



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



UNODC YOUTH FORUM 2021 REPORT

29 March – 2 April

Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section
Drug Prevention and Health Branch



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Expanding the Youth Initiative despite COVID-19 Challenges

As part of the UNODC Youth Initiative, the annual Youth Forum aims to connect young people from around the globe and empower youth to become active in their communities for substance use prevention and health promotion. It provides a platform for youth to exchange ideas, visions and different perspectives on how to better protect the health and wellbeing of their peers within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.5.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



SDG Target 3.5

Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.

In 2020, the initial spread of the COVID-19 pandemic left its mark at the Youth Forum with the decrease in number of participants, owing to last minute cancellations in attending the in-person event. A year later, the aftermath of the pandemic still challenged the world and withheld the opportunity for youths to gather in Vienna, Austria. In efforts to keep youths safe from increased risk and exposure to COVID-19, yet still carry on with expanding the youth community built from previous years, the Youth Forum 2021 was decided to be held virtually during 29 March – 2 April.



Welcoming Youth Participants of 2021

Member States were asked to nominate youth leaders best suited to participate in the Youth Forum. A total of 84 nominees from 43 countries went through a selection process, which included assessments of questionnaire responses, CVs, and individual interviews. Thanks to the online format, more youths were able to be included in this year's Youth Forum. At the end of the process, 62 youths from 41 countries were selected to participate in the Youth Forum 2021.



Ms. Ghada Waly, Executive Director of the UNODC, welcomed the youths at the Opening Ceremony by commending their continued efforts and commitments towards substance use prevention and participation in the Youth Forum despite challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. She added, "Creating such connections and building a network for common action and mutual support is particularly important at a time when the world, and young people, are suffering from the effects of the COVID pandemic."



The Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the International Organizations in Vienna, H.E. Mikhail Ulyanov, urged youths to familiarize themselves with the UNODC Handbook on Youth Participation in Drug Prevention Work and also stressed that empowerment of youths in tackling substance prevention among peers is essential because voice of youths are more effective than that of adults.



H.E. Ambassador Günther Granser of the Sovereign Order of Malta expressed his conviction in youth participants being “Goodwill Ambassadors” aspiring for a more sustainable future. He also insisted youths to not consider the pandemic as a hindrance, but rather as an opportunity for growth and development, and to actively strive for their voices to be heard.

Ms. Giovanna Campello, Chief of the Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section of UNODC stressed the importance of evidence-based strategies implemented by youths, especially that these strategies not only prevent drug use, but also prevent youth violence, child maltreatment, other risky behaviors, and that such strategies are even more effective if youth are the engine that drives them forward.

*Evidence-based strategies
for youth, by youth.*





At this year's Opening Ceremony, a few youth participants were also invited to share their motivation and anticipation in being part of the Youth Forum 2021. Here are a few of their highlights:

"Our role as youth is extremely important in prevention, not only because we are able to educate ourselves and others, but also because we can imagine a better world, one where everyone is healthy and happy. And we choose to work hard using evidence-based information to make little impact every day and transform big and crazy dreams into reality."

"All of us have an impact on others in our lives... Our actions today will impact our future. I do not want to wait for the future to arrive to do something. We could have an impact today and that is truly inspiring. "

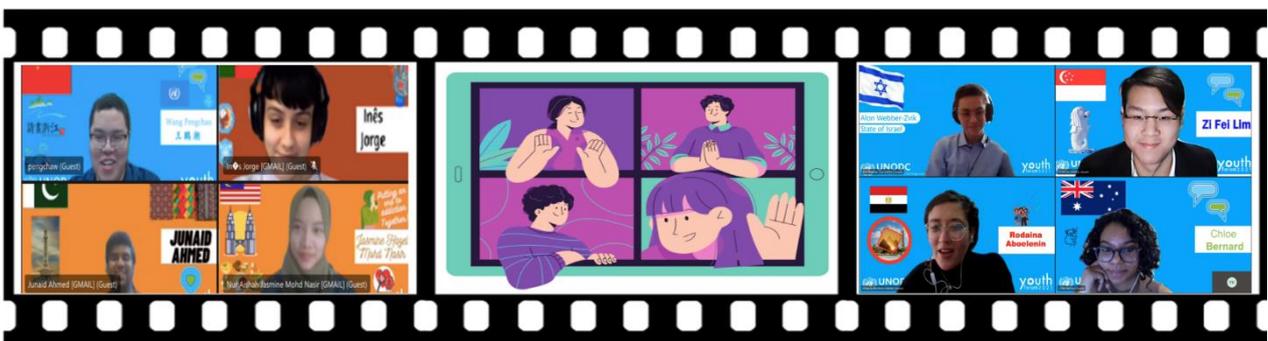
First Virtual Youth Forum!

The Youth Forum this year was fully virtual due to preventative measures against the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the event was not in-person, the youths' participation and dedication to attending the sessions were markedly high. While it was unfortunate that the global pandemic drove people towards online education and remote working environments, a positive aspect to note was the youth's aptness in adapting to the Youth Forum's virtual platform.

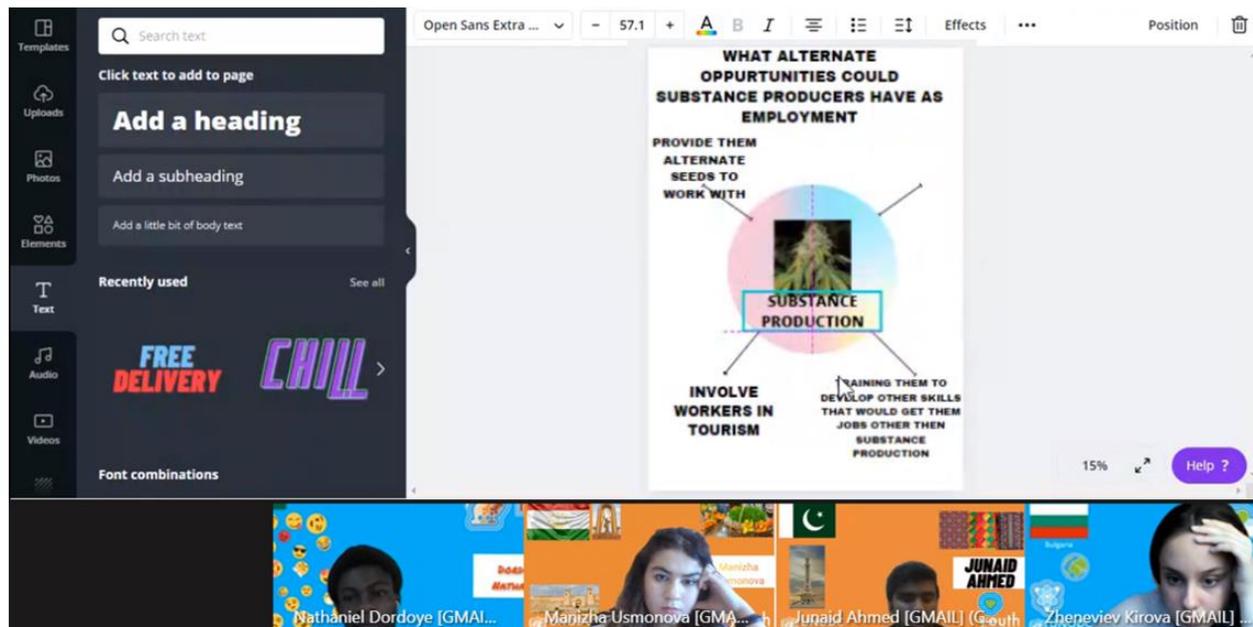


The Youth Forum was organized in way to ensure that time differences would not hinder youth participation. As participants were from all regions of the world, all time zones were taken into consideration. Some sessions were repeated throughout the day, so that youths could choose the most comfortable time to join in. Despite fatigue, active participants showed a great deal of passion and enthusiasm by joining in both elective sessions, even if it was 3 AM in their local time. We applaud their ardor & energy!

Technology advancements were used to their fullest at the UNODC Youth Forum this year. Group activities normally taken place at in-person meetings were accommodated to complement the virtual setting. Throughout the event, youths were broken out into smaller, independent virtual meeting rooms to discuss the subject at hand, create graphic visualizations as a group, and then reconvened in the Main Room to present their outcomes. These breakout sessions seemed to provide introvert participants with a more comfortable space to voice their opinions.



The online platform also enabled youths to quickly create visual content using online templates, graphics, and functionalities during their timed group sessions. By sharing their screen, youths were able to view proposed visuals and writings, give feedback and suggestions on a real-time basis.



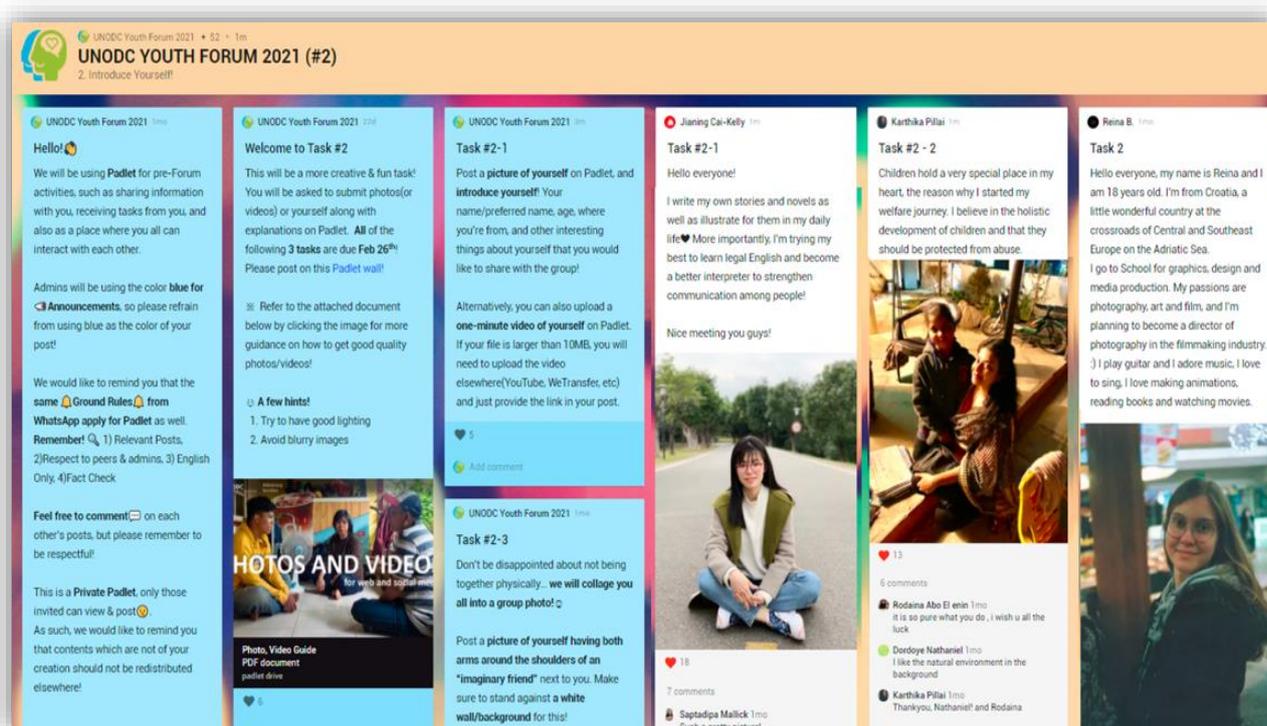
The virtual platform also allowed youths to express themselves by using media art to create their own backgrounds to use during the online sessions. Their personality, character, and culture definitely shined through their self-made backgrounds.

Early engagement with Youth Participants

The Youth Community 2021 was established more than a month prior to the event. Youth participants began to communicate and interact with one another via social media, and they were introduced to a fundamental resource for evidence-based prevention, the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention.

Pre-Forum tasks were handed out to participants, with the intent of preparing youths and building a positive momentum as the Youth Forum neared. These tasks started out from self-introductions and greetings to other participants, to creating backgrounds to use during the virtual meeting, and then to reviewing and commenting on substance use prevention related reading materials. With the gradual lead-up to substantive content, youths were able to gain more background knowledge on thematic areas, which they could refer back to frequently when discussing evidence-based drug use prevention.

In line with the virtual format, another digital platform was used to engage the youth in pre-Forum activities. Each task was designated with a 'wall' of its own, set up to not only share information with youth and receive submissions from them, but also to serve as grounds of interaction where youths could comment and react to what others posted.

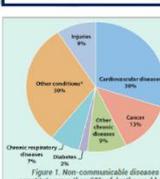


Questions or Aha! Moments from youths on reading materials

Understanding Substance Use Prevention

Introduction: Substance Use

Epidemiology of Substance Use



Health, Safety and Well-being Are Related to National Economic Growth

Substance use disorders contribute significantly to global illness, disability, and death.

- Loss of life due to overdose, traffic crashes, suicide, trauma, violence and other non-communicable diseases have links to substance use.
- Injection drug use (IDU) is a significant means of transmission for serious communicable diseases such as hepatitis and HIV/AIDS.

The former Executive Director of UNODC, Yury Fedotov, notes that

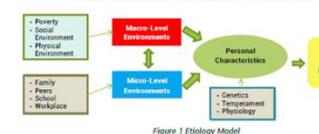
Understanding Substance Use Prevention

Evidence-based Prevention Strategies

Infancy and Early Childhood	Middle Childhood	Early Adolescence	Adolescence and Adulthood
Key Developmental Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of warm and safe attachment to caregivers Age-appropriate language skills, as well as 		Key Resilience Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caregivers who are responsive and provide stimulation Children who learn how to be effective in having needs met, are easy to soothe, and are not temperamental 	

Environmental Influences

How do the Interactions between Personal Characteristics and Micro- and Macro-Level Environments Work?



MICRO-LEVEL INFLUENCE

PARENTS AND FAMILIES:

- Nurture children and keep them safe
- Instill social and emotional regulatory skills
- Teach children about sharing and reciprocity
- Reinforce accepted norms, values, and age- and gender-specific behaviors of the community/society

Parenting and family continue to be important through adolescence when youth have more autonomy and opportunities for risk behaviors.

AHA!

As someone working in the youth sector in _____ one of which is substance prevention- these figures that were presented do not shock me at all.

From a macro perspective, the 269 million individuals who inject drugs disturb me significantly, making me reflect on the portion of that amount of the _____ setting. Our role as representatives of our country is amplified together, motivated with a collective goal that needs to have a call to action.

Secondly, the study and knowledge of epidemiology are essential to our fellow youth as every individual should act on health, safety, and well-being.

I would love to know the statistics in our age!

Food for Thought

After reading, there are a couple of things that stood out to me:

I suppose that the mentioned vulnerability to substance use is connected to the socioeconomic environment of certain groups. I think it would not be in vain to, while educating others on the dangers of substance use, also work on those outward factors (finding jobs, creating safe spaces for social activities etc.)

Another AHA moment for me was the fact that 11 million people inject substances, and of those who do that 7 million are affected by lethal conditions of HIV and hepatitis C. That means that almost 75% of people who abuse substances in this way will end up with serious conditions due to the lack of clean syringes, I recon. I think a good start to solving this issue is not to stop people from abusing drugs, but to firstly focus on those who might get infected and provide them with safe and clean syringes. This could be a slippery slope of course, because to solve one you have to solve the other, I guess these

Question!

As per the Etiology Model, Substance use is a result of interactions between environmental factors and the characteristics of individuals, I would like to learn more about this perspective. If we bring change in one variable can we positively influence the other factors leading to Substance abuse.

What Exactly are Evidence Based Interventions, and how can we employ them in our field of expertise.

Injection drug use (IDU) is a significant means of transmission for serious communicable diseases such as hepatitis and HIV/AIDS, is there a way we can collaborate with agencies to get a more holistic approach?

Thankyou.

Interactive activities directed towards Strategic Planning

Commitment and efforts made by youths in familiarizing themselves with the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention certainly paid off, because youths were able to jump right into substantive discussions. Throughout the discussions, the importance of the science and evidence behind drug use prevention was stressed highly.

“We have to let go of our ideas (instinct) of what works, and **let science guide us** as to what works effectively!”



Each day was scheduled to involve interactive activities aimed to help youths understand substance use prevention and the science behind it. Even the seemingly innocent 'Life Raft Game' held deeper meanings beyond the superficial 'What is the most important item to save?', as it was later revealed that the process of decision-making and of reaching consensus within a group was actually the main focus of the activity. Just like drug policy making decisions, numerous factors needed to be taken into account during the activity: everyone's (stakeholders) views, the current or potential value (benefit) of the item (program, policy), etc.



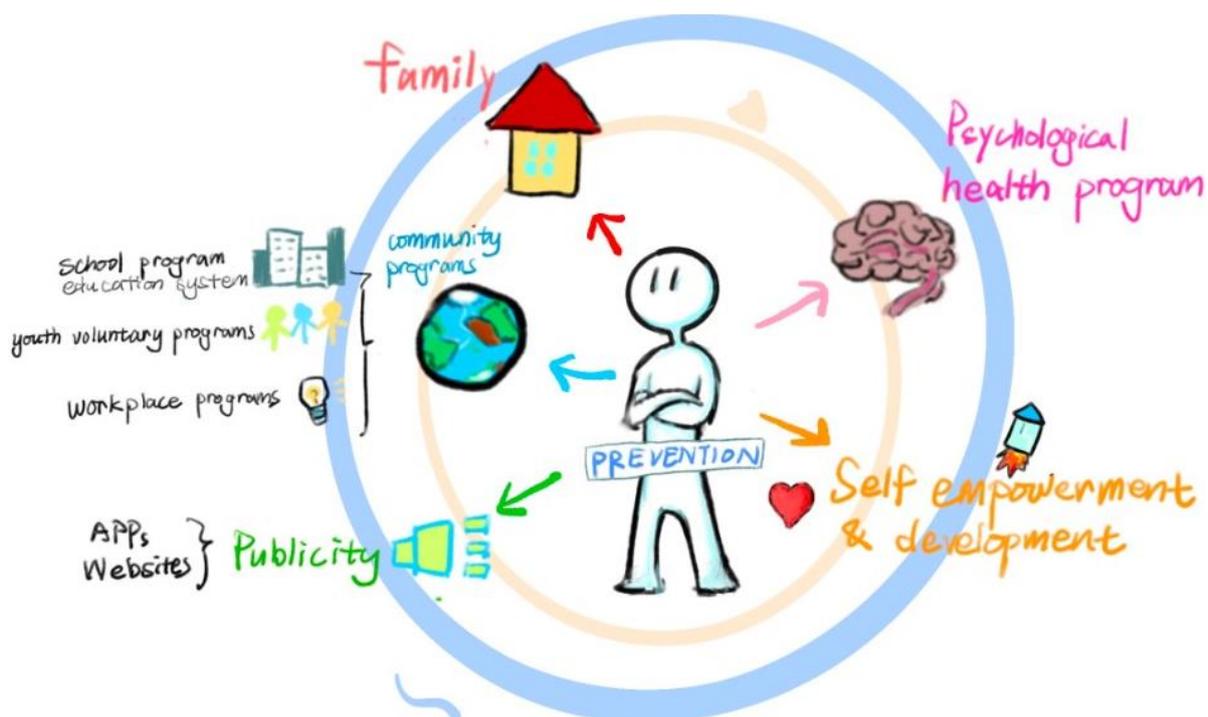
Youths also role-played in Debate Activities on topics related to drug use prevention. Again, they were broken out into different sessions to discuss the topic at more depth before starting the debate. This activity not only provided youth the chance to share knowledge and experience with others, but also subtly trained them to concisely and clearly convey their opinions to an audience (in preparation of creating their CND statement).

Youths also brainstormed drug use prevention strategies in small groups, and then elaborated them into measurable goals. Through these activities and the discussions that followed, common misconceptions that youths had were cleared up. It was underlined multiple times that scare tactics are not appropriate approaches, and that sports or media alone are not sufficient to be considered prevention activities.



Youths were surprised to learn that drug use prevention strategies or programs don't necessarily need to be directly related to substance use or its harmful effects. Training parents or caregivers with adequate skills to properly nurture infants, educating children and youths with pro-social attitudes, cognitive functions, emotional regulatory functions, to name a few, are powerful protective factors against substance use, even though these programs may not be promoted as drug use prevention programs.

The multi-faceted aspects of prevention were also discussed, and youths grasped that various factors need to be considered in conjunction to one another for successful prevention strategies. Not one single prevention program can be fruitful on its own, but gentle interventions to multiple areas can build up to be comprehensive support systems. In this context, youths were asked to visualize what prevention looks like, and here is what they created in just 30 minutes!





Youth Statement 2021

delivered at the 64th Session of the CND

Excellencies, influential representatives, ladies and gentlemen, a pleasant day to all.

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, we call on Member States to continue to implement evidence-based substance prevention, especially for children and youth that include safe spaces, effective caregiving and continuous support.

Prevention strategies must be multifaceted with many factors. No one single, stand-alone program will be effective in isolation. Prevention should be inclusive. No matter the age, situation, thoughts or abilities everyone in our society deserves the chance to benefit from science-based prevention programs. Prevention should also follow a humanitarian approach, not stigmatizing or labeling people based on their circumstances.

We call on Member States to focus on community based multi-component initiatives that address prevention at the micro and macro levels, especially concerning the lasting impact COVID-19 will have at local and international levels. We need Member States to devote adequate attention toward solving the problems of poverty, lack of access to healthcare or education, and issues of inequality and discrimination at the largest scale at the same time as supporting programs that train caregivers, support social services, retain young people in schools and enhance skill development and positive mental health.

Effective substance use prevention strategically meets the needs of all people based on developmental stages, delivered across various settings. It must be voluntary. It should be interactive and fun for the participants. It should create safe environments for children in schools, homes and in the community. It must include effective communication campaigns and the development of strong support networks and friendships.

We ask Member States to pay attention to health literacy. In particular it is critical to analyze the impact of social media, how it may be harmful to young people by promoting risky behaviors and how it might be used to increase effective substance use prevention messages.

Youth Statement 2021

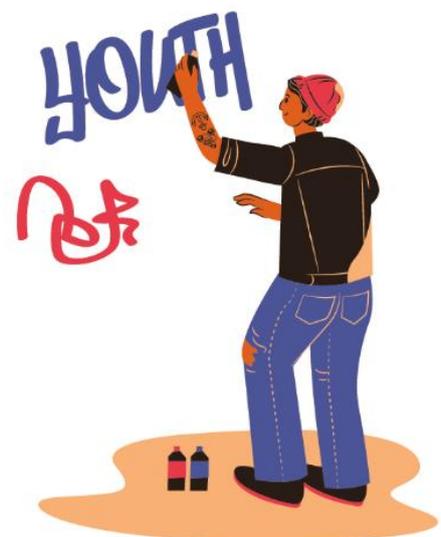
delivered at the 64th Session of the CND

Increased funding and political support are crucial for prevention worldwide because even when considerable funding is spent on treatment, only one in eight people worldwide have access to this treatment. If we invest more diligently in prevention, we can save as much as 10 dollars for every dollar spent and reduce substance use worldwide.

Youth empowerment is the key, we call on Member States to include at least 2 youth members on a national level committee that decides how prevention initiatives are researched, developed, implemented and evaluated. We believe that everyone has a role in drug prevention, and that for us to succeed in this goal, we must do it together by creating opportunities for success and empowering youth in a meaningful way. You must include youth as part of the process, raise youth voices and provide more platforms, opportunities, and positions for youth to actively contribute to policy-making decisions, supportive services, and drug prevention strategies. Using our shared effort and passion, we will create a drug-free environment for children and the generations to come.

The COVID-19 pandemic shall not affect our progress. We implore Member States to support effective, evidence-based prevention. We can all work together to build safe, compassionate communities not only for us, but also for future generations to come.

Our voices are strong, and we must be heard in the present and remain impactful in the future.



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 youths 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 3,151 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 late February to mid-April 2021.

Channels	New Followers	Engagements	Media Views	Posts
Twitter	88	1,355	1,675	15
Facebook	576	846	4,844	14
Instagram	80	950	6,110	77
SUM	744	3,151	12,629	106

Next steps forward...

Although the Youth Forum has concluded, youths will continue participating in events alongside UNODC and the Youth Initiative. Youths are invited to establish individual Strategic Plans to implement in their own communities by applying what was learnt and gained from the Youth Forum. Monthly sessions will be held with participating youths to share their progress, discuss hardships and provide guidance if needed. Youths will also be invited to create and publish a Youth Magazine, aimed to provide youths with a creative platform to share and promote their endeavors in implementing substance use prevention and health promotion activities within their communities.

A key image that came up various times during the Youth Forum was the 'butterfly effect'. Gentle yet resilient prevention outreaches not only contribute directly to drug use prevention itself, but also open the window for amplification of such positive influences that ripple out from one person to another. UNODC hopes that the Youth Forum 2021 gave the experience and stimuli for youths to begin their metamorphosis; so that one day, they too flutter their own wings to spread positive influences in their homes and communities.



Every person we might help to better themselves could one day help others. This butterfly effect should drive us to inspire and empower others in need.

- Youth Participant 2021



Youth Forum 2021 Participants

Name	Country
Henri Fero [#]	Albania
Marc Bessa	Andorra
Chloe Bernard	Australia
Dechen Choden	Bhutan
Radoslav Kanchev	Bulgaria
Zheneviev Kirova	Bulgaria
Doriana Stoyanova	Bulgaria
Erika Dupuis	Canada
Yunyi Zhang	Canada
Jianing Cai	China
Pengchao Wang	China
Maria Acevedo	Colombia
Reina Brabenec	Croatia
Pamela Viteri	Ecuador
Rodaina AboElenin	Egypt
Carlos Vasquez	El Salvador
Juan Vargas	El Salvador
Nathaniel Dordoye	Ghana
Richmond Koranteng [#]	Ghana
Karthika Pillai	India
Saptadipa Mallick	India
Alon Webber-Zvik	Israel
Celina Wallace	Jamaica
Khalia Marner	Jamaica
Amanda Slew	Jamaica
Daniyar Sadykov	Kyrgyzstan
Begimai Gaparova	Kyrgyzstan
Nicolas Marxer	Liechtenstein
Nur Aishah Jasmine Mohd Nasir	Malaysia
Nur Raihana Zakaria	Malaysia
Diksha Ramdonee	Mauritius
Carmen Valeria Hernandez Aguirre	Mexico
Carlos Rodrigo Alexis Reyna Montreal [#]	Mexico

Mirna Yaritza Juarez Delgado	Mexico
Galbadrakh Erdenetsogt	Mongolia
Raima Manjate [#]	Mozambique
Sarah Fabricius Blom Jul-Rasmussen	Norway
Eva Djordjevic	Norway
Junaid Ahmed	Pakistan
Alexandra Bravo Schroth	Peru
Emmanuel Mirus Ponon	Philippines
Inês Jorge	Portugal
Luisa Correia [#]	Portugal
Maxim Polyatus	Russia
Elizaveta Petrova	Russia
Veronika Petrova	Russia
Roaa Alshedokhi	Saudi Arabia
Ahmed Alayoubi	Saudi Arabia
Mina Trajković	Serbia
Zi Fei Lim	Singapore
Petra Pauerova	Slovakia
Nipuni Abeydeera	Sri Lanka
Moayad Dawoud	Sudan
Basheer Al Refai	Syria
Manizha Usmonova	Tajikistan
Tinnaput Tosri	Thailand
Kwanchanok Phoninhom	Thailand
Merve Aluclu	Turkey
Aslıhan Yesir	Turkey
Valentina Rendon	USA
Alberto Matheus	Venezuela
Samuel Linares	Venezuela

Please note that this youth was not able to participate due to conflicting personal schedules and priorities.

Acknowledgments

UNODC would like to take this opportunity to extend its gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation and the Sovereign Order of Malta for their support in funding the UNODC Youth Initiative. With their continued support, we have been able to connect youths from around the globe and empower them to become active leaders in drug use prevention.

While the Youth Forum 2021 was fully virtual due to preventative measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, UNODC wanted to acknowledge the significant commitment that youth made to participate, and to encourage youths' enthusiasm and motivation. Through the generous support of our sponsors, we were able to send each youth a small "Youth Engagement Package" that included pens, notepads, posters, a face mask and other items to support their substance use prevention work going forward. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Permanent Missions that kindly offered to deliver packages to youth participants, as the global pandemic also impacted international deliveries.

Next, UNODC would like to thank the following countries for their nominations for this year's Youth Forum: Albania, Andorra, Australia, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ghana, India, Israel, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, and Venezuela. We appreciate your support in identifying such outstanding young leaders and making it your priority to do so despite challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are looking forward to continued support and nominations from Member States in the coming years, to provide youths with a stage and voice in health and drug policy, and to empower youth leaders in countering the world drug problem.



Thanks to the generous support of
the **Russian Federation** and the **Sovereign Order of Malta**

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 drugs 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 policy makers.

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 youths are nominated by Member States, they participate in the Youth Forum in their personal capacity.

When UNODC commences the nomination process for Youth Forum 2022, 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 youths to participate in Youth Forum 2021, 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 until Youth Forum 2022!



Illustration by Saptadipa Mallick (YF 2021 Participant)