## **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Inputs**: Study on the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights of young people

1. **Can you provide information on any programs or activities your agency has implemented regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people?**

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) leveraged eLearning sessions, online sport challenges and the extensive use of social media for information sharing, awareness raising, and group communication. Below are some concrete examples from country and regional offices:

* In India, UNODC launched the [*Lockdown Learners Initiative*](https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/about-e4j/e4j-around-the-world/lockdown-learners-india.html)*,* which is a series of free-of-cost, interactive dialogues with students and educators on topics pertaining to COVID-19 and its impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 16), peace and the rule of law. It includes sensitisation of students on issues such as cybercrime, misinformation, gender-based violence, discrimination and corruption, among others. The Lockdown Learners series also aims to provide a platform for students to receive mentorship and knowledge support to use their skills to promote awareness among these issues and share their ideas and solutions to address some of these problems.
* In Peru, UNODC worked in partnership with national youth institute (SENAJU) provided the platform for online engagement of youth and youth-led organizations, launching the initiative [*Agents of Change for Education*](https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/news/2021/02/unodc-forges-new-partnerships-in-peru-to-advance-youth-crime-prevention-through-sport--despite-the-pandemic.html), geared towards strengthening young leaders and their capacity to promote a culture of peace. As part of this initiative, UNODC and SENAJU jointly organized a series of online events on the use of sport and art as tools to prevent youth crime and violence, to promote participation and social cohesion including during and after the pandemic, reaching a virtual audience of nearly 60,000 people. The events highlighted the organizational capacity of young people and the positive impact that their initiatives generate in communities and schools across Peru, with a focus on projects on social transformation through sports, recreation and physical activity.
* In Uzbekistan, UNODC, in partnership with Ministry Physical Culture and Sports, promoted sport as tool for addressing anxiety, stress and mental health challenges related to the confinement and COVID-19 related restrictions through the [*Line Up Live Up Initiative*](https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/news/2020/05/even-through-covid-19-confinement--unodcs-line-up--live-up-builds-resilience-with-sports.html).
* In Palestine, the Office continued engaging young people through the development of awareness-raising material using a [participatory video approach](https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/news/2021/04/amplifying-the-stories-of-palestinian-youth-amid-covid-19.html). A selected group of young teachers, Line Up Live Up trainers, and mass communication students received 20 virtual sessions of training on developing their own audio-visual material, along with messaging on violence, crime and drug use and on the role of sport in building youth and community resilience.
* In Bolivia, UNODC supported the work of the Youth Network for Transparency in different municipalities of the country. In 2020, despite the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people were able to train 736 primary and secondary school students through interactive online sessions for children and adolescents. Videos and educational materials developed by UNODC were used for the training sessions.  A virtual course on Leadership and participation of youth in municipal management was also carried out and was attended by 722 young people (255 men and 467 women) from 94 municipalities in Bolivia, of which 482 completed at least 4 of the 5 sessions to obtain a certificate of participation.

In order to meaningfully engage young people in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNODC held a variety of workshops and forums to engage young people:

* UNODC supported the Government of Japan in the organization of the “1st Global Youth Forum on the Culture of Lawfulness” which brought together, in a hybrid format, talented young people from every corner of the world. Participants were asked to discuss, aided by the expertise of Japan Ministry of Justice officials as well as UNODC representatives, the overall theme of “the role of youth in achieving a diverse and inclusive society” by delving more precisely in constructive dialogues around the impacts of the pandemic on young people.
* UNODC launched the [YCP/COVID online workshop series](https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/topics/sports/crime-prevention-through-sports---events---youth-crime-prevention-in-covid-times.html) with policymakers, youth representatives, civil society and academia and hosted 15 events at country and regional levels across the globe with the goal to raise awareness on the impact of COVID-19 on children and youth, with a focus on crime, violence and drug use, and associated risk factors. To mitigate these threats, experts stressed the need to prioritize the continuity of services for youth, parents and families, including through community-based programmes. A common challenge was the need to secure public spaces and create recreation opportunities for young people, including sports, arts and culture. Innovative responses while respecting pandemic restrictions included the use of sport and art to provide a venue for young people to stay active, express themselves, and create peer support networks, both online and in small face-to-face gatherings.
* In June 2021, UNODC launched the Africa-YPN Initiative to help prevent gender-based violence and violence against women (GBV-VAWG) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The event provided a platform to review the progress that parliaments in the region have made in achieving some key goals towards mitigating against GBV-VAWG and identify ways in which criminal justice systems and services can be improved to address the hidden pandemic on the rise.
* To commemorate the International Anti-Corruption Day 2020, UNODC supported the Africa Young Parliamentary Network (YPN) and the Kenya Young Parliamentarians Association (KYPA) with a hybrid meeting on “Keeping the Receipts- Transparency and Accountability during COVID-19”, with various stakeholders and young parliamentarians from across the continent. The primary objectives of the meeting were to create an avenue and platform through which public dialogue on corruption and governance issues could be discussed and addressed as well as discussing recommendations on best practices and courses of action to ensure effective mitigation against corruption during the pandemic.

1. **Based on your work, what are the main challenges that young people face in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to it? If any age-disaggregated data has been collected in this regard, please include it in your response.**

UNODC has also released a variety of reports addressing the effects of COVID-19, with particular emphasis on young people:

* UNODC identified early that the pandemic is most likely to have a devastating impact on victims of human trafficking and smuggled migrants. Taking advantage of the vast network of practitioners and front-line responders, the Office published its first preliminary findings, “[Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf)” and recommendations for action based on rapid stocktaking in April 2020 and made it available in 6 languages.
* In July 2021, UNODC published a comprehensive global assessment on the impact of the pandemic on survivors of human trafficking as well as on the State responses, “[The effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons and response to the challenges](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/The_effects_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic_on_trafficking_in_persons.pdf)”. The study not only highlights the increased vulnerability of young people to exploitation and abuse, but also offers a compendium of reports and actions taken by various actors, including the OSCE, UN Women, IOM and non-governmental organizations.
* [Corruption and COVID-19: Challenges in crisis response and recovery](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/COVID-19-Crisis-responserecovery-WEB.pdf), was published by the UN Global Task Force on Corruption under the co-leadership of UNODC, the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) within the framework of the Secretary-General’s Executive Committee that identified corruption risks and provided key recommendations for Member States on how to continue to prioritize anti-corruption during the pandemic, with particular emphasis on increasing corruption risks emanating from the closure of educational institutions and the impact on youth.
* The findings of the [2020 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html) reveal that LGBTQI+ children and young adults can be particularly vulnerable to crimes, including human trafficking. Their vulnerability arises from their young age, as they are assumed to be easily manipulated and unable to protect themselves. Second, their LGBTQI+ identity increases their vulnerability, as they are often marginalized in society and ostracized by friends and relatives who may force them out of their home. Studies have also shown that LGBTQI+ youth are overrepresented among runaway and homeless youth population, reflecting an acute marginalisation as they flee harassment, family rejection, violence and economic instability. LGBTQI+ youth often report challenges in locating and accessing services, including safe shelter and culturally sensitive service.
* Experts also highlighted that online child sexual exploitation has significantly increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The available evidence suggests that the increased demand for child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM) is exacerbating the sexual exploitation of children. During the period of COVID-19 emergency measures, there has been an increased number of reports of child abuse, including new ways to sexually exploit and abuse children, such as live-streaming child sexual abuse or the establishment of new easily accessible locations for exploitation.
* Beyond loss of life, frequently reported crimes faced by smuggled migrants include sexual and gender-based violence, theft, kidnapping for ransom, robbery, extortion and trafficking in persons. As shown by a recently published study by UNODC, “[Abused and Neglected](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf)”, children (especially unaccompanied children) are particularly exposed to exploitation, violence and abuse while in transit, vulnerabilities that were exacerbating with the pandemic. Young boys report significantly higher instances of forced labour, physical violence and inhuman and degrading treatment while in transit. Women, especially young women, report a much higher exposure to sexual violence while migrating and report “not having access to sufficient health care” as a significant obstacle, showing an increased need for such services likely linked to the impact of sexual violence experienced as part of their journey.

1. **Can you share any good practices to support young people and ensure the full implementation of their rights during and after the pandemic, including the following rights:**

* **right to education (including in the context of the closure of educational institutions and transition to online learning);**

By shifting the overall framework of education from formal to informal, through the means of digital platforms and programs based on digital innovation, education can be safeguarded and promoted as basic human right even in periods of unprecedented disruptions and uncertainty. UNODC promotes the use of digital platforms to engage and teach young people about rule of law, integrity, ethics and anti-corruption efforts in various ways from virtual youth forums (like the UNGASS Youth Forum or the Global Youth Forum on the Culture of Lawfulness) to online dialogues etc. to maximize engagement.

In its publication, “[The effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/The_effects_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic_on_trafficking_in_persons.pdf),” UNODC highlighted the fact that many services, especially education, have been moved online. Therefore, many children are not able to use education resources due to a lack of devices or internet access. To this end, in some countries and regions, frontline victim support service providers also purchased regular internet packages for survivors and their dependent children so that victims and their dependent children could access services and education that moved online. For instance, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, British Telecom donated smartphones, SIM cards and data bundles to up to 100 people who are receiving support from the NGO, Unseen UK.

* **right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (including with the increase in domestic violence and abuse, anxiety and depression, stress caused by social isolation, etc.);**

Inviting youth to act as the ambassadors to spread educational messages among youth from rural areas, minority groups, refugees, with disabilities, in conflict with the law who are particularly vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse has shown to be a good practice. The majority of youth from mentioned category remain “invisible” and their peers are those whom they can trust.

* **right to participate meaningfully in political and public affairs (including in connection with the prohibition of gatherings and transition to online rallies);**
* **other rights or freedoms.**

**Right to a Fair Trial:**

E-justice mechanisms established or strengthened: In many regions and countries, prosecution services and the judiciary responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by developing and/or strengthening e-justice mechanisms. They provided facilities for judicial actors to, for example, submit motions and petitions online and request official copies of documents online. Remote trials have enabled trafficking in persons trials and hearings to continue and for backlogs in cases to start to be at least partially cleared. In addition, remote victim and witness testimonies were enabled during the pandemic and identified as a promising practice that should be established and maintained beyond this period.

Planning and coordination efforts have been strengthened in trafficking in persons protocols: In some regions and countries protocols and guidelines have been developed to guide the COVID-19 response, including trafficking in persons responsibilities and activities during the pandemic. For example, in some countries, protocols have been developed and/or amended for shelters for trafficking in persons victims, which provide guidance on the provision of health-related matters for victims and shelter staff. Protocols have also been developed for managing child protection cases during the pandemic. Anti-trafficking coordination has increased in many places, with frontline organizations capitalizing on the convenient set-up of online meetings to have more frequent meetings with counterparts. This has meant that anti-trafficking personnel have been able to coordinate effectively on cross-border investigations and victim repatriations

1. **Based on your work on the topic, what role have young people had in COVID-19 response, vaccination, and recovery efforts, and how has that role been valued/encouraged?**

UNODC continues to work for, and with, young people to assist Member States within the thematic areas outlined in the new [UNODC 2021-2025 Strategy](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/strategy/index.html). Empowering youth and protecting children is also a cross-cutting commitment of the Strategy, with increasing emphasis on meaningful youth engagement and youth mainstreaming across UNODC’s programmatic work.

As mentioned in Section 1, UNODC gathered the opinions of youth and young people through workshops and forums to enhance responses to COVID-19, especially regarding the role that corruption plays in the COVID-19 crisis.

Additionally, youth-led technological solutions represent opportunities to eliminate crime and spread awareness about trafficking in persons among their peers, support survivors in their rehabilitation, create cooperative interactions and support criminal justice practitioners to identify and prosecute more traffickers. Harnessing the skills and specific knowledge of young people to find solutions on COVID-19 related instances of the online sexual exploitation of children, was one of the objectives of the the [Datajam against Exploitation.](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/Webstories2021/datajam-against-exploitation.html) The project not only facilitated inter-generational and multi-disciplinary collaboration between Canadian and international governmental entities, civil society actors, education institutions, and private corporations, but also produced 16 technological solutions that are tailored to combat human trafficking in Canada.