.

³¹⁶ UNICEF, *UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation*, 2020.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, *#YouthStats: Public and Civic Participation*.

³¹⁹ UNDP, *Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace 2016-2020*, 2016, p. 26.

³²⁰ UNFPA, *Youth Participation and Leadership*, 2017.

³²¹ Ibid.

at local, regional, and international levels? How can other UN bodies, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society organizations be useful in realizing leadership and participation of youth? How can governments better involve youth in decision-making processes that directly affect them? What national and regional practices have been successful in increasing youth leadership and participation, and how might they be adapted and implemented at the international level?

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United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2016). *World Youth Report: Youth Civic Engagement*. Retrieved 28 September 2020 from:

<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr/2015/report.pdf>

This report was published in response to an increased policy focus on youth civic engagement in the years leading up to its publication. It focuses on the changing trends of economic, political, and community-based participation of youth, as well as offering conclusions and recommendations. Delegates should use this source to understand the economic and political trends in and barriers to youth participation in society. Understanding these trends is vital in developing effective solutions to overcome barriers.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2018). *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved 28 September 2020 from:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

This report examines the mutually supportive roles of current youth development efforts and the 2030 Agenda. The report considers the role that the 2030 Agenda can play in enhancing youth development efforts and examines how evidence-based youth policies can help accelerate youth-related objectives. Delegates will find this source helpful to make a correlation between youth participation and the SDGs. Youth participation is critical to realization of the SDGs and thus it is important for delegates to understand how youth participation and the SDGs are related.

United Nations Population Fund. (2007). *UNFPA Framework for Action on Adolescents & Youth*.

Retrieved 28 September 2020 from: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/framework_youth.pdf

UNFPA's policy and program priorities for young people and its contributions with other UN entities to the development agenda are outlined in this framework. It also lays out the key elements that every UNFPA-supported adolescent and youth program should have, in accordance with UNFPA, while recognizing their diverse needs. This document will be especially helpful to delegates in understanding the relevance of the issue, the associated challenges, and the kinds of ongoing initiatives that UNFPA is undertaking that delegates can adapt and expand upon.

United Nations Population Fund. (2013). *UNFPA Strategy on Adolescents and Youth*. Retrieved 28 September 2020 from: <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-strategy-adolescents-and-youth>

This strategic framework lays out five areas in which UNFPA planned to contribute to the advancement of adolescents and youth for the following four years and beyond. UNFPA's focus in this strategy is taking bold initiatives to reach marginalized and disadvantaged adolescents and youth, especially girls, and promoting youth leadership and participation. Delegates should use this source to better understand the barriers and challenges associated with youth participation in society to develop thoughtful solutions on the topic.

United Nations Population Fund. (2014). *State of the World Population: The Power of 1.8 Billion*.

Retrieved 28 September 2020 from: <https://www.unfpa.org/swop-2014>

This annual report by UNFPA focuses on the 1.8 billion youth alive today and recognizes the importance of their participation in society, as the shapers and leaders of our global future. Although this is an annual report, the 2014 State of the World Population report focuses specifically on youth participation and leadership in a way that no report has

done since. The report also provides trends and statistics on adolescent and youth populations worldwide. Delegates will find this source particularly useful in providing statistics and definitions of key terms on the topic of youth participation.

United Nations Population Fund. (2020). *The State of World Population 2020: Against my Will: Defying the Practices That Harm Women and Girls and Undermine Equality*. Retrieved 10 August 2020 from: <https://www.unfpa.org/swop>

This most recent UNFPA report highlights the different ways in which the human rights of young women and girls are violated through harmful practices. The three major areas of focus of this report are: son preference, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Delegates will find this source useful as it contains strategies to alleviate human rights transgressions as well as information on how COVID-19 has disrupted the worldwide situation for women and young girls.

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