



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

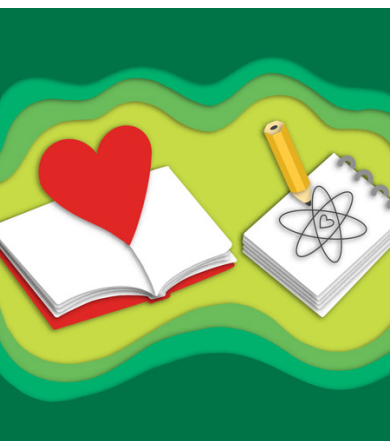


Youth Forum Report

February 28 to March 4, 2022

Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section
Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch





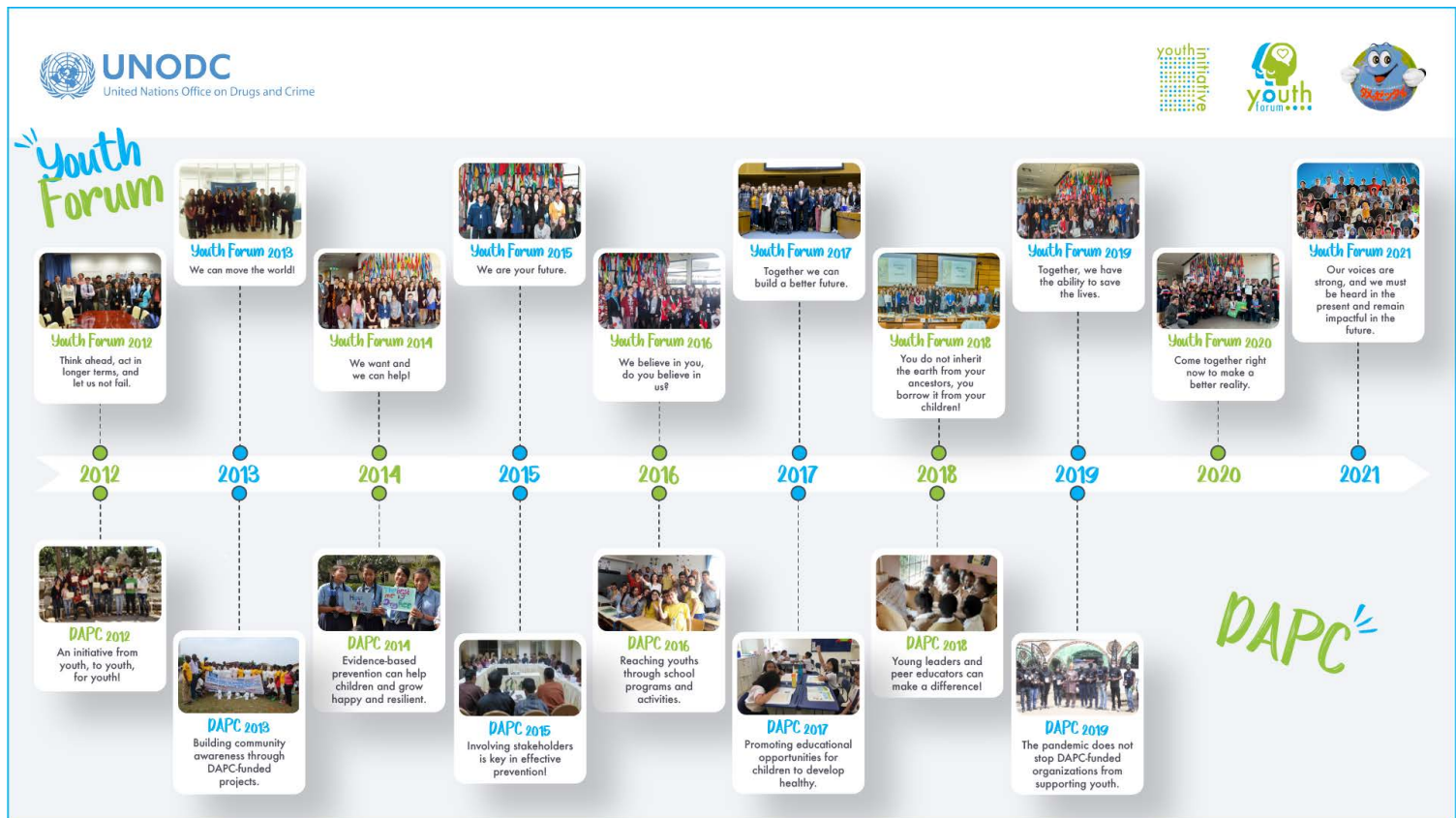
Youth Forum 2022

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Celebrating a decade of Youth Initiative



Since 2012, the UNODC Youth Initiative sought to connect young people from around the globe and empower them to become active in their schools, communities and youth groups for substance use prevention and health promotion. When it was first launched at a side event during the 55th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), “Mobilizing for Prevention of Drug Use: The Development of International Prevention Standards and the Youth Initiative”, there were only 20 participants from a handful of countries. In the course of 10 years, the Youth Forum has steadily grown, and the Youth Initiative continues to encourage young people to reflect on the potential impact of substance use in their schools and communities, and to start taking effective and evidence-based action to prevent substance use.

To see the full image, click [here](#).

This year’s Youth Forum 2022 was a very special occasion, as the year 2022 marks the 10th anniversary of the Youth Initiative. During the past decade, UNODC observed 10 Youth Fora held with the participation of 371 young people from 97 countries. And now, as the Youth Initiative steps forward into its next decade of action, UNODC continued to expand the youth community through the Youth Forum 2022. Organised virtually from 28 February to 4 March 2022, this year’s forum brought together 74 young leaders to learn about evidence-based drug use prevention, discuss perspectives on the world drug problem, and be empowered to embark on or continue action on drug use prevention and health promotion.

Every year, youth participants of the Youth Forum have the opportunity to address the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) at its Plenary session. This is a special and powerful opportunity, as it allows global policymakers to hear the voice of the youth, and their perspective on drug-related matters.

Last year's youth participants called on Member States to continue investing in evidence-based substance use prevention despite COVID-19 challenges, and to provide youth with the opportunity to be more involved in drug prevention work. Their closing sentence, "Our voices are strong, and we must be heard in the present and remain impactful in the future", is a reminder of UNODC's commitment to empowering youth to work towards preventing drug use worldwide.



STEPPING INTO THE NEXT DECADE OF YOUTH ACTION

Upholding the aim of the Youth Initiative in providing youth with possibilities to participate and become active in supporting the health and wellbeing of their peers, UNODC started to pave the way for the next decade of action with the Youth Forum 2022. Despite hopes of holding the Youth Forum as an in-person event, the continuing challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic restricted the mode of participation to an online event.

Member States were asked to nominate youth leaders best suited to participate in the Youth Forum 2022. A total of 96 youth were nominated from 43 countries, who went through a selection process consisting of reviews of questionnaire responses, CVs, and individual interviews. Thanks to the online format, UNODC was able to accommodate more youth participants in this year's Youth Forum, with 74 youths from 43 countries finally selected to participate.

The Youth Forum 2022 was coordinated to facilitate the participation of selected youth connecting in from all regions of the world. Sessions were repeated throughout the day to enable youth to choose their most comfortable time to join in, but 'all-together' sessions were also held once per day so that youth could interact with more participants who were not from similar time zones. In addition, youth also met in smaller groups outside of the regular sessions to collectively work on group discussions and tasks.

Group activities normally conducted during in-person events were coordinated to complement the virtual setting. Throughout the week, youth were broken out into smaller, independent virtual meeting rooms to discuss the subject at hand, worked on group tasks, and reconvened to present their collective thoughts. As the Youth Forum came to a close, youth provided feedback that the smaller group sessions were helpful for them to feel comfortable when voicing their opinions and in gradually breaking out of their shells.



EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Taking advantage of social media and digital platforms, UNODC began establishing the youth network of 2022 a month prior to the event. Youth participants started to interact with each other and were introduced to background information on substance use prevention that would help them be better prepared for contribution and discussion in the Youth Forum sessions. Youth were also introduced to the fundamental resource for evidence-based prevention, the UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention.

One of the key experiences of being part of the Youth Forum is meeting other young leaders who are interested in working towards building a healthier, better future. Throughout the Youth Forum (and beyond) the youth establish new comradeships, learn from each other and work as a team through collaboration. In order to support the youth in getting to know each other and start building new relationships before the event, group activities were planned to introduce youth to their respective 'small groups', in which they would collaborate later on throughout the Youth Forum. The youth met together in their small groups and played an ice-breaker game of "Two Truths and a Lie".

Leading up to the Youth Forum, pre-forum activities took a turn to include more substance aspects. Youth read substance use prevention-related reading materials and were asked to answer questions through interactive polls and self-reflection. Through the latter activities, youth were able to gain more background knowledge on the thematic area in preparation of their participation in the Youth Forum.



***"Alone we can
do so little;
together we can
do so much."
– Helen Keller***

KICKING OFF THE YOUTH FORUM

The Youth Forum 2022 was officially kicked off through the Opening Ceremony on 28 February, where Ms. Ghada Waly, Executive Director of UNODC, warmly welcomed the youth and commended the young leaders for dedicating their efforts and attention to drug use prevention, in the face of many obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. She went on to say, “With their energy and fresh views, young people are better placed than anyone to achieve true, lasting change in their communities... Your engagement will be essential in raising awareness, changing attitudes, and developing solutions.”

The Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations in Vienna, H.E. Mikhail Ulyanov, wished the youth best of luck for their endeavors through the Youth Forum, in hopes of youth finding ways to promote drug use prevention and healthier lifestyles amongst young people.

The Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta, H.E. Günther Granser, motivated youth to reflect on the significance of youth empowerment and encouraged each and every one of them to utilize it as a tool to obtain the ability and authority to make well-informed decisions and positively affect outward changes in their lives and those of others. He added, “Our Order is convinced that your involvement is crucial to help the world to better recover and develop greater resilience to future crises.”

This year, the Opening Ceremony was also honored by the presence of the Chair of the 65th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, H.E. Ghislain D’Hoop. “We are policymakers,” he said, “But we also listen to you, to youth... and we also listen very closely to scientific recommendations.” The participation of the Chair of CND was an affirmation of how important the Commission regarded the voices of youth, and how earnestly they would listen to the joint Youth Statement in the coming days. The Chair closed with “I hope that you will contribute to our work by making your own voice heard in your own way, with your own vocabulary.”



YOUTH ALUMNI COMING THROUGH!



The commemoration of a decade with the Youth Initiative aims to celebrate great initiatives for youth and by youth, and in particular, seeks to feature youth, their triumphs and voices from around the world. In pursuit of this goal, the first day of the Youth Forum 2022 was extra special this year with the presence of very special guests, youth alumni (participants of previous Youth Fora) from recent years.

Youth alumni warmly welcomed the Youth Forum participants of 2022 and inspired them by sharing their experience with the Youth Forum, what they gained, and how they sought to advocate for substance use prevention in their own communities after their participation.

The “Youth Alumni Session”, a newly added segment in commemoration of the decade celebration, was received with virtual ovations from the crowd. As they were perspectives and reflections coming from someone of similar age, interest, and aspirations, it was apparent that the stories of the alumni were resonating with the youth participants, and also hopefully inspired them to actively participate in the Youth Forum and beyond.



Joanitah Lunkuse

Youth Forum 2018 Participant

"The Youth Forum was an informative and profound learning experience and a priceless opportunity to connect with passionate young people seeking constructive transformation on drug use issues. I was able to learn what happens to different people in different countries, and helped me to think about what was transpiring in mine to take greater strides in evidence-based programming..."

Merve Yetistirici

Youth Forum 2019 Participant

"Now, it is your chance to talk, and the floor is entirely yours. Do not ever hesitate to express your opinions as well as your thoughts. We, as the youth, have a significant potential to change the policies that will affect our future. UNODC Youth Forum is such a unique opportunity to renew those policies in favor of us, for our well-being."



Divaghar Voothayakumar

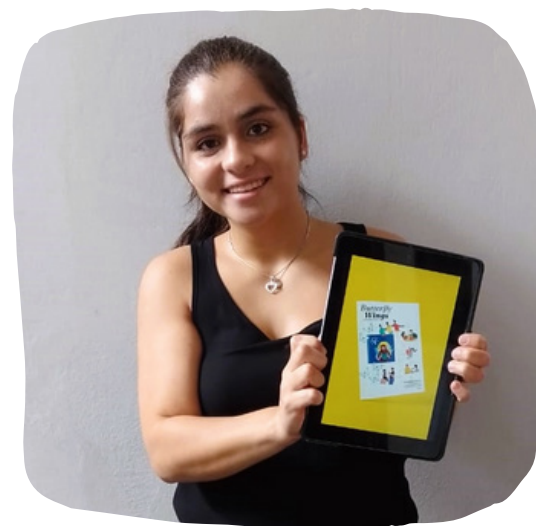
Youth Forum 2020 Participant

"It is tough work, but at the end of the day, it was well worth it to see the smile on the faces of the youth that we're helping. It reminds us that we are all in this together. The next 5 days will be intense, but you will learn a lot about evidence-based substance use prevention. And your journey will not end here; it will continue after the Youth Forum."

Alexandra Bravo Schroth

Youth Forum 2021 Participant

"Everything you do has the potential to make the world better, small steps are significant and can lead to great things, even when it is only one community, one school, one family or even one person... it all leads to change. And even if you are far from each other [virtually] and probably complete strangers, you can make amazing friends here."



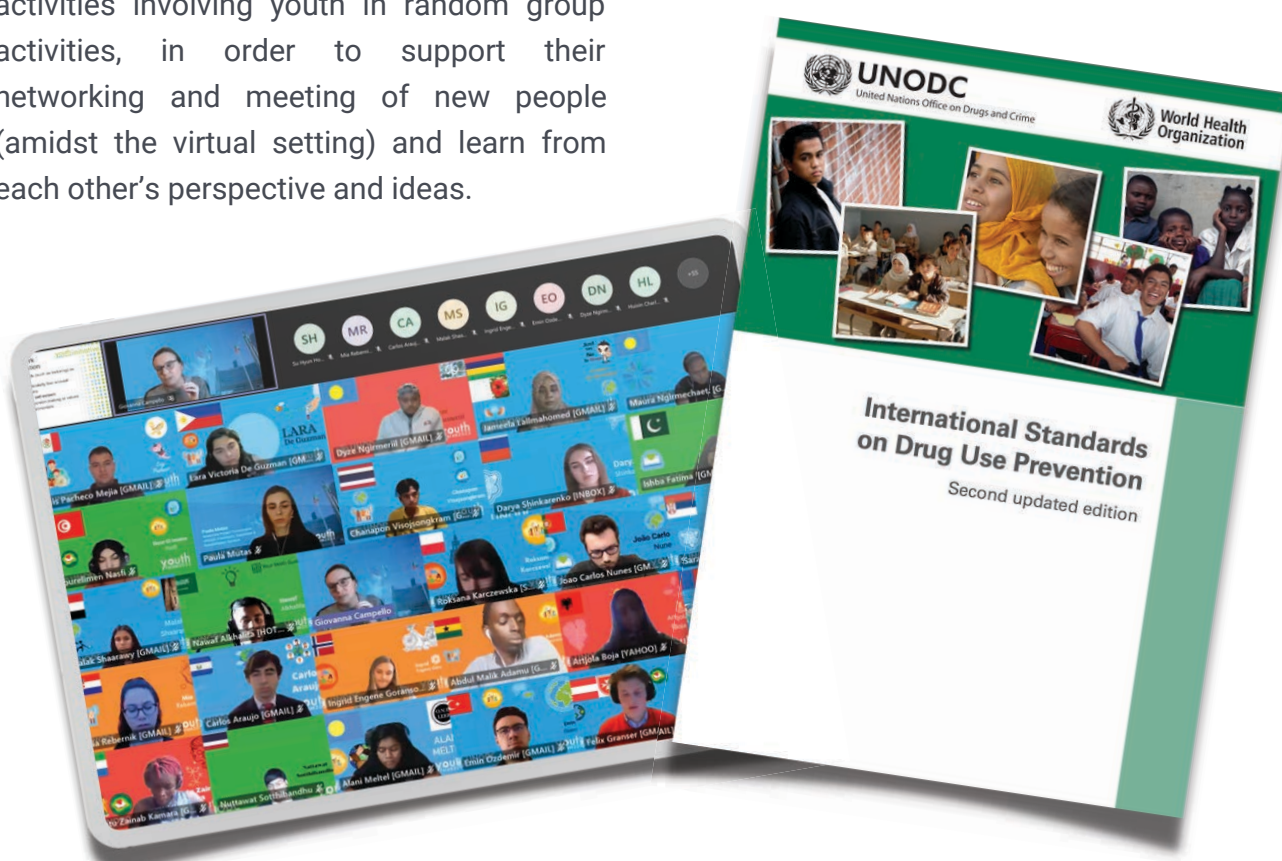
SNEAK PEEK INTO THE YOUTH FORUM

Throughout the week, youth participants embraced key take-home messages on substance use prevention, processed new learnings and reflected on their Aha moments (moments of sudden insights and new learnings). The youth had the opportunity to hear from prevention experts on the importance of science and evidence in supporting what is effective or not, and were introduced to study results that demonstrated the effectiveness in preventing drug use. And of course, the easiest way to find a summary of effective strategies, the “go-to” resource material that demonstrates the results of the systematic review of available study results, is the [UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention](#).

Each day was scheduled with interactive activities involving youth in random group activities, in order to support their networking and meeting of new people (amidst the virtual setting) and learn from each other’s perspective and ideas.

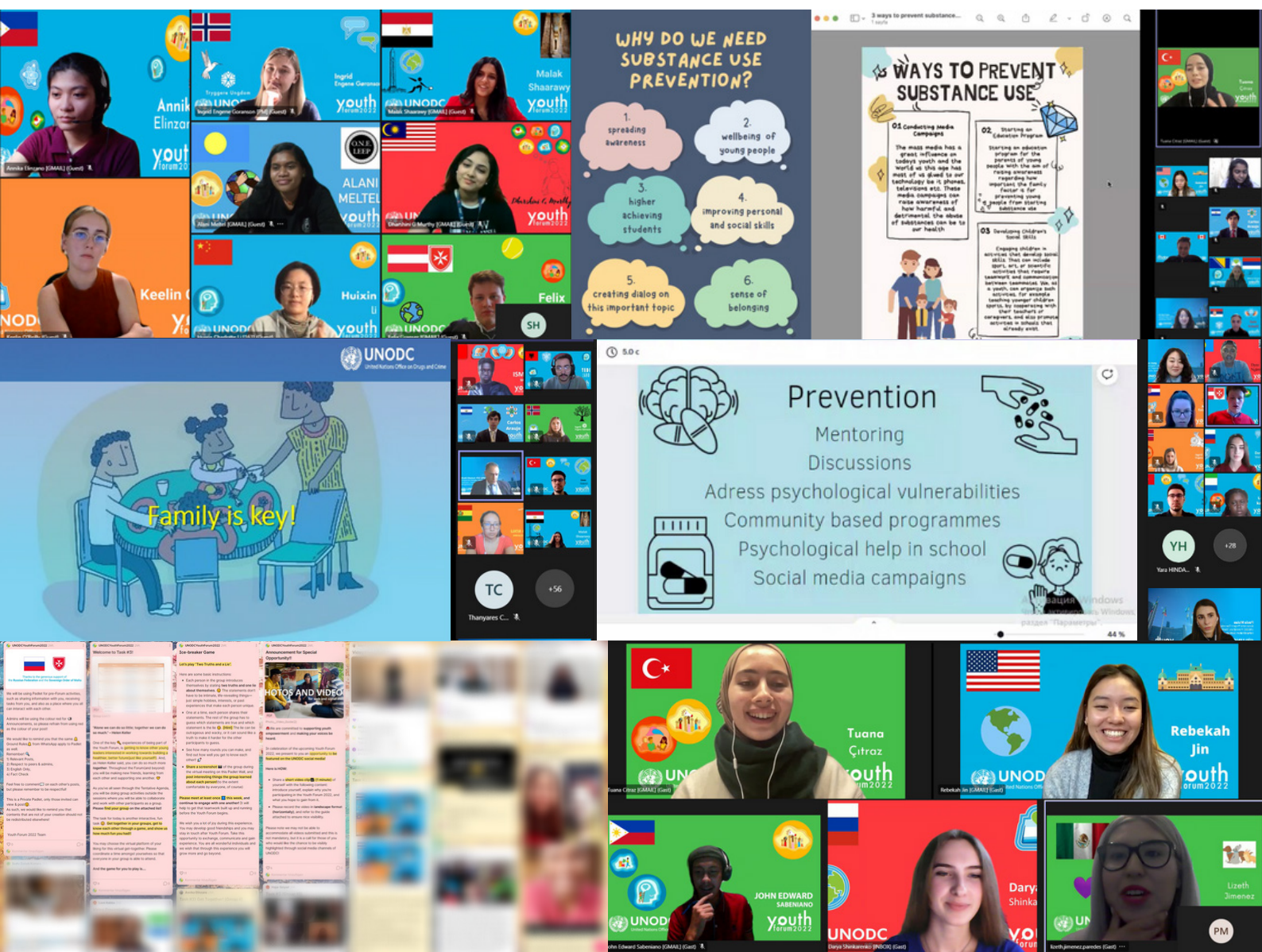
The young leaders discussed the risk and protective factors to drug use prevention, the importance of healthy familial relationships, and age-appropriate development such as social and emotional learning.

Short rounds of ‘Speed Meeting’ were played for the youth to concisely teach each other on the key messages they picked up from the session materials, undertaking a form of active learning (during which more information is retained compared to passive learning, such as listening to lectures). Youth were also introduced to the UNODC ‘Listen First’ global initiative, which promotes evidence-based drug prevention as an effective investment for the healthy and safe development of children and youth.



Youth participants remained committed throughout the week, as they continued to meet outside the regular sessions within their small groups in order to brainstorm drug use prevention ideas and develop them into strategies that could be effective, based on evidence. They were asked to refer back to the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention and make a connection with their brainstormed activities. During one of the sessions, youth had the opportunity to present their strategies and receive feedback from prevention experts.

Many youth seem to encounter Aha moments when they learned that “Say ‘No’ to Drugs” campaigns alone are not effective in preventing substance use, as the provision of information alone does not change the behavior of an individual. Rather, age-appropriate development of personal and social skills is crucial in the healthy growth of children, as it reinforces resiliency against drug use.

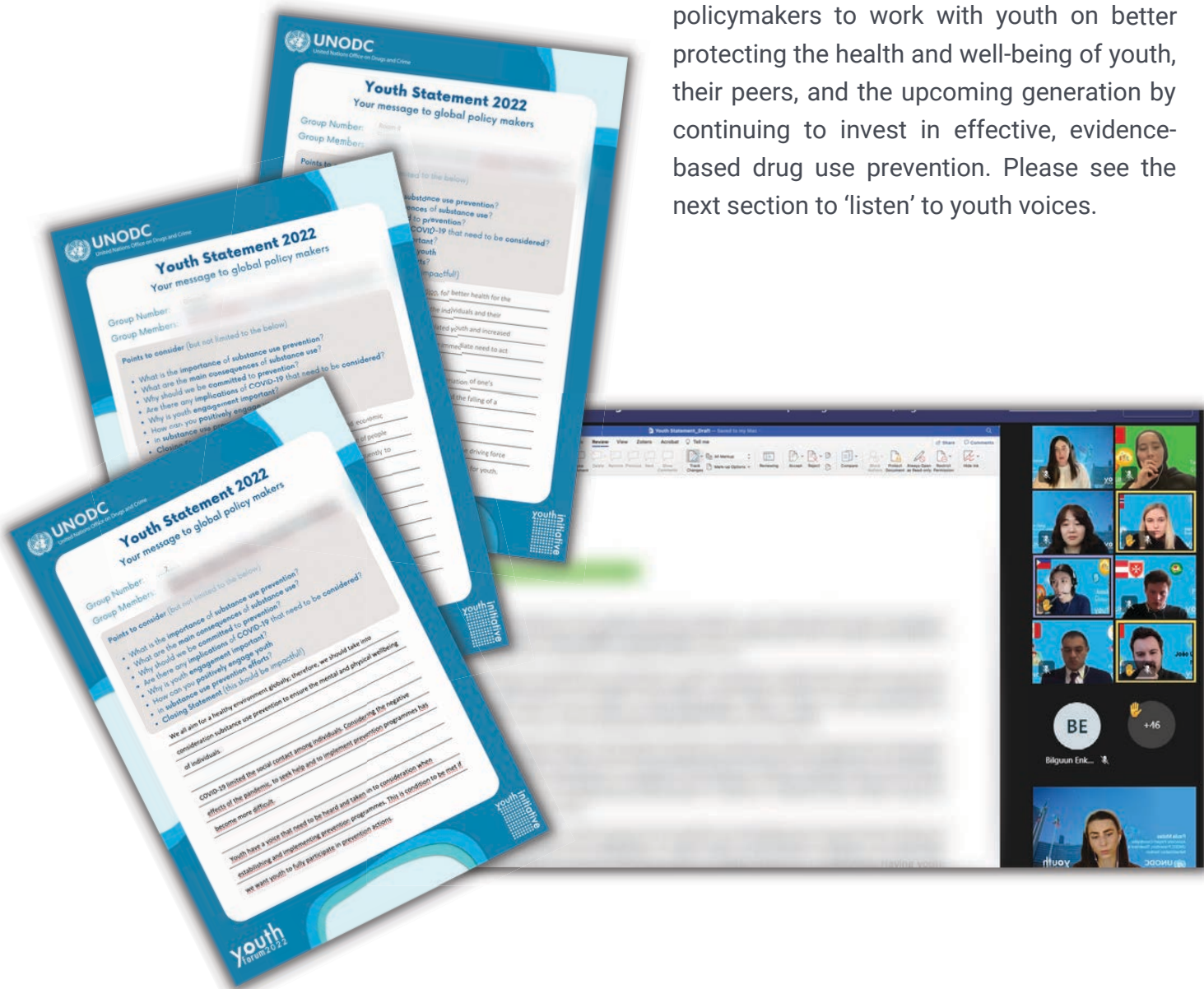


In addition, some were surprised to learn that few of the strategies they were familiar with within their communities, such as scare tactics, police officers coming to schools to show the ‘dangers’ of drugs, or testimonies of ex-drug addicts, are not always effective and sometimes even have negative consequences that may inadvertently provoke drug use initiation.

The multi-faceted layer of prevention, as evident through the different levels of micro- and macro-environments, was another key take-home message for the youth. When planning effective prevention programs, the age of the target population and the setting (family, school, community, etc.) need to be considered as well.

Youth were also introduced to the Handbook on Youth Participation in Drug Prevention Work, which itself is an outcome of positive and meaningful youth engagement, made with contributions from aspiring youth participants of previous Youth Fora. The young leaders were encouraged to utilize the Handbook as guidance to facilitate discussion with adult policymakers and decision-makers to leverage more meaningful youth participation in their community’s substance use prevention work.

Lastly, participants also jointly created a Youth Statement, messages they wished to convey to the adult global policymakers attending the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. It is a call to action for global policymakers to work with youth on better protecting the health and well-being of youth, their peers, and the upcoming generation by continuing to invest in effective, evidence-based drug use prevention. Please see the next section to ‘listen’ to youth voices.



YOUTH STATEMENT 2022

65th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Excellencies and influential representatives!

We are youth, and we are here to speak up for our future and the upcoming generation. We are 74 young people from 43 countries, here on a mission to deliver our message.

With the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed the physical, emotional, and mental struggles of young people, how it isolated youth, and increased vulnerability to substance abuse, showing the need to intensify our efforts. We have a specific goal: for all people to be healthy. In pursuing this goal, we must be committed to prevention now, for the success of future generations.

We call on Member States to encourage investments in prevention efforts because even conservative estimates indicate a 10-time return on every dollar spent. We want to encourage the use of evidence-based and holistic approaches in recognition of the deficits of today's practices. Help us create a safe environment for everybody and build better futures. Scientifically, it saves lives.

Youth engagement is crucial to ensure we accomplish our global vision that prioritizes health, well-being, substance use prevention, and recognizes youth' needs.

Please recognise the tremendous competency, capacity, and motivation of youth by creating opportunities for involvement in policy and decision-making. Youth engagement inspires a sense of empowerment and responsibility in young people, and supports the development of skills that promote healthy decision-making. We ask you to engage younger generations not only as instruments but as the driving force of global implementation of evidence-based prevention programs for youth.

Creating a more socially advanced tomorrow starts with gathering communities in activities that inspire evidence-based prevention. We do not want to be treated as adults in becoming. We are aware of what the future needs and what we want in terms of effective prevention. It is of utmost importance that the message being sent is understood.

Especially in hard times, a global pandemic, when everything seems dark, we may find it hard to seek light; but we have a flame within us, which can only be kept alive with your help.

Change lies in your hands, so join forces with the youth for a future we can look forward to.

YOUTH ARE LEAVING FOOTPRINTS ALL OVER THE WORLD!

As evidently seen through the Youth Alumni, young leaders continue to participate in events and work alongside UNODC and the Youth Initiative even after the Youth Forum is concluded. Youth participants from 2022 will also be invited to partake in creating the Youth Initiative Magazine, **'Butterfly Wings'**, a creative platform to share their perspectives on evidence-based substance use prevention. UNODC will also continue to provide guidance to aspiring youth who wish to develop and implement individual plans of action for their communities.

The UNODC is celebrating youth successes and achievements through the newly launched **"Youth Action"** page, on the Youth Initiative website. More and more youth stories will be shared with the world to support and promote meaningful youth engagement in substance use prevention efforts at all levels, whether local, national, or international.

UNODC hopes this new platform provides youth with more opportunities to highlight the good work they are doing and inspires other youth to be empowered in taking those initial, transformative steps!



Finally, UNODC would like to pay tribute to the youth who have actively played a role in making positive changes to their communities, especially during the challenging times of COVID-19.

The map below demonstrates hard work of youth throughout this past year, and UNODC commends all youth involved who have contributed to making this world a better place.

Their resilience, energy, and ambitions not only directly help beneficiaries, but also unfurls to positively influence other youth. UNODC looks forward to also working with newly added members of the youth community, the Youth Forum 2022 participants, and hopes to continue to expand and grow the Youth Initiative!



VISIBLE HIGHLIGHTS (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH)

The UNODC Youth Initiative continuously builds on global movement using Social Media Networks to make youth efforts visible. Accordingly, various social media platforms were used prior to the Youth Forum to promote the event, highlight youth and their anticipation, as well as feature sneak peeks into the sessions of the Youth Forum.

The Youth Forum acquired its fair share of attention via social media, with a total of 6,326 engagements, which is indicative of the number of times that people were engaged with a social media post through reactions, comments, shares, and clicks. The table below presents indicators that depict the overall performance from the three main social media channels of the UNODC Youth Initiative from 7 February to 22 March 2022.



Top Tweet earned 3,023 impressions

The **@UNODC #YouthForum** will take place online from 28.02-04.03! 📅 Young leaders from all over the world 🌍 will have the opportunity to gain insight that will contribute to their communities!

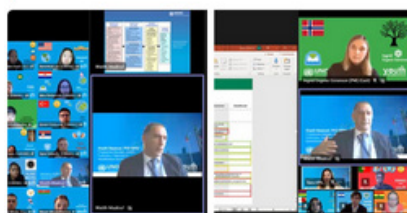
What actions do you take to raise awareness about **#substance use** **#prevention**? pic.twitter.com/TzPiDNHhQ5



1 6 14

Top Tweet earned 3,930 impressions

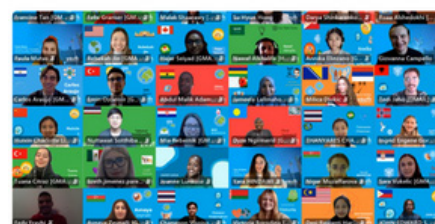
. **@UNODC #Youth Forum** Participants 🧑🏫 are learning the importance of **#evidence-based** 📊 **#prevention** & discussed risk & protective factors that may influence **#druguse**.
pic.twitter.com/EzUoQG0YYY



2 6 38

Top media Tweet earned 2,518 impressions

The **@UNODC** Youth Forum '22 officially began today: Continuing the tradition of empowering **#youth** to make their voice heard by 🌐 policymakers, throughout the Youth Forum participants will develop a Statement to be delivered during the 65th session of the **#CND**
bit.ly/3IH3bqk
pic.twitter.com/yDE2aA7Rjd



1 22 52

Channels	New Followers	Engagements	Media Views & Impressions	Posts
Twitter	94	3,500	28,473	21
Facebook	30	1,914	3,942	17
Instagram	50	912	4,184	17
Total	174	6,326	36,599	55

VISIBLE HIGHLIGHTS (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH)

The [UNODC Youth Initiative homepage](#), including the new Youth Action website, were also leveraged to visibly highlight the Youth Forum 2022. An interactive [Event Timeline](#) that demonstrates the progression into the event, and [weekly articles](#) were featured to provide updates to interested potential future youth participants.

In addition, a video was also created and showcased during the plenary session at CND, highlighting not only the Youth Forum, but youth voices of inspiration and revelation. We invite you to view the video [here](#).



YOUTH FORUM 2022

PARTICIPANTS

Name	Country
Tedi Jaho	Albania
Artjola Bojawith	Albania
Keelin O'Reilly	Australia
Asnaya Zeynalli	Azerbaijan
Nigar Muzaffarova	Azerbaijan
Seljan Ibadzade#	Azerbaijan
Victoria Borodina	Belarus
Rodolphe Marbaix	Belgium
Yoran Diels	Belgium
Lucia González-Aramayo Virreira	Bolivia
Milica Dukic	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Anna Mladenova#	Bulgaria
Hajar Seiyad	Canada
Jack Campbell	Canada
Haohang Wei#	China
Huixin Li	China
Jingyi Fei	China
Mia Rebernik	Croatia
Malak Shaarawy	Egypt
Carlos Araujo	El Salvador
Adam Abdul Malik	Ghana
Awurabena Pokuaa Boateng-Mensah	Ghana
Adieb Whittaker#	Jamaica
Matthew Jumpp	Jamaica
Tashwaine Davis	Jamaica
Austin Panato	Kenya
Desi Rawanti Harmaini	Malaysia
Dharshini G.Murthy	Malaysia

Please note that this youth was not able to participate due to conflicting personal schedules and other matters

YOUTH FORUM 2022

PARTICIPANTS

Name	Country
Bibi Aashouraa Jameela Lallmahomed	Mauritius
Lizeth Jimenez	Mexico
Luis Pacheco Mejía	Mexico
Bilguun Enkhbaatar	Mongolia
Yesui Bayarsaikhan	Mongolia
Ingrid Engene Gøranson	Norway
Ishba Fatima	Pakistan
Alani Meltel	Palau
Dyze Ngirmeriil	Palau
Maura Ngirmechaet	Palau
Alexis Nimer Apaza Loayza	Peru
Annika Elinzano	Philippines
John Edward Sabeniano	Philippines
Lara Victoria De Guzman	Philippines
Roksana Karczewska	Poland
Ismael Baió	Portugal
João Carlos Nunes	Portugal
Maryam Al-Muhannadi	Qatar
Darya Shinkarenko	Russia
George Sukhotin	Russia
Maria Yushina	Russia
Ahmed Albarak#	Saudi Arabia
Nawaf Alkhalifa	Saudi Arabia
Roaa Alshedokhi	Saudi Arabia
Sara Vukelić	Serbia
Isatu Zainab Kamara	Sierra Leone
Love Kabba	Sierra Leone
Francine Tan	Singapore
Oliver Halász	Slovakia
Felix Granser	SMOM/Austria
Rithmaka Karunadhara	Sri Lanka

Please note that this youth was not able to participate due to conflicting personal schedules and other matters

YOUTH FORUM 2022

PARTICIPANTS

Name	Country
Sarisha Kushmandi Senanayake	Sri Lanka
Savini Hiranya Samadhi	Sri Lanka
Madina Hasanzoda#	Tajikistan
Chanapon Visojsongkram	Thailand
Nattawat Sotthibandhu	Thailand
Thanyares Chamnan	Thailand
Bendita Ximenes	Timor-Leste
Joaninha Alves Guterres Perera#	Timor-Leste
Levilito da Ressurreição Das Neves Baptista#	Timor-Leste
Fedy Frayhi	Tunisia
Nour El Imane Nasfi	Tunisia
Emin Özdemir	Turkey
Tuana Çitraz	Turkey
Rebekah Jin	USA
Jesús Bracho	Venezuela

Please note that this youth was not able to participate due to conflicting personal schedules and other matters

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNODC would like to take this opportunity to extend its gratitude to the countries that have provided support in identifying outstanding young leaders to nominate for participation in the Youth Forum 2022. The following countries have shown interest in providing youth with opportunities to learn and be empowered in advocating for substance use prevention, and have made it their priority to do so despite challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic: **Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Norway, Pakistan, Palau, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, SMOM, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkey, USA, and Venezuela.** We look forward to continued support and nominations from Member States in the coming years, to provide youth with a stage and voice in health and drug policy, and to empower youth leaders in countering the world drug problem.

With the COVID-19 global pandemic restricting yet again in-person gatherings for the Youth Forum 2022, UNODC sought to provide youth with a token of acknowledgment and encouragement through a small Youth Engagement Package, which consisted of stationeries, face masks and other items to support their substance use prevention work going forward. We would like to extend our gratitude to the Permanent Missions that kindly offered to deliver packages to youth participants.

And last but not least, we would also like to acknowledge the main sponsors of the Youth Initiative, the Government of the Russian Federation and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta (SMOM) for their ongoing support in funding the UNODC Youth Initiative. With their continued support, we have witnessed 10 years of youth engagement, education, and empowerment through the annual Youth Forum, and look forward to many more to come.

We thank you for your continued support in the Youth Initiative.

INFORMATION FOR PERMANENT MISSIONS

The Youth Forum is an annual event organized by the UNODC Youth Initiative in the broader context of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND). Its main objective is to gather young people, nominated by Member States and active in the field of drug use prevention, health promotion and youth empowerment from around the world. The aim is to allow them to exchange ideas, visions and different perspectives on how to better protect the health and wellbeing of their peers and provide them with an opportunity to convey their joint message to the global level policymakers.

It is important to note that youth participants do not represent Member States during the Youth Forum. The Youth Forum is aimed to be a safe place for youth to exchange experiences, learn and develop a statement sharing their hopes and visions with CND. Therefore, although youth are nominated by Member States, they participate in the Youth Forum in their personal capacity.

When UNODC commences the nomination process for Youth Forum 2023, a guidance document will be provided to Permanent Missions in order to provide assistance in nominating appropriate candidates for participation in the Youth Forum. In this context, please note that nominations can only be made by Permanent Missions, and thus a coordinated approach should be exercised amongst concerned stakeholders in-country to identify the most appropriate youth.

Again, UNODC would like to thank Permanent Missions that have nominated youth to participate in Youth Forum 2022, and we look forward to expanding the youth community in the years to come. Further information and guidance will be provided in the coming months.

Adieu
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Illustration by Saptadipa Mallick

Youth forum 2023!