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United Nations Children's Fund Background Guide 2022

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with contributions by Esther Bickel and Kiki Tamis-Noordman



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This year's staff are: Directors Diego Padilla Marquez Rosales (Conference A) and Ksenia Shevtsova (Conference B). Diego is a biochemistry undergraduate from Contra Costa College with a background in politics of the Middle East and North Africa. Ksenia holds a Masters in International Relations and works as expert in the Moscow Analytical Center.

The topics under discussion for UNICEF are:

1. Fostering Digital Civic Engagement by Young People
2. Providing Violence Response and Access to Justice for Children and Youth

As a fund reporting to the UN Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) plays a critical role in the protection and empowerment of children globally, as well as in the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). UNICEF seeks to address a wide range of topics regarding children, including achieving child- and youth-specific targets under the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) and advocating for children's rights as human rights. In order to accurately simulate this committee, delegates will need to understand UNICEF's important role and mandate, and ensure continued prioritization of UNICEF's directive to provide humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.

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 2022 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](#), serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

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 Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs (HRHA) Department, Citlali Mora Catlet (Conference A) and Caitlin Hopper (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

Diego Padilla Marquez Rosales, Director

Conference B

Ksenia Shevtsova, Director

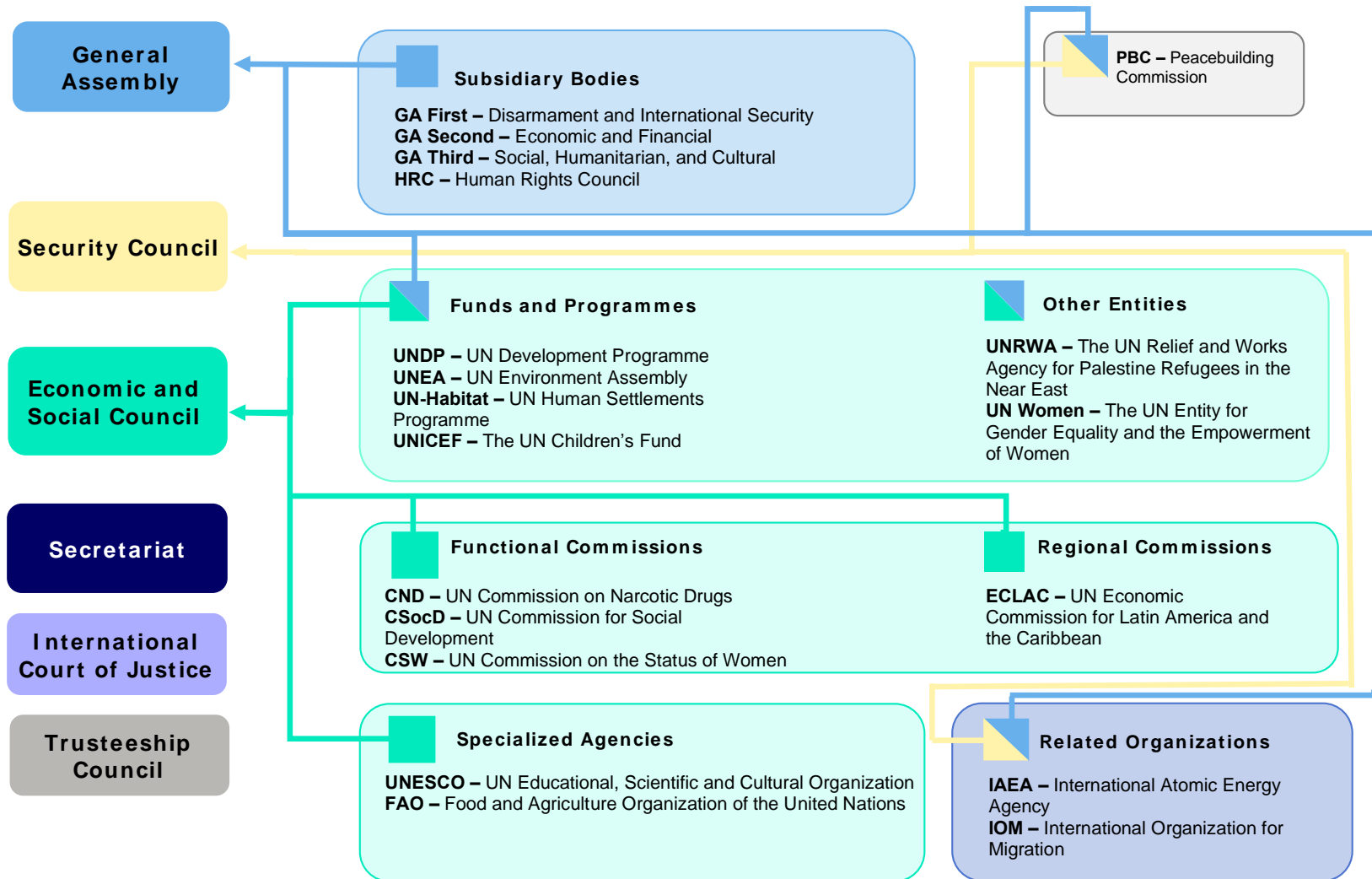


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United Nations System at NMUN•NY

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 Children's Fund (UNICEF) is one of the United Nations' (UN) programs and funds, and was established in 1946 through UN General Assembly resolution 57 (I) on "Establishment of an International Children's Emergency Fund."¹ It was initially founded as a relief organization for European child refugees from the Second World War, and named the UN International Children's Emergency Fund.² As the UN saw the continued need of all children to get support from governments and international organizations for their survival and well-being, the General Assembly expanded UNICEF's mandate beyond Europe to include all children through resolution 417 (V) on *Continuing needs of children: United Nations Children's Emergency Fund* in 1950.³ In 1953, pursuant to resolution 802 (VIII) *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)*, the General Assembly extended UNICEF's mandate indefinitely and changed the organization's full name to the United Nations Children's Fund.⁴

The *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1959) and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1990) frame the work of UNICEF.⁵ The CRC took UNICEF over 10 years to create with the assistance of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights advocates, lawyers, health specialists, social workers, educators, child development experts, and religious leaders.⁶ Following the adoption of the CRC, UNICEF organized the World Summit for Children in 1990, which hosted the largest gathering of world leaders in history and helped broaden the debate on children in conflict situations in the Security Council during the 1990s.⁷ As General Assembly resolution 61/146 on *The rights of the child* (2006) showed, the situation of children remains critical as poverty, inequalities, and the lack of education and health services persist.⁸

Governance, Structure, and Membership

UNICEF's work is divided into administrative work and research, as well as programs for local action.⁹ The Executive Board serves as the highest level of UNICEF's administrative management.¹⁰ It determines all policy and budgetary decisions based on reports from the National Committees and meets three times a year.¹¹ 36 Member States make up the Executive Board and are elected to three-year terms by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), with elections occurring in April or May each year.¹² The Executive Board allocates eight seats to Africa, seven seats to Asia, four seats to Eastern Europe, five seats to Latin America and the Caribbean, and 12 seats to Western Europe and Others.¹³ The Executive Board also observes all UN missions related to children and youth, and oversees all documents adopted by the organization, including several annual reports.¹⁴

¹ United Nations, *UN System*; UN General Assembly, *Establishment of an International Children's Emergency Fund (A/RES/57 (I))*, 1946.

² UN General Assembly, *Establishment of an International Children's Emergency Fund (A/RES/57 (I))*, 1946, p. 1.

³ UN General Assembly, *Continuing needs of Children: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (A/RES/417(V))*, 1950; UNICEF, *Responding to COVID-19: UNICEF Annual Report 2020, 2021*, p. 9.

⁴ UN General Assembly, *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (A/RES/802 (VIII))*, 1953.

⁵ UN General Assembly, *Declaration of the Rights of the Child (A/RES/908 (VIII))*, 1953; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

⁶ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989; UNICEF, *75 years of UNICEF, Reimagining the Future for Every Child Since 1946*.

⁷ UNICEF, *75 years of UNICEF, Reimagining the Future for Every Child Since 1946*.

⁸ UN General Assembly, *Rights of the Child (A/RES/61/146)*, 2006.

⁹ UNICEF, *About UNICEF*; UNICEF, *UNICEF Partnerships*.

¹⁰ UNICEF, *UNICEF Executive Board*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² UNICEF, *Membership, the UNICEF Executive Board Membership*.

¹³ UNICEF, *UNICEF Executive Board*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

UNICEF has a strong presence in 190 countries and territories.¹⁵ It runs 33 National Committees, which are set up as independent local NGOs.¹⁶ Since UNICEF is funded entirely by voluntary contributions, the National Committees focus on fundraising, and also on establishing best practices and sharing methods for public-private partnerships.¹⁷ The National Committees also aim to gain the foster an understanding with the national governments of the Member States they operate in, and raise public awareness in those states for children's rights.¹⁸

UNICEF leads a Supply Division, headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark, where all the supplies for medical emergencies, natural disasters, or post-conflict settings are stored and allocated.¹⁹ The Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) in Florence, Italy is the research branch of UNICEF and liaises with intergovernmental policy creators and leaders.²⁰ The IRC examines the efficacy of UNICEF's policies and programs, for example through case studies, and promotes the CRC by monitoring changing situations, highlighting chronic problems, finding ways to support areas lacking capacity, and influencing intergovernmental policies that affect children.²¹ The IRC is closely linked to the National Committees, which support putting research into practice.²²

Mandate, Functions, and Power

Originally defined by General Assembly resolution 57 (I) on *Establishment of an International Children's Emergency Fund* (1946), UNICEF's mandate was later broadened by General Assembly resolutions 417 (V) on *Continuing needs of children: United Nations Children's Emergency Fund* (1950) and 802 (VIII) on *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)* (1953) to include protecting the rights of all children, providing education and health services, and strengthening access to justice.²³

The *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1959) guarantees inalienable human rights for all children.²⁴ The declaration aims to defend their right to education, and promote the healthy growth and development of every child.²⁵ It sets forth 10 principles for all children so they can lead good and happy lives.²⁶ Principle two expresses that children need special protection by law, and principle seven affirms that all children are entitled to receive education.²⁷

In addition to the Declaration, UNICEF's work is further based on the CRC and its article 3, which establishes that all actions concerning children shall be in the best interest of the children.²⁸ Article 7 of the CRC obliges State Parties to implement children's rights within their national law and ensure that children are particularly protected.²⁹ The CRC sets the international standard for the rights of children and recognizes the important role of UNICEF.³⁰

¹⁵ UNICEF, *About UNICEF*.

¹⁶ UNICEF, *UNICEF National Committees*.

¹⁷ UN ECOSOC, *Annual Report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2021/10)*, 2021; UN ECOSOC, *Structured Dialogue on Financing the Results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021 (E/ICEF/2021/30)*, 2021; UNICEF, *UNICEF Executive Board*.

¹⁸ UNICEF, *UNICEF National Committees*.

¹⁹ UNICEF, *About us*.

²⁰ UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, *Research Programmes*, 2016.

²¹ UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, *Evidence and Gap Map Research Brief*, 2018; UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, *The Difference a Dollar a day Makes: A Study of UNICEF Jordan's Hajati Programme*, 2021.

²² UNICEF, Office of Research-Innocenti, *How we work*, 2016.

²³ UNESCO, *Guide to the Archives of Intergovernmental Organizations: UNICEF*, 1999; UN General Assembly, *Establishment of an International Children's Emergency Fund (A/RES/57 (I))*, 1946, p. 3.

²⁴ UN General Assembly, *Declaration of the Rights of the Child (A/RES/1386 (XIV))*, 1959.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁸ UNESCO, *Guide to the Archives of Intergovernmental Organizations*, 1999; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989, p. 167.

²⁹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989, pp. 167-168.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 166.

Additionally, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continue to be a focal point for UNICEF, especially SDG 1 (“ending poverty”), SDG 3 (“good health and well-being”), SDG 4 (“inclusive and equitable quality education”), SDG 10 (“reduced inequalities”), and SDG 16 (“provide access to justice”).³¹

UNICEF also coordinates with UN partners, including the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to reach SDG 17 (“strengthening global partnerships for sustainable development”).³² UNICEF reports on the progress made on the SDGs and other priority areas to the General Assembly and ECOSOC, both of which undertake annual reviews of the organization’s work.³³

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

Approximately every other year, the UNICEF Executive Board adopts the flagship *State of the World Children* report, which focuses on a key challenge facing children and adolescents globally.³⁴ 2021’s report was released on 4 October, and was centered on the theme “On My Mind: Promoting, protecting and caring for children’s mental health.”³⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns about the mental health of children, and even beyond the pandemic, UNICEF expresses concern about safeguarding the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of children in fragile and conflict-affected areas, and rising risks to children’s mental health, such as the internet.³⁶ 2021 marks the first time that *The State of the World’s Children* report has focused on mental health, and is a result of UNICEF’s campaign to reach 47.2 million children with community-based mental health and psychosocial support in 2020, as well as provide relevant awareness campaigns.³⁷

In 2019, the *State of the World’s Children 2019* (SOWC) report highlighted the challenges children around the world face with regards to food and nutrition.³⁸ Malnutrition, which includes undernutrition, inadequate vitamins or minerals, obesity, hidden hunger, and diet-related noncommunicable diseases, are growing challenges to children’s health and well-being.³⁹ “At least one in three children under five is undernourished or overweight and one in two suffers from hidden hunger”.⁴⁰ The situation is expected to worsen due to climate change, humanitarian crises, and inequities.⁴¹ For example, families with a small budget are likely to purchase food that is cheap but of low quality, so children are at greater risk of malnutrition and nutrient deficiencies.⁴² UNICEF recommends that all Member States implement policies to promote healthy diets and nutrition.⁴³

UNICEF’s strategic plans are created and approved by the Executive Board every four years.⁴⁴ UNICEF’s *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* is informed by the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDGs 1 (“no poverty”), 3 (“good health and wellbeing”), 4 (“quality education”), 10 (“reduced inequalities”), and 16 (“peace, justice and

³¹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

³² UN IANYD, *Joint Statement of the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development*, 2011; UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Strategic Framework 2011-2013*, 2011, p. 5.

³³ UNESCO, *Guide to the Archives of Intergovernmental Organizations*, 1999.

³⁴ UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2021, On My Mind: Promoting, protecting and caring for children’s mental health*, 2021.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2019, Children, Food and Nutrition: Growing well in a Changing World*, 2019.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴² Ibid., p. 9.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 123-124.

⁴⁴ UN ECOSOC, *The UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017 (E/ICEF/2013/21)*, 2014.

strong institutions”).⁴⁵ In the Executive Board’s first regular session in February 2021, the focus areas of the *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* were presented by the Executive Director Henrietta Fore, and are: “distance learning to save futures, immunization to save lives, water to save communities and mental health to save families.”⁴⁶ UNICEF also seeks to continue alignment with national policies and its local programs so that basic health care and remote education are accessible for all children.⁴⁷

During the Executive Board’s annual session in June 2021, the Executive Director presented the *Annual Report for 2020* (2021), and highlighted that progress has been made on goal area 2, “every child learns,” on

access to education.⁴⁸ Despite some progress, the COVID-19 pandemic uncovered that about half a billion children, whose schools were shut down, had no access to digital learning opportunities.⁴⁹ UNICEF’s focus is to improve remote learning and reopen schools safely.⁵⁰ Regarding goal area 1, “every child survives and thrives,” the Executive Director highlighted that child health and nutrition have been improved.⁵¹ However, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted children from lower income households as vaccines and other health care products sometimes are not affordable.⁵² UNICEF’s focus is to improve children’s health by strengthening immunization, mental health, and violence and injury prevention.⁵³

UNICEF’s report on *Protecting Children from Violence in the time of COVID-19: Disruptions in Prevention and Response Services* (2020) describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all children and their rights.⁵⁴ The report shows that approximately half of all children faced domestic violence during the pandemic, and associated measures against the pandemic, such as school closures, contribute to an increased exposure of children to domestic violence.⁵⁵ Child protection services, for instance violence prevention programs, have been interrupted in Member States worldwide.⁵⁶ UNICEF emphasizes that the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-term effects on all children, and asks Member States to particularly protect the rights of children during the COVID-19 pandemic and prioritize children’s needs.⁵⁷

The second regular session of UNICEF’s Executive Board was held in the fall of 2021, where approval of the *Proposed programme of work for the Executive Board sessions in 2022* (2021) and the *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* (2021) were priority agenda items.⁵⁸ The new strategic plan has five goal areas with goal area three aiming “to ensure that every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices.”⁵⁹ Part of this goal includes ensuring access to justice, with a focus on building capacities for social services and strengthening national policies.⁶⁰ Additionally, the Executive approved the *Provisional List of Agenda Items* for 2022, which includes a focus on consultations with UN partners including UN Women, UNDP, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), as well as an update on the recommendations from the independent panel review of the UNICEF

⁴⁵ UN ECOSOC, *Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children’s Fund on the work of its First Regular Session of 2021 ((E/2021/34 (Part I)-E/ICEF/2021/7 (Part I))*, 2021; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 14.

⁴⁶ UN ECOSOC, *Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children’s Fund on the work of its First Regular Session of 2021 ((E/2021/34 (Part I)-E/ICEF/2021/7 (Part I))*, 2021, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ UN ECOSOC, *Annual Report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2021/10)*, 2021, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ UNICEF, *Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in Prevention and Response Services*, 2020.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁸ UN ECOSOC, *Provisional Annotated Agenda, Timetable and Organization of work (E/ICEF/2021/30)*, 2021; UNICEF, *Proposed programme of work for the Executive Board sessions in 2022*, 2021.

⁵⁹ UN ECOSOC, *UNICEF’s Strategic Plan 2022-2025, Draft for Review (E/ICEF/2021/12)*, 2021, p. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority.⁶¹

Conclusion

UNICEF plays a unique role as it protects children's rights and promotes their well-being within each Member State through local programs.⁶² Guided by the SDGs, UNICEF's *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* (2021) addresses ongoing challenges facing children, aiming to ensure that all children can have a fair chance at a healthy, safe, and sustainable future.⁶³ UNICEF has continued to make strides, as reported in the Annual Report 2020, which highlighted the work of UNICEF and its various partners.⁶⁴ UNICEF continues to combat critical issues guided by the SDGs, and continues to ensure that children remain a priority on the global agenda.⁶⁵

Annotated Bibliography

United Nations Children's Fund. (n.d.). *UNICEF and the Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved 23 June 2021 from: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>

This website examines the SDGs, and how these goals impact and are impacted by the work of UNICEF and its partner organizations. This resource also highlights goals that are specific towards the work of UNICEF and discusses the long-term areas of on children's rights in order to meet the SDG targets. This is a useful resource effectively summarizes the SDGs as the current framework of all UN entities and actions, and their relation to UNICEF.

United Nations Children's Fund. (2021). *UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025, Draft for Review (E/ICEF/2021/12)*. Retrieved 07 August 2021 from:

https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/documents/UNICEF_Strategic_Plan_2022%E2%80%932025-SRS-2021

This Strategic Plan establishes UNICEF's current priorities on achieving inclusive, equitable recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving the SDGs by 2030. The strategic plan includes the latest developments and insights from the COVID-19 pandemic relating to children's rights, and emphasizes relevant partnerships with UN and non-UN entities. Five goal areas build the basis for making the plan accessible to all and to making progress measurable. For delegates, this plan is a valuable resource as it will shape the priority items at UNICEF's upcoming Executive Board sessions. As well, the strategic plan will provide delegates with useful information and insight into the organization's future goals and visions.

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2020). *Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund: Report on the 1st and 2nd Regular Sessions and Annual Session of 2020 (E/2020/34/Rev.1-E/ICEF/2020/7/Rev.1)*. Retrieved 24 June 2021 from: <https://undocs.org/en/E/2020/34/Rev.1>

This report contains detailed information about all the work UNICEF has carried out in 2020, operationally and administratively. There is a specific section dedicated to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of UNICEF and all children. It also discusses how UNICEF has responded to these challenges. Digitalization and violence against children are central topics of the report, making it useful to delegates researching these issues. As well, the report serves as a starting point for delegates to understand an overview of developments in the past years, and remaining obstacles to progress.

United Nations, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. Adopted on the Report of the Third Committee (A/45/753). Retrieved 24 June 2021

⁶¹ UNICEF, *Provisional List of Agenda Items*, 2021.

⁶² UNICEF, *About UNICEF*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ UN ECOSOC, *Annual Report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2021/10)*, 2021.

⁶⁵ UNICEF, *About UNICEF*.

from: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/44/25>

This declaration is key to the work of UNICEF. It establishes the rights and freedoms for every child in every Member State and lays the foundation for the organization's work. The CRC shows that children need special protection by law and institutions, and the means to ending exploitation, violence, and hunger. The right to life, education, and access to justice should be guaranteed by all Member States under the CRC. Delegates preparing for committee must understand the rights and principles set forth in the CRC.

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United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-first session, (2006). *Rights of the Child (A/RES/61/146)*. Adopted on the report of the Third Committee (A/61/439). Retrieved 21 September 2021 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/61/146>

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1. Fostering Digital Civic Engagement by Young People

“Let us acknowledge and celebrate what youth can do to build a safer, more just world. Let us strengthen our efforts to include young people in policies, programmes and decision-making processes that benefit their futures and ours.”⁶⁶

Introduction

UNICEF upholds the United Nations (UN) definition of young people as “[t]hose persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.”⁶⁷ Young people currently constitute 15.5% of the world population, and have long been recognized as a vulnerable social group.⁶⁸ In many remote and rural areas, slums, and other underserved areas, youth are often more likely to lack basic services, adequate opportunities for decent work, and have lower quality of living than other age groups.⁶⁹ Civic engagement is one of the primary means through which these young people can develop skills and knowledge about their rights and responsibilities, express their political stances, and advocate for their specific needs.⁷⁰ Civic engagement is defined by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) as “individual or collective actions in which people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general” and includes taking part in the electoral process, attending community meetings, and interacting with public officials.⁷¹

Current digital technologies also make participation in political and social issues more accessible to diverse young people, thereby removing many of the historic barriers of traditional civic dialogue.⁷² The ability to participate in society online is called digital citizenship, and digital citizens are people who use technology for political information to fulfill their civic duty and “use technology at work for economic gain.”⁷³ Aspects of digital citizenship include quality of online participation, including online behavior taking into account the concepts of responsibility, rights, safety, and security.⁷⁴

Despite the positive opportunities that digital engagement offers to youth, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), estimate that two-thirds of children and young people in the world aged 25 years or under do not have internet access at home as of 2020.⁷⁵ Beyond unequal access to internet, this “digital divide” is further characterized by unequal access to information and communication technology (ICT), a “diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information.”⁷⁶ Despite this discrepancy, the UN recognizes young people as major contributors to narrowing the digital divide and note the growing rates of digital literacy, or the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow an increase of safety and empowerment for children and youth in the digital world.⁷⁷

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has forced a global digital transformation, fostering civic engagement of youth through the digital technologies became particularly relevant.⁷⁸ Though these technologies have facilitated remote access to traditionally in-person services, they have also exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic inequalities in the digital divide, including those created by underdeveloped infrastructure,

⁶⁶ UN ECLAC, *Message by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon on International Youth Day*, 2010.

⁶⁷ UN Secretary-General, *International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace - Report to the General Assembly: Annex (A/36/215)*, 1981, p.15.

⁶⁸ UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2020.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ UNICEF, ITU, *How Many Children and Youth Have Internet Access at Home report*, 2020.

⁷⁶ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, *Information and communication technologies (ICT)*, 2009.

⁷⁷ UN DESA, *Youth and ICT*, 2013; UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020.

⁷⁸ UN DESA, *Digital technologies for social inclusion*, 2021.

geographical location, or cost of connectivity.⁷⁹ Existing barriers such as access to only low-functionality mobile devices, and social barriers include gender digital divide, a lack of digital skills, and a low level of awareness of the benefits of being connected, have not been effectively combatted during the digital shift during the pandemic.⁸⁰ As a key organization promoting adherence to the rights of the children and youth, UNICEF serves to ensure the civic engagement of youth and their equitable access to ICTs.⁸¹

International and Regional Framework

Civic participation is a fundamental principle of the global human rights framework.⁸² The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948), the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) (1966), and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (1966) laid the foundation for upholding human rights globally.⁸³ UDHR was the first document to recognize civil and political rights, and the right to freedom of information.⁸⁴ Specifically, its Article 18 enshrines that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”⁸⁵ Article 27 of UDHR also recognizes the everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the community.⁸⁶ According to Article 3 of ICCPR, states should guarantee the right of enjoyment of all civil and political rights, while Article 10 of ICESCR recognizes the need for the protection of the young people ensuring their full participation in their communities.⁸⁷

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989), of which UNICEF is mandated to facilitate implementation, became a landmark framework by enshrining children’s rights globally.⁸⁸ CRC established the right of children and adolescents to have appropriate social and political participation, including the rights to freedom of expression, association, thought, conscience and religion, as well as the right to privacy and to information.⁸⁹ In this context, opportunities of youth to exercise these rights are the important pre-conditions for the right to express views and influence matters of concern.⁹⁰ In 1995, the UN General Assembly issued the resolution 50/81 on the *World Programme of Action for Youth* (WPAY), which represents the practical guidelines for Member States on protecting the rights of young people and enhancing their social inclusion.⁹¹ WPAY determined fifteen youth priority areas for Member States, including empowerment and participation.⁹² Priorities set in the WPAY impacted national plans, priorities, and laws and contributed to the development of the mechanisms for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating national initiatives.⁹³

Development of youth and digital inclusion form crucial components of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 8 (“decent work for all and economic growth”) including targets on ensuring youth have access to relevant professional skills, including technical and vocational skills.⁹⁴ Additionally,

⁷⁹ UN DESA, *Digital technologies for social inclusion*, 2021; UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020.

⁸⁰ UN DESA, *Digital technologies for social inclusion*, 2021.

⁸¹ UNICEF, *UNICEF mission statement*, 2021.

⁸² UN General Assembly, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/RES/50/81)*, 1996, pp. 4-6; OHCHR, *Enhancing participation and protecting civic space*, 2021.

⁸³ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

⁸⁴ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

⁸⁸ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ UNICEF, *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*, 2018.

⁹¹ UN General Assembly, *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/RES/50/81)*, 1996.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2018.

SDG 9 (“industry, innovation, and infrastructure”) establishes target to “significantly increase access to ICTs and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet.”⁹⁵ SDG 16 (“peace, justice and strong institutions”) also sets a target to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.”⁹⁶

Role of the International System

UNICEF plays a key role in establishing international standards, promoting policies and best practices among Member States, collecting data, and carrying out research on the topic of digital civic engagement by youth.⁹⁷ More specifically, UNICEF promotes policies that encourage strengthening the participation of youth in digital platforms for social and political participation, and in regards to vocational training.⁹⁸ Through its Office of Research – Innocenti based in Italy, UNICEF coordinates research projects on the aspects of the use of digital technologies by children, and assists Member States in shaping their national policies to protect the rights of the child.⁹⁹ Activities of UNICEF contribute to the involvement of youth in decision-making and ensuring the accountability of relevant mechanisms.¹⁰⁰ UNICEF also collaborates with young online influencers to raise the awareness among youth on understanding and exercising their full range of rights, and supports programs aimed at improving the decision-making skills and confidence of the young people.¹⁰¹

In 2018, UNICEF adopted *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation* which underlines the need for improved services and policies, access to policymakers and relevant institutions, enhanced protection for adolescents, and capacity development to assist adolescents in contributing to their communities.¹⁰² Among other important tools under the framework, UNICEF issued “*Engaged and Heard!*” *Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement (2020)*.¹⁰³ These guidelines are primarily designed for personnel at UNICEF, governments, civil society organizations human rights institutions, and adolescents to express their viewpoints through civil engagement.¹⁰⁴ The Guidelines encompass recommendations on strategies, organizational processes, and monitoring of participation and civic engagement of the young people.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, among the outcome documents of UNICEF annual session of 2021, the *Joint annex on implementation of the common chapter of the Strategic Plans, 2018–2021 of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women* was adopted.¹⁰⁶ It set a target to increase the number of countries which have “institutional mechanisms for the participation of young people in policy dialogue and programming, including in peacebuilding processes” from 83 in 2020 to 105 in 2021.¹⁰⁷

Since 2003, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) has been publishing UNICEF’s flagship *World Youth Report* in order to trace the progress of the international community on the youth agenda and WPAY.¹⁰⁸ Issued biannually, the latest report of 2020 stressed that the young people are still excluded from policy and decision-making process affecting their lives.¹⁰⁹ It also concludes

⁹⁵ UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2018.

⁹⁶ UN DESA, *Information for integrated Decision-Making & Participation*, 2021.

⁹⁷ UNICEF, *Adolescent participation and civic engagement*, 2021.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ UNICEF, *Global Kids Online*, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ UNICEF, *Adolescent participation and civic engagement*, 2021.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² UNICEF, *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*, 2018.

¹⁰³ UNICEF, “*Engaged and Heard!*” *Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ UNICEF, *Joint annex on the common chapter of the strategic plans, 2018-2021 of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women*, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

that the digital divide disproportionately affects young people in developing countries, highlighting that 9 out of 10 youth who lack access to digital services live in Africa or in Asia and the Pacific.¹¹⁰

UNICEF also implements programs that advance access of youth to ICTs and achieving youth-related SDGs.¹¹¹ For instance, UNICEF partners with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and civil society in order to facilitate digital inclusion and pioneer projects that use ICT for development.¹¹² It also supports youth-led civic engagement throughout humanitarian and development programs across the world.¹¹³ In 2020 Member States' governments, UNICEF, the global multi-sector partnership Generation Unlimited, and other stakeholders have scaled-up the digital platforms for empowerment, learning, acquiring necessary skills, and entrepreneurship, covering more than 100 million young people in more than 40 countries.¹¹⁴ Though in-person engagement was limited due to COVID-19 outbreak, online platforms such as these were a needed and valued resource to youth, particularly in rural and remote areas.¹¹⁵

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was launched in 2003 to promote benefits from using ICT, and represents an important organization in fostering digital citizenship of youth.¹¹⁶ WSIS consisted of two phases, Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005, both of which involved Member States, UN bodies, intergovernmental organizations, and NGOs into its consultations.¹¹⁷ The *Geneva Declaration of Principles* (2003), resulting from the meeting in Geneva, highlighted the impact of youth on ICTs and vice versa.¹¹⁸ The accompanying 2003 *Geneva Plan of Action* indicated the importance of equipping young people with knowledge and skills to use ICTs and participate fully in our information-based society.¹¹⁹ The documents resulting from the 2005 Tunis meeting also emphasized the need to engage youth in innovative ICT-based development programs, and take into account the interest of young people in the process of ICT advancement.¹²⁰

Promotion of youth participation has received considerable regional attention from several intergovernmental organizations, such as European Union (EU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹²¹ EU adopted its *Youth Strategy* in 2018 as a framework for youth policy cooperation from 2019-2027.¹²² It aims to facilitate social and civic engagement of youth and to ensure that young people have the necessary resources for civic participation.¹²³ The Strategy recognizes that EU policies should take into consideration changes brought about by digital communication and the resulting impact on civic participation.¹²⁴ In turn, ASEAN adopted *Work Plan on Youth 2016-2020* in 2017, setting five sub-goals to ensure the well-rounded development of youth.¹²⁵ Sub-goal 5 of the Work Plan focuses on "increasing youth competences and resilience with advanced technological and managerial skills."¹²⁶ With this Work Plan, ASEAN specifically aims to involve youth in decision-making in the fields of disaster risk reduction, climate change, and health.¹²⁷ ASEAN also recognized the importance of socialization through workshops and forums for youth, and the provision of training and consultancy for youth to increase digital literacy.¹²⁸

¹¹⁰ UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2020.

¹¹¹ ECOSOC, *Annual report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF*, 2021.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ UN General Assembly, *World Summit on the Information Society (A/RES/56/183)*, 2001.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ ITU, *Geneva Declaration of Principles (WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4)*, 2003.

¹¹⁹ ITU, *Geneva Plan of Action (WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/5)*, 2003.

¹²⁰ ITU, *World Summit on the Information Society: Tunis Agenda for the Information Society*, 2005, p. 14.

¹²¹ EU, *Youth Strategy*, 2018.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ ASEAN, *Work Plan on Youth 2016-2020*, 2017.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Civil society represents a critical forum for implementing human rights, including the right of the young people to participate in political, economic, and other forms of dialogue.¹²⁹ Globally, civil society organizations (CSOs) have launched relevant projects and campaigns to support the online participation of children and youth, and promote youth-inclusive and youth-led civic spaces.¹³⁰ For instance, the Southeastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance (SEEDIG) aims foster the public dialogue and collaboration on internet and digital policy issues in the region.¹³¹ Among its other initiatives, it holds Youth School to improve the digital literacy of youth by teaching students on the basic principles of the freedom of expression online, right to privacy of information, and most importantly, the ways to meaningfully participate in the internet governance processes.¹³² Youth-led civil society organizations are also playing an important role in the dialogue, with many linking youth-led Egyptian activist organizations such as Resala and Kifaya to events such as the Arab Spring in January 2011.¹³³ Organizations such as these, which are youth-created and -led, generate a platform for youth to have their voice heard, even in the face of sometimes oppressive or autocratic domestic media laws.¹³⁴

Access to Technology and Infrastructure

Access to technology and increased digital participation also fosters offline civic engagement of youth.¹³⁵ Increasing access to the internet can help advance opportunities for youth to participate in civic activities and campaigns at all levels.¹³⁶ Non-discriminatory, equitable, and affordable access of youth to ICT enables their academic, social, and economic development as well as digital and social inclusion.¹³⁷ ICTs also play an important role in building communication between the young people from every corner of the world. In turn, international cooperation fosters the transfer of technology among citizens.¹³⁸ UNICEF revealed a wide range of factors critical for the young people to pursue digital civic engagement.¹³⁹ They include access to the broadband network, digital technology, and the ability to gain benefits from using the internet.¹⁴⁰

The importance of access to ICTs in ensuring civil rights of youth is underscored by the annual *Youth Development Index* (YDI) published by the Commonwealth Secretariat.¹⁴¹ The YDI measures progress in youth development across 183 countries and includes 18 indicators relating to education, well-being, employment, and civic and political participation.¹⁴² Among the Index's indicators is the percentage of youth having five or more years of experience using the internet.¹⁴³ The 2020 Index highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic could reverse the positive trend of the youth digital development, and recommends that governments invest in lifelong digital training of young people and youth participation in decision-making.¹⁴⁴ It also suggests ways to improve data collection on education and diversify ways of measuring digital skills and online engagement of youth.¹⁴⁵ The Index further calls on governments to build on policy-making on the rights-based framework of participation and youth mainstreaming within whole-of-government planning processes.¹⁴⁶ The report outlines preconditions for effective mainstreaming, such as

¹²⁹ SEEDIG, *About SEEDIG*.

¹³⁰ UNICEF, *Digital Civil Engagement by Young People*, 2020.

¹³¹ SEEDIG, *SEEDIG Youth School*.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Abdou & Skalli, *Egyptian Youth-led Civil Society Organizations: Alternative Spaces for Civic Engagement?*, *What Politics?*, 2017.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ UNICEF, *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*, 2018.

¹³⁶ UN DESA, *World Youth Report on Youth Civic Engagement*, 2016.

¹³⁷ UN DESA, *Youth and ICT*, 2013.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ The Commonwealth Secretariat, *Youth Development Index 2020*, 2021.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

informed mainstreaming and its impact on major government strategies; inclusion of a diverse set of genders and ethnicities; and support in participation of youth in decision-making structures by older people.¹⁴⁷

Opportunities and Barriers to Digital Civic Engagement

Effective digital civic engagement requires digital skills and literacy to safely engage both online and offline.¹⁴⁸ Youth continue to disproportionate amounts of digital-specific risks, such as online harassment and trolling, which can be defined as online activities which involve publishing “off-topic material, inflammatory or confusing messages,” by bots, adults, or fellow youth.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, some digital tools can be used against youth to distort the message they planned to convey, or to silence or frighten them.¹⁵⁰ There is also the risk of individuals or the private sector misusing children’s data and the possible illegal monitoring of their online activities, which also lead to the violation of a child’s right to freedom of expression.¹⁵¹

Recognizing that one in three internet users globally is a child, UNICEF’s Office of Research - Innocenti coordinates research on children’s use of digital technologies and develops methodologies that can be implemented at the national levels.¹⁵² In partnership with the London School of Economics and Political Science and the EU Kids Online network, UNICEF - Innocenti coordinates the Global Kids Online program.¹⁵³ Established in 2015, the program provides a set of methodologies that enable researchers around the world to gather robust data on children’s digital experiences.¹⁵⁴ UNICEF - Innocenti then uses these methodologies to engage with various stakeholders, contributing to safer online gaming, lower excessive internet use, and better safer digital technology usage for youth.¹⁵⁵ In 2021, UNICEF issued the report *Investigating Risks and Opportunities for Children in a Digital World* using the Global Kids Online research framework.¹⁵⁶ According to the report’s findings, children prefer to learn about and participate in civic participation via the internet.¹⁵⁷ Though children are more likely to obtain proactive civic positions because of offline activities rather than online, digital civic engagement contributes to shaping of independent opinions of youth on crucial issues.¹⁵⁸

Due to social and cultural norms that limit opportunities for participation, young people are often excluded from decision-making processes.¹⁵⁹ In areas where the youth need support in expressing their views and taking part in decision-making, governments may invest in building their confidence, and advancing skills and capacities to increase their participation.¹⁶⁰ Investing in measures to change these norms with a view to promote societal and other benefits of greater civic engagement will contribute to raising the participation of the young people.¹⁶¹ Among other UN bodies, UN DESA collaborates with Member States to promote positive social change by developing toolkits containing recommendations on improving civic engagement in public policies.¹⁶²

¹⁴⁷ The Commonwealth Secretariat, *Youth Development Index 2020*, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020.

¹⁴⁹ UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020; CSES, *Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA): The Prevalence and Impact of Online Trolling*, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² UNICEF, *Global Kids Online*, 2021.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Stoilova, et al., *Investigating Risks and Opportunities for Children in a Digital World: A rapid review of the evidence on children’s internet use and outcomes*, 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ UNICEF, *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*, 2018.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² UN DESA, *Civic Engagement in Public Policies*, 2007.

Among the global initiatives aimed at raising the profile of youth voices, including in digital spaces, is the Youth Forum process coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹⁶³ The Youth Forum was established in 1999 to provide young people with the opportunity to deliver their ideas to Member States.¹⁶⁴ As a result of the Forum, a set of recommendations is presented at the UNESCO General Conference annually.¹⁶⁵ Topics of the Forum encompass the most relevant issues to the youth community, including access to technology, civic and political engagement, and allow young people to have their voice heard.¹⁶⁶

A robust legislative framework is a strong pathway to ensure that the rights of the young people are heard and respected online.¹⁶⁷ UNICEF also promotes allocating necessary funds to support the formalized protection of youth participation, to implement laws, policies and procedures.¹⁶⁸ It is important for the young people to be aware of their rights and how these rights can be both violated and utilized online.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, human rights education for both adolescents and adults are among the factors strengthening youth civic engagement.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

Limited digital civic participation of youth remains one of the most crucial global challenges.¹⁷¹ The importance of ensuring digital participation of youth is recognized by the post-2015 development agenda, including SDG 8 (“decent work and economic growth”), SDG 9 (“industry, innovation and infrastructure”), and 16 (“peace, justice and strong institutions”).¹⁷² Lack of participation in decision-making processes deprives youth of adequate opportunities for full expression of their rights.¹⁷³ These inequalities have been further exacerbated by the digital divide and global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷⁴ Among the factors fostering the advancement of digital citizenship the UN notes the need to ensure equal and fair access of young people to ICTs, and relevant infrastructure in order to promote digital literacy and digital skills, as well as provide necessary civic education and engagement opportunities.¹⁷⁵ A more effective use of technology both at the governmental and individual level would enable youth to fulfill their civic duty and engage in the full expression of their human, political, and civic rights.¹⁷⁶

Further Research

When researching the topic, delegates will need to take into consideration several questions, such as: How can governments and engage the youth in the decision-making process on digital issues? What measures by the international community can promote the civic rights of the young people in digital spaces? What are some best practices in ensuring access of vulnerable groups to ICTs? What issues with regards to the participation of youth have become pressing due to the COVID-19 pandemic? What new approaches to mainstreaming youth participation have appeared or need to be introduced? How can UNICEF work to support the incorporation of youth and their digital civic participation into the initiatives at the national level? How can the international community better ensure the safety of the young people on the Internet?

¹⁶³ UNESCO, *The Youth Forum*, 2015.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ UNESCO, *The Youth Forum*, 2015.

¹⁶⁷ UNICEF, *Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation*, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2020.

¹⁷² UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2018.

¹⁷³ UN DESA, *World Youth Report*, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Annan, K., *On the Digital Divide*, 2002.

¹⁷⁵ UNICEF, *Digital civic engagement by young people*, 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

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This framework identifies key aspects of youth civic participation, and explains how this participation can be quantified and measured. The document builds the important evidence on the right to participation by young people. It can help delegates in understanding major conditions for establishing the enabling environments for youth civic engagement, essential features of meaningful participation, different modes of participation, and the social ecology of civic participation.

United Nations Children’s Fund. (2020). *Digital civic engagement by young people*. Retrieved 30 June 2021 from: <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/706/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-digital-civic-engagement-2020.pdf>

This resource provides an overview of the latest research on digital civic engagement by young people, with a focus on the enablers, constraints, and nature of youth civic engagement in the digital space. The document also contains definitions of relevant terms and explains the main examples of youth digital civic engagement. It also gives recommendations to policymakers on how digital civic engagement by youth can drive youth participation in more traditional forms of civic engagement.

United Nations Children’s Fund. (2021). *Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement*. Retrieved 30 June 2021 from: <https://www.unicef.org/documents/engaged-and-heard-guidelines-adolescent-participation-and-civic-engagement>

These guidelines provide relevant information on the main features of participation and civic engagement of youth. The publication includes guidance on the conceptual understandings, main strategies and key interventions, organizational commitment and processes, and monitoring and evaluation of youth civic participation. The document will also help delegates explore sector-specific guidelines for participation in health, education, child protection, disaster risk reduction, and others.

United Nations, Economic and Social Council. (2021). *Annual report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF*. Retrieved 30 June 2021 from: https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/media/4721/file/2021-10-ED_annual_report-EN-ODS.pdf

This document is the annual report of the UNICEF Executive Director to the UNICEF Executive Board on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. It contains essential information on the outcomes of UNICEF’s activities and will support delegates in understanding the organization’s current work, functions, and mandate, as well as its specific thematic focuses for 2021. The document also highlights the progress made in promoting youth civic engagement worldwide.

United Nations, General Assembly, Fiftieth session. (1996). *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/RES/50/81)*. Retrieved 15 August 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/50/81>

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action to improve the lives and engagement of youth in decision-making process. This document offers recommendations for action aimed at promoting improved well-being and representation among young people. WPAY primarily focuses on measures to strengthen national capacities, to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society, which will prove useful as delegates begin their research on solutions to this issue.

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United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). *Digital Civil Engagement by Young People*. Retrieved 8 November 2021 from: <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/reports/digital-civic-engagement-young-people>

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2. Providing Violence Response and Access to Justice for Children and Youth

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”¹⁷⁷

Introduction

Historically, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has discussed the issue of providing violence response and the issue of access to justice for children and youth as two separate topics.¹⁷⁸ Recently, UNICEF has begun to increasingly highlight the important overlap between the two topics, as reflected in UNICEF’s recognition of access to justice as a means to address and respond to violence against children and youth.¹⁷⁹ UNICEF upholds the United Nations (UN) definition of youths as “[t]hose persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States,” with children are defined as those under the age of 14.¹⁸⁰

Violence against children can occur in physical and psychological forms, for example as sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse, and can occur in many different locations, such as at home, school, on the internet, or within communities.¹⁸¹ Perpetrators can range from family members to teachers, strangers, or friends.¹⁸² There is a multitude of implications that violence against children and youth can have, from development impairments, lasting trauma, self-harm, physical and mental injuries in varying seriousness, to even death.¹⁸³

In the 2008 document *UN Common Approach to Justice for Children* (Common Approach), “access to justice for children” was described as “the ability to obtain a just and timely remedy for violations of rights as put forth in national and international norms and standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”¹⁸⁴ Specific examples of access to just and timely remedy include access to judicial or alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, the right to a fair trial, the right to relevant information in child-friendly language, the right to be heard, and to have these processes be experienced free of any discrimination or prejudice.¹⁸⁵ The Common Approach is the framework document on access to justice for children, as it establishes the definition of the issue, which was then upheld in the 2013 report on access to justice for children by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.¹⁸⁶

As the COVID-19 pandemic proves to be a worldwide challenge, UNICEF recognizes the negative impact of the pandemic, lockdowns, and mitigation measures against COVID-19 have had on children, as well as the resulting increase in cases of domestic violence.¹⁸⁷ UNICEF works to respond to the pandemic and the effects thereof by taking action on the rising number of cases of violence against children and youth in domestic situations and learning environments.¹⁸⁸ Here, the overlap between providing violence response

¹⁷⁷ Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund, *Nelson Mandela Quotes About Children*, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ UNICEF, *Violence Against Children*, 2020; UNICEF, *Justice for Children*, 2020.

¹⁷⁹ UNICEF, *Safe and Child-Sensitive Counselling, Complaint and Reporting Mechanisms to Address Violence Against Children*, 2016.

¹⁸⁰ UN Secretary-General, *International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace - Report to the General Assembly: Annex (A/36/215)*, 1981, p. 15.

¹⁸¹ UNICEF Data, *Violence Against Children*, 2015.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ UNICEF, *Violence Against Children*, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ *UN Common Approach to Justice for Children*, 2008.

¹⁸⁵ UN HRC, *Access to Justice for Children (A/HRC/25/35)*, 2013.

¹⁸⁶ *UN Common Approach to Justice for Children*, 2008; UN HRC, *Access to Justice for Children (A/HRC/25/35)*, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Safe to Learn During COVID-19: Recommendations to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children in All Learning Environments*, 2020.

¹⁸⁸ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Safe to Learn During COVID-19: Recommendations to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children in All Learning Environments*, 2020.

and access to justice can be seen clearly, as reflected in UNICEF’s opinion that access to justice, specifically access to child-friendly legal aid, safe and child-sensitive counseling, and complaint and reporting mechanisms, even in the case of a global crisis such as a pandemic, is key to responding to the rising number of violence against children and youth.¹⁸⁹

International and Regional Framework

Access to justice for children and youth was first established in the form of the right to be heard and the right to a fair process in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR).¹⁹⁰ Following the UDHR, another framework document addressing justice for children and youth was established: the 1966 *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR).¹⁹¹ The ICCPR provides for the right to an effective remedy, which is seen as a means to defend oneself when human rights and fundamental freedoms are restricted and/or violated.¹⁹² The Human Rights Commission, predecessor to the current UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), stated at the time that “in addition to effective protection of Covenant rights, States Parties must ensure that individuals also have accessible and effective remedies to vindicate those rights. Such remedies should be appropriately adapted to take account of the special vulnerability of especially children.”¹⁹³

UNICEF was first established through the 1946 General Assembly resolution 1/57(I) on *The Establishment of an International Children’s Emergency Fund*.¹⁹⁴ This mandate was later expanded to include efforts “for the protection of children’s rights,” including measures to meet a child’s basic needs, such as education and health.¹⁹⁵ Survival, protection, and development of children are all a part of UNICEF’s mission, and protection against violence and access to justice are imperative to protecting children and ensuring opportunity to develop their full potential.¹⁹⁶ The chances of a successful future diminish when a child suffers from violence, has no access to justice to help overcome the situation, or is incarcerated without proper access to judicial proceedings or alternative resolution mechanisms.¹⁹⁷

The work of UNICEF is further guided by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989) which enshrines that each Member State should, to the maximum extent possible, protect the survival and development of a child.¹⁹⁸ This includes taking all measures possible to protect a child from violence, including ensuring access to fair legal recourse, the right to be heard in judicial proceedings, and the right to access justice.¹⁹⁹ Member States are obliged to implement the CRC in their legal framework, including the adoption of legislature that ensures fair and effective access to justice.²⁰⁰ The right to access to justice is further established in the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of*

¹⁸⁹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2019.

¹⁹⁰ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

¹⁹¹ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966, art. 2-2(3).

¹⁹² UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966, art. 2-2(3); UN HRC, *General Comments no. 31 [80] on the Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13)*, 2004.

¹⁹³ UN HRC, *Access to Justice for Children (A/HRC/25/35)*, 2013; UN HRC, *General Comments no. 31 [80] on the Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on States Parties to the Covenant (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13)*, 2004.

¹⁹⁴ UN General Assembly, *Establishment of an International Children’s Emergency Fund (A/RES/57 (I))*, 1946, p. 3; UNICEF, *About UNICEF*, 2021.

¹⁹⁵ UNICEF, *Mission Statement*, 2021; UNICEF, *About UNICEF*, 2021.

¹⁹⁶ UNICEF, *Violence Against Children*, 2020; UNICEF, *Justice for Children*, 2020.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ UN General Assembly, *Establishment of an International Children’s Emergency Fund (A/RES/57 (I))*, 1946, p. 3; UNICEF, *About UNICEF*, 2021; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

¹⁹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2001), which institutes the expectation towards Member States to follow the principles of child-sensitive justice.²⁰¹

The UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) (2015) reiterates the importance of providing effective responses to violence and access to justice for children and youth, for instance in SDG 16 ("peace, justice and strong institutions").²⁰² More specifically, target 16.2 calls for an end to all violence against children, and target 16.10 aims to ensure public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms, demonstrating the important intersection of violence response and access to justice in violence response and prevention.²⁰³ UNICEF works to reach these SDG targets by building stronger child protection systems, including supporting health and social work, justice programs, and challenging existing norms relating to violence and abuse.²⁰⁴

Finally, the 2005 UN Economic and Social Council's *Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime (2005/20)* recognizes the coherence between access to justice and violence response for children and youth.²⁰⁵ This pivotal resolution suggests that Member States either implement or improve existing, legislation and procedures regarding children that have been a victim of or witness to a crime, recognizing their vulnerable position in society.²⁰⁶

Role of the International System

One of the largest and most influential data compilations on violence against children is the *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence Against Children* report, published in 2014 by UNICEF.²⁰⁷ The report concluded that interpersonal violence, no matter the form, affects children immensely, proving a danger to reaching their full potential, damaging their health and well-being, and even ending their lives.²⁰⁸ This report was updated in 2017 with the *A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents* UNICEF report, which showed that children can be subject to violence during their entire childhood and adolescence, mostly at the hands of people that they interact with often.²⁰⁹ The report also includes best practices for national actions and strategies, such as national plans, implementing and enforcing legal and policy frameworks, and establishing effective pathways between social welfare and child protective services, the police, and other sectors.²¹⁰

In 2014, UNICEF created the *Theory of Change on Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children and Adolescents* recommendations, aimed at presenting an overarching, multisectoral approach in the response to violence against children.²¹¹ It specifically takes into account the forms of violence against children measured by the SDG indicators, including violent disciplining and sexual violence, and was also designed to cover all forms of physical, sexual, and emotional/psychological violence.²¹²

UNICEF has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of cases of violence against children in domestic situations and learning environments by creating guidelines on these matters.²¹³ These are

²⁰¹ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989; UN General Assembly, *Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (A/RES/54/263*)*, 2001.

²⁰² UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

²⁰³ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

²⁰⁴ UNICEF, *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2021.

²⁰⁵ UN ECOSOC, *Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime (2005/20)*, 2005.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight, A Statistical Analysis of Violence Against Children*, 2014.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ UNICEF, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents*, 2017.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ UNICEF, *Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children and Adolescents, Theory of Change*, 2014.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Safe to Learn During COVID-19: Recommendations to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children in All Learning Environments*,

developed together with other UN bodies and multiple non-governmental organizations (NGOs), under the collective name the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.²¹⁴ This group is a global, interagency coalition, which sets standards and provides technical support related to the protection of children and youth against violence.²¹⁵ These guidelines are informed by reports from the field, and outline prevention and response strategies to, amongst other goals, ensure the continuity of child and family court services and strengthen child support helplines.²¹⁶

UNICEF works closely with NGOs on matters regarding violence response and access to justice for children and youth, including being a member of the Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children.²¹⁷ It is one of the biggest public-private partnerships, created by the UN Secretary-General to work towards achieving SDG target 16.2 (“end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children”) and is the only entity focused solely on that specific SDG.²¹⁸ Since its inception in 2016, the partnership has created campaigns such as #ENDviolence, #SafetoLearn, Safe Online, and Safe at Home to work together for the prevention of, and response to, violence against children.²¹⁹ Connected to the #ENDViolence campaign is the UNICEF Action to End Violence Against Children in Schools review of program interventions.²²⁰ The partnership currently has over 600 members/partners, including NGOs such as Terre des Hommes, Red Cross International, and also regional partners such as Child Rights Coalition Uganda, the New York Center for Children, ChildFund Brazil and Australia, Children Advocacy Network Pakistan, and the Netherlands’ International Child Development Initiatives.²²¹

Other UN bodies also address these issues, for instance, the General Assembly in their 2002 resolution on *The rights of the child (56/138)*.²²² In this resolution, the General Assembly, as was recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, requested the Secretary-General conduct an in-depth study on violence against children, which resulted in the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (SRSG).²²³ The SRSG organizes expert consultations on priority topics such as child-sensitive counselling, complaint and reporting mechanisms, and legal protection for children, and creates thematic reports to enhance awareness and consolidate knowledge.²²⁴ The SRSG reports to the General Assembly and the HRC annually, with the latest report being provided during the HRC’s forty-sixth session in 2021.²²⁵ In this report, an overview of initiatives and developments regarding violence against children is provided, including the ASEAN Regional Conference on Child Online Protection, the Council of Europe’s *2022-2027 strategy for the rights of the child*, the joint road map of action of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and an initiative of the League of Arab States to organize a forum on empowering girls.²²⁶ The SRSG also expressed her concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against children, noting that the pandemic and its resulting mitigation measures increased the risk of children

2020; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020.

²¹⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020.

²¹⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *What we do*, 2021.

²¹⁶ Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Safe to Learn During COVID-19: Recommendations to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children in All Learning Environments*, 2020; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020.

²¹⁷ Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Who we are*, 2021.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ UNICEF, *Action to End Violence Against Children in Schools*, 2021.

²²¹ Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Partners*, 2021.

²²² UN General Assembly, *The Rights of the Child (A/RES/56/138)*, 2002.

²²³ UN General Assembly, *The Rights of the Child (A/RES/56/138)*, 2002; UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, *Mandate*.

²²⁴ UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, *Our Work*, 2021.

²²⁵ UN HRC, *Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (A/HRC/46/40)*, 2020.

²²⁶ Ibid.

being exposed to violence in their homes and also in the digital realm, due to increased digitalization and unsupervised internet use.²²⁷

Within the European Union (EU), a strategy has been created by the European Commission to help children fulfil their rights and center their needs within EU law-making.²²⁸ In the 2021 *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*, the EU put forward seven targets imperative to helping children and youth fulfil their full potential, two of which are to combat violence against children and ensuring child protection, as well as to create systems of child-friendly justice.²²⁹ In the strategy, it is estimated that around 50% of all children worldwide suffer, or have suffered, under some form of violence each year, and that national justice systems are currently lacking in addressing children's rights and needs.²³⁰ Therefore, the European Commission invites Member States to raise awareness on violence against children, adequately supporting particularly vulnerable children, support judicial training providers, develop robust alternatives to judicial action, and increase cooperation when cross-border elements are implicated.²³¹

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also created the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children in 2016, in which they declare the need to take action on providing appropriate violence response and access to justice for children and youth.²³² The plan emphasizes a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach with the objectives including the institutionalization of policies and creation of services for effective prevention and protection, supported by national and regional legislation as well as institutional mechanisms.²³³

Access to Justice as a Violence Response Mechanism

Access to justice for children and youth is commonly understood by UNICEF as an important violence response mechanism, as children may not have the knowledge necessary to seek help and justice.²³⁴ Vulnerable children, such as disabled, incarcerated, and migrant children, as well as children in conflict situations, are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to justice, for example when it comes to receiving legal aid.²³⁵ This disproportionate effect may stem from having insufficient knowledge about their rights, limited or restricted means to contact (legal) aid, and/or a lack of financial resources to access justice.²³⁶ An example of an action by UNICEF against this disproportionate effect is the Strengthening the Justice and Social Welfare Systems to Advance Child Protection in Serbia project, which was created in 2014.²³⁷ This project illustrates the importance of access to justice in providing a response to violence, and reiterates that the current dearth of effective access to justice for children and youth is often due to a lack of knowledge, financial means, and child-sensitive processes.²³⁸ Through this program, UNICEF works together with the Serbian Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, and the Centre for the Rights of the Child, to provide professional capacity-building in the form of training for civil society and municipal legal services, as well as free legal aid for children.²³⁹

One of the initiatives of the Global Alliance and Fund to End Violence Against Children is Safe to Learn.²⁴⁰ In 2020, Safe to Learn created the *Global Programmatic Framework & Benchmarking Tool*:

²²⁷ UN HRC, *Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (A/HRC/46/40)*, 2020, pp. 6-7.

²²⁸ European Commission, *The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee*, 2021.

²²⁹ European Commission, *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*, 2021.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-15.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 16.

²³² ASEAN, *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children*, 2016.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ UNICEF, *Justice for Children*, 2020.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ UNICEF Serbia, *Free Legal Aid*, 2017.

²³⁸ UNICEF, *Justice for Children*, 2020; UNICEF Serbia, *Free Legal Aid*, 2017; UNODC, *United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems*, 2013.

²³⁹ UNICEF Serbia, *Free Legal Aid*, 2017.

²⁴⁰ Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Safe to Learn*, 2021.

From Call to Action to Programme Responses, which is a tool that establishes a five-point call to action: implementation of policy and legislation, strengthening prevention and response at the school level, shifting social norms and behavior change, effective investment of resources, and generating and using evidence.²⁴¹ Currently, Safe to Learn has 14 partners, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNICEF, and the SRGS.²⁴² These partners are responsible for translating the call to action into practical actions, building on the #ENDViolence campaign, working collectively to support countries in their implementation of the call to action.²⁴³

Another threat to access to justice, and therefore effective violence response mechanisms, is that the current response of criminal justice systems may not be child sensitive.²⁴⁴ Some justice systems do not support victims, but may instead criminalize them, which can lead to victims ending up in detention and facing prejudice from their local communities.²⁴⁵ Examples of this are children who are sexually exploited or trafficked, who may end up arrested and detained if they report their situation to authorities.²⁴⁶ In 2013, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) created the *United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems*.²⁴⁷ These principles are based on the 2012 General Assembly resolution 67/187 on the *United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems*, which states that legislative system must also include specific provisions for children, taking into account their vulnerability and their need for additional protection.²⁴⁸ These provisions span a wide range of aims, such as access to legal aid under the same, or more lenient, conditions than adults, prioritizing the best interest of the child in decisions regarding legal aid that affect children, using child-appropriate language, and the prevention of bias and stigmatization as a result of involvement in the criminal justice system.²⁴⁹

In their 2013 report on *Safe and Child-Sensitive Counselling, Complaint and Reporting Mechanisms to Address Violence Against Children*, UNICEF aims to raise awareness about the specific needs of children seeking justice, such as the use of child-friendly language in situations where children need to seek help in response to violence.²⁵⁰ In 2018, UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (UNICEF ECARO) developed the *Guidelines on Child-Friendly Legal Aid*, which recommends seeking competence from legal aid providers, addressing child-sensitive communication, exploring knowledge-building through education for children, and cooperating with family members and other supportive adults to ensure equal access to justice for children and adolescents.²⁵¹ Within this specific document, attention is drawn towards the lack of child-friendly legal aid, which is a current obstacle facing children trying to access justice or violence response mechanisms.²⁵²

Lasting Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence Against Children and Youth

Socioeconomic pressure, such as the prolonged amount of time spent at home during the COVID-19 pandemic due to closures of schools and lockdowns, can lead to increased cases of violence against

²⁴¹ Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Global Programmatic Framework & Benchmarking Tool: From Call to Action to Programme Responses*, 2020.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ UNICEF, *Justice for Children*, 2020.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ UNODC, *United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems*, 2013.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems (A/RES/67/187)*, 2012; UNODC, *United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems*, 2013.

²⁵⁰ UNICEF, *Safe and Child-Sensitive Counselling, Complaint and Reporting Mechanisms to Address Violence Against Children*, 2016.

²⁵¹ UNICEF ECARO, *Guidelines on Child-Friendly Legal Aid*, 2018.

²⁵² Ibid.

children.²⁵³ Risk factors for increased violence against children and youth can include increased poverty, financial distress, restricted food access due to a loss of employment, increased intake of substances or alcohol by the caregiver, lesser access to physical education, and digital risks due to unsupervised access to the internet for children and youth.²⁵⁴ There may also be less access to confidants and welfare services due to mitigation measures, which negatively impacts violence response, victim support, and access to justice for children and youth.²⁵⁵

With more people working from home or simply having to remain at home due to general lockdowns, increasing the time people spend in close proximity of each other, the number of cases of violence against children and youth has risen.²⁵⁶ All of these patterns also mean that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the violence response for children and youth.²⁵⁷ UNICEF has established that over 1.8 billion children live in countries where violence response services have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the number of cases of violence against children and youth, but it has been too short a period to gather solidified statistics.²⁵⁹

Not only has the UN system voiced its concern about the rise of cases of violence against children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, but global media coverage also shows a rise in numbers of violence against children and youth.²⁶⁰ The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) has intensified their attention to violence against women, including girls, seeing rising numbers of violence against these groups during the pandemic.²⁶¹ They conclude that specifically domestic violence has intensified, due to factors such as security, health and money worries, movement restrictions, and isolation with abusers.²⁶² They stress the importance of helplines, education, and awareness, and raise concern about the diversion of resources and efforts from counter-violence towards immediate COVID-19 relief.²⁶³

The increase of cases of violence is threatening children's rights to safety and protection, as established in the 1989 CRC and the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019).²⁶⁴ These standards were created by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, which is a global network of stakeholders such as UNICEF, NGOs, and academic institutions.²⁶⁵ The standards

²⁵³ Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children, *Safe to Learn During COVID-19: Recommendations to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children in All Learning Environments*, 2020.

²⁵⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020.

²⁵⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; UN Women, *The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During COVID-19*, 2021.

²⁵⁶ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; UNICEF, *Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in Prevention and Response Services*, 2020; UN Women, *The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During COVID-19*, 2021.

²⁵⁹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020.

²⁶⁰ UNICEF, *Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in Prevention and Response Services*, 2020.

²⁶¹ UN Women, *The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During COVID-19*, 2021.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ UN Women, *Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women*, 2021.

²⁶⁴ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2019; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*, 1989.

²⁶⁵ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *Minimum Standards for*

emphasize that governments should prioritize maintaining or adapting violence prevention and response to support child victims and also ensure access to resources for parents and teachers and access to justice in the form of social service officers, child-sensitive judicial procedures, and child-focused helplines.²⁶⁶

Conclusion

Access to justice cannot happen without the availability of support systems, and effective remedies are an imperative part of violence response for children and youth.²⁶⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic and the following mitigation measures have a lasting effect on violence against children.²⁶⁸ When access to justice lowers, the number of cases of violence against children and youth has risen, demonstrating the interrelated nature of these two issues.²⁶⁹

UNICEF has been working towards eliminating violence against children and youth and providing them with access to justice by creating reports, strategies, and working with governments and NGOs.²⁷⁰ The United Nations system has been guided by its mission of peace and prosperity throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, realizing future crises that have already started impacting global society and the road towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.²⁷¹

Further Research

In their further research, delegates can contemplate questions such as: How can the UN system better establish the interconnectedness between violence response and access to justice for children and youth? Is there a necessity for a universal definition of access to justice, and if so, how can this be established? How can UNICEF combat the increasing cases of violence and limited access to social welfare due to the COVID-19 pandemic? How can UNICEF further help children and youth to be safe in their homes and school, and consider the needs of vulnerable groups? How can UNICEF further strengthen their relationship with NGOs, governments, and civil society to help them on their route towards the 2030 Agenda, and provide necessary violence response and access to justice for children and youth?

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- ²⁶⁶ UNICEF, *Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in Prevention and Response Services*, 2020.
- ²⁶⁷ UN HRC, *Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (A/HRC/46/40)*, 2020.
- ²⁶⁸ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2019.
- ²⁶⁹ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, 2020; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.
- ²⁷⁰ UN Common Approach to Justice for Children, 2008; UNICEF, *Justice for Children*, 2020; UNICEF, *Safe and Child-Sensitive Counselling, Complaint and Reporting Mechanisms to Address Violence Against Children*, 2016; UNICEF, *Violence Against Children*, 2020.
- ²⁷¹ UN HRC, *Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (A/HRC/46/40)*, 2020; UNICEF, *Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in Prevention and Response Services*, 2020; UN Women, *The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During COVID-19*, 2021.

This source provides an overview of the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of cases of violence against children and what the risk factors are, as well as some guidelines on what practices can be followed to combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some recommendations include the changing social norms, supporting families and child protection services, and strengthening child helplines. This document will help delegates understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced this important topic and can serve as a comprehensive overview to begin their research.

United Nations Children's Fund. (2016). *Safe and Child-Sensitive Counselling, Complaint and Reporting Mechanisms to Address Violence Against Children*. Retrieved 3 July 2021 from:

https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/publications/9_safe_and_child-sensitive_counselling_complaint_and_reporting_mechanisms_to_address_violence_against_children.pdf

This joint report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Children and the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography is an example of how access to justice and responding to violence against children and youth often go hand-in-hand. Complaint and reporting mechanisms are often the start of the judicial process, yet this document identifies that not all counselling, complaint, and report mechanisms are child-friendly or safe to access for children. Delegates can use this source as a starting point towards their further research on the correlation between violence response and access to justice.

United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). *Justice for Children*. Retrieved 26 June 2021 from:

<https://www.unicef.org/protection/justice-for-children>

This UNICEF website addresses multiple facets of justice for children, including children that are already in contact with the law, child survivors, child victims, and child witnesses of crimes. It explains the importance of the topic as a whole for UNICEF, and also provides further resources for the different aspects the topic can include. This website is a useful gateway towards further research on the topic of access to justice for children and youth.

United Nations, Human Rights Council, Twenty-fifth session. (2013). *Access to Justice for Children*. Retrieved 29 June 2021 from:

https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/regularsessions/session25/documents/a-hrc-25-35_en.doc

In this document, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights defines access to justice. This definition is widely used throughout the United Nations system. It discusses barriers such as complexity and non-adaptation to children's level of understanding, as well as best practices such as empowerment and child-friendly procedures. This report is imperative to understanding the topic, and functions as one of the main resources on this topic within the United Nations. Understanding the definition of access to justice and getting an overview of what progress has been made and what issues still exist, is paramount for delegates to understand before conducting further research.

United Nations, Human Rights Council, Forty-sixth session. (2020). *Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children*. Retrieved 5 August 2021 from:

<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/46/40>

The SRSR reports annually to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and this is the most recent report. In this report, the SRSR underlines the effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on violence against children and synergizes violence response and access to justice by explaining the necessity of access to justice in violence response and prevention. This report also provides an overview of best practices in the form of initiatives and developments and sets out recommendations to move forward on the issue while working towards the 2030 Agenda. Overall, this is a useful document to gaining knowledge on recent developments and potential solutions on this important issue.

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