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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of
action pertaining to the situation of social groups: World
Programme of Action for Youth

Policies and programmes involving youth

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

> The present report is submitted pursuant to Commission for Social Development resolution 57/1. It provides an update on the implementation of the resolution through an analysis of three thematic issues impacting young people, namely, youth poverty alleviation; the digital global economy; and juvenile justice, and youth and the law. Progress and developments in those three areas, including impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, are highlighted. Included in the analysis of the three thematic issues are research, policies and initiatives undertaken by Member States, United Nations entities and youth-led or youth-focused organizations as part of the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report also contains an overview of youth engagement at the United Nations, and concludes with key recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

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I. Introduction

1.   The Commission for Social Development, in its resolution 57/1 on policies and programmes involving youth, requested the Secretary-General to submit at its fifty-ninth session a comprehensive report on the implementation of the resolution, including progress on the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, as well as the linkages to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2.   The present report includes information received from Member States,[1] relevant specialized agencies, funds and programmes, the regional commissions, and youth-led and youth-focused organizations,[2] as well as information based on research conducted by academic entities, Member States and intergovernmental institutions.

3.   The present report is focused on three thematic topics that are relevant to young people and have not been addressed in recent reports. First, the topic of youth poverty alleviation is examined, including, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the drivers of youth poverty, its impacts on well-being, and policy responses and initiatives. Second, a broader approach is taken in order to examine structural impacts arising from longer-term trends of globalization and technological transformation that have contributed to young people's vulnerability to socioeconomic shocks resulting from COVID-19, and that offer opportunities to build back better from the pandemic. In the third thematic area, youth development is linked to criminal justice and interactions between young people and law enforcement, and efforts to build trust and security through non-coercive measures are examined.

4.   In each thematic analysis, activities undertaken by Member States, United Nations entities, and youth-led or youth-focused organizations that contribute to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda are highlighted. The past two years have revealed existing long-term trends exacerbating the acute challenge of COVID-19, as well as successes that can be scaled up or replicated. The report also includes an overview of youth engagement at the United Nations. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission in order to meet the present challenge and build back better.

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[1] Armenia, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, Haiti, Italy, Mauritania, Mexico, Myanmar, Peru, Poland, Serbia, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Uruguay.

[2] Input was solicited from the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, which is led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as permanent Co-Chair; a representative of the Youth Caucus as a Co-Chair representing youth-led and youth-focused organizations; and a rotating Co-Chair (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for 2019/20, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for 2020/21). The following Network members contributed input: the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the International Telecommunication Union, the Major Group for Children and Youth, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the United Nations Population Fund.

II. Implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A. Youth poverty alleviation

5.   Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 account for 20 per cent of the global population in extreme poverty living on an income of below $1.90 per day.[3] Extreme youth poverty is highly concentrated, as more than three quarters of these young people live in sub-Saharan Africa. While, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the estimated number of youth living in extreme poverty was expected to decline by 2030, the consequences of the pandemic pose additional challenges to reaching that objective. The newly poor will likely be concentrated in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, areas that were already experiencing high poverty rates before the pandemic.[4] Furthermore, extreme poverty rates are on the rise in fragile and conflict-affected situations,[5] and it is estimated that more than 600 million youth today reside in fragile and conflict-affected countries.[6]

6.   Youth poverty stems, in part, from lack of access to decent jobs. Worldwide, 13 per cent of working youth live in extreme poverty, while 17 per cent live in moderate poverty, that is, on an income of below $3.20 per day. Globally, youth are also more likely than adults to be in informal employment or unemployed.[7] In particular, as the increase in unemployment linked to the pandemic is set to exceed that induced by the 2009 global financial crisis, youth risk being disproportionately impacted by job losses resulting from measures imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19.[8] The lack of decent jobs thus both contributes to youth poverty and puts youth at greater risk of bearing the negative economic consequences of shocks such as pandemics.

7.   Monetary poverty and unemployment represent only the economic dimension of youth poverty. Youth living in poverty may also experience several deprivations in areas other than their individual standard of living, including education and health. The combined lack of economic means, education and health make young people likely to remain trapped in poverty over the course of their life. In this regard, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal target 1.2, Member States are required to reduce, at least by half, the proportion of people living in poverty in all its dimensions by 2030. Currently, there are 1.3 billion multidimensionally poor people, and half of that group is under the age of 18.[9]

8.   Importantly, youth poverty and deprivations also stem from social exclusion. For example, youth poverty is a highly gendered phenomenon and there is a lack of progress in closing the gap between young men and young women not in employment,

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[3] International Fund for Agricultural Development, *2019 Rural Development Report: Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth* (Rome, 2019).

[4] Andy Sumner, Chris Hoy and Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez, "Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty", Working Paper No. 2020/43 (Helsinki, United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, 2020).

[5] Paul Corral and others, *Fragility and Conflict: On the Front Lines of the Fight against Poverty* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2020).

[6] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Youth Strategy 2014–2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future* (New York, 2014).

[7] International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the Future of Jobs* (Geneva, 2020).

[8] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Responding to COVID-19 and Recovering Better" (2020).

[9] Sabina Alkire and others, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019: Illuminating Inequalities* (UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2019).

education or training.[10] Legal frameworks also continue to exacerbate gender disparities, with 104 countries preventing the employment of women in certain jobs.[11] Furthermore, while girls on average outperform boys in years of schooling,[12] about 90 per cent of men and women worldwide still have some reservations regarding women being as good or competent as men in domains such as employment, education and politics.[13] Structural and relational barriers, particularly discrimination, thus make some youth more likely to face poverty and deprivations. It follows that social inclusion is necessary to eradicate poverty and deprivations among all youth, but such inclusion will require structural measures that go beyond individual empowerment.

1. Policies and programmes to reduce youth poverty according to national definitions

9.   Poverty is multifaceted, and addressing youth poverty thus requires integrated policy and programming solutions that provide income support and income generation opportunities; equal access to services for all youth; and the eradication of discrimination to create equal opportunities for individual empowerment and development.

10.   With regard to income support for individual development, Member States have been focusing on providing funding, grants and scholarships to reduce school dropout rates among youth. For example, in Mexico, welfare grants assist youth in upper secondary education and support their progression to higher education. A welfare grant for families, also provided in Mexico, situates youth in a financially supported family unit, maximizing their ability to continue their education. Turkey has been following a similar approach by providing scholarships and grants to youth in education. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the "Kickstart jobs" scheme funds work placements for young people for a period of six months.

11.   Providing technical and vocational education and training can also help address multidimensional poverty by making youth more employable. In Turkey, the Ministry of Youth and Sport seeks to maximize access to skills training through free personal development and fine art workshops at local youth centres. Mexico has established skills laboratories to deliver digital workshops for youth while teaching broader social awareness, including human rights, gender and interculturality. Similarly, the Sacúdete strategy of Colombia provides a mix of courses, workshops, innovation laboratories and exhibitions that reached 4,598 young people via 6 centres in 2019, a reach that is set to expand to 140 centres by 2022. Civil society organizations have also been leveraging skills development and training. For example, Jeunes volontaires pour l'environnement (Young Volunteers for the Environment) in Togo has raised youth awareness regarding the employment opportunities associated with environmental protection and climate change. In addition, the initiative advocates for gender equality during its sustainability-themed workshops in schools, communities and summer camps.

12.   Capacity-building initiatives can improve institutional settings. For example, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) challenges biases through its eTrade for Women Network by providing women, including young

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[10] Rosina Gammarano, "Labour market access – a persistent challenge for youth around the world", Spotlight on Work Statistics, No. 5 (ILO, 2019).

[11] World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2018* (Washington, D.C., 2018).

[12] Ciro Avitable and others, *Insights from Disaggregating the Human Capital Index* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2018).

[13] UNDP, "Tackling social norms: A game changer for gender inequalities", 2020 Human Development Perspectives.

women, with the tools and training to thrive in e-commerce, offering them a financial autonomy that they would often not be able to attain otherwise. Also focusing on e-commerce, the UNCTAD eFounders Fellowship Programme assists young entrepreneurs in transitioning to a digitized economy, making entrepreneurship more inclusive in scope. Along with the Conference's Automated System for Customs Data and e-business facilitation, these initiatives help create a financial environment conducive to youth entrepreneurship and improve youth employment prospects. Widening youth access to skills training can maximize the impact and reach of capacity-building initiatives.

13.   The removal of entry qualifications, exemplified by the skills development courses of the National Youth Corps of Sri Lanka, provides youth with further vocational training opportunities, which can increase their employability. In Myanmar, the design of skills workshops is aligned with national qualification frameworks, producing skilled, qualified workers. By providing a standardized set of skills, the workshops signal to employers the competencies that the youth have acquired.

14.   Effective strategies to improve the living standards of all youth must enhance gender equality and young women's empowerment. While economic changes can help to change gender norms, those norms themselves play a critical role in reducing or increasing economic inequalities. Earnings in adulthood can be reduced by as much as 9 per cent as a result of child marriage,[14] perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty. The Global Programme to End Child Marriage, developed by the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is working to share information and services related to sexual and reproductive health with more than 7.7 million adolescent girls.[15] Young women with children exhibit the highest rate of early school departure, with a dropout rate of 48 per cent for young women with children, compared with 15 per cent for young women without children.[16] Given that educating youth about sexual and reproductive health can be a key step in the empowerment of young women and the advancement of gender equality, Marie Stopes International China, in collaboration with UNFPA in China, offered over 6,000 students digital livestreaming of comprehensive sexuality education in early 2020. Through the programme, young people learned about their reproductive health, in a similar way to the UNFPA "My body, my life, my world!" strategy.

2.   **Inclusion of youth in mechanisms and policymaking processes relating to social protection**

15.   While social protection provides an effective means of lifting youth out of poverty, social protection policies can inadvertently exclude youth from participating in programmes and schemes. Youth might not be in a position to access contributory social protection schemes as a result of their age or informal employment. For example, of 98 countries providing unemployment protection, 82 use contributory social insurance schemes as a mechanism for periodic cash benefits.[17] Social protection responses to COVID-19 have also been broad but, to date, often lack

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[14] Quentin Wodon and others, *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report* (Washington, D.C., World Bank and International Center for Research on Women, 2017).

[15] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "UNICEF and UNFPA renew multi-country initiative to protect millions of girls from child marriage", press release, 10 March 2020.

[16] Juan Chacaltana, Sara Elder and Miso Lee, "Youth transitions and lifetime trajectory", Employment Working Paper, No. 253 (Geneva, ILO, 2019).

[17] *Promoting Inclusion through Social Protection: Report on the World Social Situation 2018* (United Nations publication, 2018).

youth-specific policies. Member States may wish to consider how universal schemes can offer inclusive social protection systems that are accessible to youth and have the greatest poverty reduction potential.[18]

16.   While youth engagement in decision-making is central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, policymaking processes still largely treat youth as dependants. For example, consultative processes for the development of employment policies often overlook youth, with governments consulting youth organizations for only 34 out of 485 policy documents, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) database on youth employment policies and legislation (YouthPOL).[19] Member States can seek youth's perspectives on policymaking by leveraging youth forums. For example, young participants in regional forums and national youth meetings in Peru informed the design of a national youth policy. Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations initiative "Coping with COVID-19: voices of young agripreneurs" for rural youth (in Guatemala, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda) used online consultations to record and broadcast young people's COVID-19 related challenges and put forth a series of concrete recommendations from them.

17.   Youth-led organizations represent key partners for effectively implementing policies and programmes. However, only 3.1 per cent of the lead agencies responsible for the implementation of youth employment policies are civil society organizations and thus fall into the YouthPOL database category for youth organizations. Member States could benefit from the meaningful engagement of youth-led organizations in the design and implementation of policies and programmes to ensure that national protection systems leave no youth behind.

18.   Access to social protection programmes and schemes, and overall engagement in policymaking, remain uneven among youth, depending on their ethnicity, disabilities, residential status and gender. Measures that foster social inclusion are therefore key to eliminating inequalities among youth. Projects such as Nexus (2019–2023) in Turkey, a collaboration between the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Education and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, aim to enhance the social inclusion of young refugees through education and extracurricular activities.[20] The project's formal vocational training and career guidance provide opportunities for social inclusion and employability. This holistic and intersectoral approach, which also includes cultural exchange, can foster a sustainable reduction in poverty and the effective engagement of the most vulnerable youth in societies.

19.   Regarding social support during the COVID-19 pandemic, the expansion of access to health care, including mental health care, has been essential. Social isolation and stress associated with the pandemic have increased the need for youth mental health services. Interventions include the Youth Action Hubs initiative of UNCTAD, which offers mental health tips as informal support, and the "We-Connect" trauma and counselling call centre for those experiencing anxiety, depression or stress as a result of COVID-19, established by the youth-led non-governmental organization Local Youth Corner Cameroon. Mental health support can also strengthen young people's ability to engage fully in employment and personal development.

20.   Other Member States, including El Salvador, have used the pandemic to review their policies to ensure that they are sufficiently prioritizing comprehensive support to holistic youth development, including for rural youth, young women and other

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[18] *Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific: Poorly Protected* (United Nations publication, 2018).

[19] Available at https://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/youth-pol/lang--en/index.htm.

[20] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, *Support to Refugees and Host Communities (SRHC) Cluster in Turkey: Roadmap into the Future* (Bonn and Eschborn, 2019).

marginalized youth. El Salvador is also ensuring that its policies position youth as strategic actors in their own development rather than simply as beneficiaries.

B. Digital global economy

21.   In addition to the acute challenges resulting from the pandemic and its socioeconomic aftershocks, existing long-term trends in globalization and technology were already having significant impacts on the lives and livelihoods of young people. Globalization and technological change are two separate, though deeply linked, trends. Both offer opportunities and risks, with the potential to increase productivity and overall gross domestic product, but also to change the distribution of income in a way that exacerbates inequality, particularly for youth.

22.   One way to understand the long-term impacts of technology and globalization is to examine the distribution of income between workers (labour) and owners of businesses (capital). Globally, the labour share of national income has been declining since the 1980s, with a corresponding rise in the share of national income captured by capital, a recent phenomenon given that, historically, the labour share had held steady. Analysis from the International Monetary Fund shows a decline in the labour share of national income in developed economies, from around 55 per cent in 1975 to around 50 per cent immediately before the global financial crisis in 2008. The labour share has recovered by 1.3 per cent since then. In developing economies, the decline started later, with labour accounting for around 39 per cent of national income in the early 1990s, a share that declined to around 35 per cent in the mid-2000s and has recovered in part, to 37 per cent, since then.[21] Econometric analysis shows that international trade and digital technologies have been major drivers of this change.[22]

23.   Globalization has significantly reduced inequality among countries, decreased absolute poverty and increased the share of labour income held by the 50 per cent of workers with the lowest earnings globally, even at a time when labour's share of income overall has declined.[23] Within countries, the data suggest that the productivity gains from globalization and technological advancements are disproportionately benefiting owners and shareholders rather than workers. Though this trend is economy-wide, young people are much less likely to have accumulated capital and are therefore more reliant on labour for their livelihoods. For example, in the United States of America, only 6.8 per cent of household wealth is held by people under the age of 40.[24] The ongoing trend for a decline in the share of national income held by labour therefore disproportionately affects young people's livelihoods and ability to accumulate capital over time.

24.   While the labour share of national income is declining, the distribution of labour income is becoming more unequal. Many developed economies have experienced a polarization of the labour market, in which incomes at the top end of the distribution have increased significantly, while incomes in the middle have declined as middle-income jobs in manufacturing and routinized service jobs have contracted.[25] In a worrying sign, this effect is now spreading to more developing countries, including through a process of premature deindustrialization as the share of middle-income

[21] Mai Chi Dao and others, "Why is labor receiving a smaller share of global income? Theory and empirical evidence", Working Paper No. 17/169 (International Monetary Fund, 2017).

[22] Ha Thi Thanh Doan and Guanghua Wan, "Globalization and the labor share in national income", Working Paper No. 639, (Tokyo, Asian Development Bank Institute, 2017).

[23] ILO, "The global labour income share and distribution" (Geneva, 2019).

[24] Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System of the United States of America, "Distribution of household wealth in the US since 1989", Distributional Financial Accounts. Available at: https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/z1/dataviz/dfa/distribute/chart/index.html.

[25] ILO, "The global labour income share and distribution".

manufacturing jobs is peaking at a much lower rate, lessening the opportunities for youth in developing countries to secure decent work and better wages.

25.   Research still indicates that openness to global markets and the utilization of technology have historically led to overall growth in jobs and gross domestic product, even if the benefits of that growth are not equally distributed. There is, however, significant uncertainty regarding whether the rapid pace of the development of artificial intelligence and robotics may result in a different outcome, in which economic growth is decoupled from job growth because of increasing automation. What is already clear is that these changes are disproportionately impacting youth.

26.   Across the age distribution, the risk of automation is highest among jobs held by youth. This effect holds across low-, middle- and high-income countries, though in some high-income countries the probability of automation is more than 30 per cent higher for the youngest workers than for workers in their 40s.[26] A key driver of this phenomenon is that it is more costly for firms to terminate workers who have been with the firm for a long time than newer workers, who are disproportionately younger. It is less costly not to hire new workers. Another driver is that automation disproportionately displaces lower-skilled jobs and tasks, which are more likely to be at the entry level and thus held by young people.

27.   The impact of reduced opportunities for youth can have long-lasting effects. Entry-level positions are critical for youth to access formal employment and provide them with additional skills for their future career. A loss of entry-level opportunities is more likely to result in longer periods of unemployment or structural unemployment for youth while making better career pathways more difficult to access, a phenomenon known as labour-market scarring. The loss of entry-level opportunities, therefore, represents the loss not only of jobs but also of potential and of hope for a better future.

28.   As automation reduces the competitive advantage of lower labour costs, the technological transformation is also changing the face of globalization. The return of production to high-income countries, known as reshoring, as a result of artificial intelligence and robotics having defrayed labour costs and in order to avoid global value chain disruptions, is emerging as a potential trajectory in the post-COVID-19 recovery.[27] Additional concerns about ensuring adequate domestic production of strategic or medical industries in the light of COVID-19 will further reinforce that trend. Such reinforcement may decrease opportunities for youth in developing countries as production moves overseas, without generating many new long-term jobs because of the reliance on automation.

29.   The emerging digital global economy also offers opportunities for young people. Digital connectivity can enable new products to be created or expand access to new markets, as well as generate new jobs. The quality of opportunities, however, is highly dependent on the level of digital skills, entrepreneurship opportunities and access to financing. While the digital marketplace can enable start-ups to reach customers from around the world, it has also resulted in the rise of large digital platforms in which workers are treated as individual contractors without access to the same kinds of social protection or employment protections as employees. These are often called "gig workers" and a disproportionately high number of them are young people.[28]

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[26] ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the Future of Jobs*, (Geneva, 2020).

[27] *World Investment Report 2020: International Production beyond the Pandemic* (United Nations publication, 2020).

[28] Cyrille Schwellnus and others, "Gig economy platforms: boon or bane?", Economics Department Working Paper, No. 1550 (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2019).

30. The rise of gig workers is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, as it can provide opportunities for youth to generate income flexibly. However, the conditions of work can range widely, with many gig workers excluded from traditional employment protections, social protection systems and health-care coverage. In some cases, the double-sided network effects of digital platforms evolve towards monopolies, leaving gig workers, especially young gig workers, with very little bargaining power to obtain better working conditions from the platforms.

31. The discussion about protecting the rights of gig workers has become more acute given the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many gig workers have experienced a significant loss of income and, in some cases, loss of health-care coverage as well. Though some jurisdictions have introduced ad hoc transfer payments for gig workers who have experienced a significant loss of income or provided publicly funded health care related to COVID-19, a longer-term solution is needed to ensure that social protection systems, including unemployment insurance and health care, are universal and adequately cover all workers.

1. Policy responses

32. In the light of these economic changes, Governments have adopted a range of policies to manage the effects of globalization and digitization. Countries such as Bulgaria, Colombia, Myanmar, Serbia and Sri Lanka have considered aspects of these issues in their national youth policies. However, in addition to youth policies and strategies, the effects of globalization and technological transformation on youth also need to be taken into account in policy instruments that target the broader population.

33. The most common form of policy response from Member States is education and training. Armenia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Myanmar, Peru, Poland, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia and Turkey have utilized education and training to manage the impacts of globalization and digitization. Examples of these policies include training in computer programming and other digital skills to empower more youth to compete in the digital economy. People with a higher level of education, as well as those with a higher level of technological competency, are less likely to experience negative economic and social effects arising from globalization and technological transformation. United Nations system entities, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, have also supported Member States in implementing these policies. Some programmes include specific outreach to young women and girls, who have been underrepresented in technology industries. The inclusion of women and girls in the technology sector can be further mainstreamed.

34. However, education and training are not enough. Many governments have also implemented policies related to labour and employment, innovation and entrepreneurship. These include policies that promote youth employment in traditional industries and programmes, such as youth innovation challenges, workshops on entrepreneurship and innovation, and co-working spaces and incubators to enable youth to participate in new industries and grow businesses as an alternative to formal employment. Collaborative partnerships between countries and United Nations system entities, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, have implemented such programmes on the ground. Youth employment and innovation programmes can build on improvements in education and training and can act as complementary policies that together translate ideas and skills into enterprises. Youth employment and innovation programmes can be further scaled up to reach youth potentially affected by technological disruption and changing patterns of globalization.

35.   In the development of policies and programmes for youth, the needs of vulnerable and marginalized youth should be carefully examined and considered. It is encouraging that United Nations system entities, in partnership with Member States, have developed programmes to support youth who are at risk of being left behind. Examples include the support of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for young women entrepreneurs, and the work of FAO with rural youth and agripreneurs. ILO has also promoted minimum standards and decent work through its Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth.

36.   Given the complexities of the changes and the diversity of youth, there is no "one size fits all" solution. Policies that enhance skills and opportunities for young people are an important area of investment for governments, and infrastructure continues to be a foundation upon which digital technology relies. Policies that provide a safety net for youth are also important, given that youth are particularly vulnerable to the risks of structural economic shifts. In the development of youth-specific and broader labour-market or innovation policies, the meaningful engagement of youth is critical in tailoring the most effective response, given the specific needs of various youth populations.

2.   Innovative co-creation

37.   One area that has emerged as promising is innovation co-creation by youth and governments, which taps into digital global markets and helps to improve government. Co-creation refers to a multi-stakeholder approach in which different entities work together to innovate a product, service or process. In the context of youth and innovation, it can refer to government engagement with youth to achieve a shared objective in a mutually beneficial way, often through collaboration with, and the growth of, tech start-up ecosystems.

38.   In the recently published *World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda*,[29] the potential of frontier technologies as a platform to catalyse social entrepreneurship for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is acknowledged, and it is recommended that governments "help young social entrepreneurs partner with representatives of the academic sector, the private sector, the public sector, and community organizations to address urgent development issues through innovation and the use of new technologies." One way in which Member States have been implementing this recommendation is through the co-creation of innovation.

39.   An example of government co-creation with youth-led start-ups is the Citypreneurs programme, a partnership between city governments, investors, start-ups, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Development Programme. Citypreneurs was initiated in the Republic of Korea, where young start-up leaders were engaged to help solve Seoul's sustainable development challenges through technological solutions. In turn, Citypreneurs expanded the ecosystem of innovation by building up the capacity of youth to grow start-ups aligned with the Goals and served as a platform to connect innovators, investors and policymakers. Successful start-ups arising from this programme have included artificial-intelligence-driven interventions to support children with disabilities and improve the efficiency of urban renewable energy generation, thereby helping to generate opportunities for youth while also supporting governments in achieving the Goals through innovation.

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[29] United Nations publication, 2020.

40.   Generation Unlimited, initiated by the United Nations Children's Fund, is another example of the co-creation of innovation. It brings together governments, United Nations system entities, the private sector and, most importantly, youth themselves to create innovative solutions that can meet the forthcoming youth employment challenge. Generation Unlimited was launched at the national level in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and Senegal, with a view to its expansion to additional countries. Its approach is grounded in the meaningful engagement of youth as equal stakeholders, and in stakeholders working with youth, not just for youth.

C.   Juvenile justice, and youth and the law

41.   Every year, a significant number of youth enter into conflict with the law. This includes involuntary interactions with law enforcement officials that may lead to arrests, as well as incarceration in juvenile or adult justice systems, often with severe negative consequences for individuals and societies. Recent tensions between youth and authorities around the globe, along with the spread of COVID-19, have brought additional attention to the need to reimagine the relationship between youth and the law.

42.   While global official data are extremely limited, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime recorded around 1.8 million juveniles (according to countries' own definition) brought into formal contact with the criminal justice system in 2016, and 24,000 juveniles held in prisons.[30] However, it is conservatively estimated in a recent United Nations global study that at least 410,000 people under the age of 18 are detained in remand centres or prisons every year, with an additional million detained in police custody.[31] A very small minority are accused of serious offences. In contrast, many youth enter into conflict with the law for committing status offences or using drugs, or for misdemeanours. El Salvador reports that the most common reasons for detaining juveniles are resisting arrest, membership of illicit groups and drug possession. Finland reports that only about a third of its detainees aged between 15 and 24 have been accused of serious offences.

43.   The number of juveniles brought into formal contact with the justice system or held in remand centres and prisons appears to be decreasing in most jurisdictions.[32] Member States' use of specific legislation and corresponding specialized procedures, such as diversion measures, that continue to redirect juveniles away from criminal justice systems are key contributing factors to that trend. However, large differences between regions and countries exist, with alarming trends in some African and South-East Asian countries, as well as Southern Europe and parts of Central America.[33] In some jurisdictions, the challenge of ensuring that special protections are effectively applied remains. For instance, in Cambodia, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that the number of juveniles (aged between 14 and 17) in detention is increasing dramatically because of the weak application of existing juvenile procedures, combined with a governmental campaign against illicit drugs. In addition, some countries still use the death penalty against young people, many employ corporal punishment and several do not have any special procedures or court systems in place for juveniles.[34]

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[30] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "dataUNODC". Available at https://dataunodc.un.org/.

[31] Manfred Nowak, *United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty* (2019).

[32] UNODC, "dataUNODC".

[33] Ibid.

[34] Nowak, *United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty*; and John A. Winterdyk, ed., *Juvenile Justice: International Perspectives, Models and Trends* (Boca Raton, Florida, CRC Press, 2014).

44.   Concerning young adults aged between 18 and 24 in contact with the justice system, the picture is less clear because of considerable gaps in age-disaggregated and comparable information at the global level. The available evidence shows that young adults tend to be overrepresented at the various stages of the criminal justice system.[35] A number of Member States report that a substantial share[36] or a majority[37] of their prison populations are comprised of young people. Similarly, official data for the United States, and for England and Wales, show that 18 per cent and 33 per cent of those countries' respective prison populations are aged under 30.[38] As with other age groups, socially disadvantaged subgroups, including ethnic minorities, are often heavily overrepresented.[39] Young people over the age of 18 are also likely to be processed as adults, implying longer sentences and detention in adult facilities, despite research suggesting that developmental factors can make youth less culpable for infractions, more receptive to positive reinforcement and more amenable to change.[40] Moreover, young adults are also more likely to face abuse and mistreatment in adult penal systems. The Major Group for Children and Youth, in its contribution to the present report, reflects these points, noting the need to make further use of ethical and more cost-effective alternatives to detention. Few jurisdictions systematically extend juvenile protections and procedures to young adults, despite United Nations recommendations.[41]

45.   Gender differences are highly visible in the area of youth and the law. For instance, young men are both the main victims and perpetrators of crime, while also constituting an overwhelming majority of young people in contact with the justice system.[42] Young women, on the other hand, are more likely to be accused of status offences, and can also enter into conflict with the law by terminating a pregnancy in States that have criminalized abortion.[43]

1.   Building mutual trust between young people, law enforcement and the justice system

46.   Young people are key agents of change in building just and peaceful societies. In many instances, however, youth – particularly those belonging to minority and marginalized groups in urban settings – are portrayed as a threat to public order.[44] In several countries, young people express animosity towards law enforcement authorities. When the authorities respond with increased assertiveness, a negative

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[35] Justice Policy Institute, "Improving approaches to serving young adults in the justice system" (Washington, D.C., 2016).

[36] Bulgaria, Peru, Uruguay, Senegal.

[37] Uruguay, Senegal.

[38] Federal Bureau of Prisons of the United States, "Statistics: inmate age". Available at https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_age.jsp (consulted on 1 December 2020); and Georgina Sturge, "UK prison population statistics" (House of Commons Library, 2020).

[39] Penal Reform International, *Global Prison Trends 2020* (London, 2020).

[40] Laura S. Abrams, Sid P. Jordan and Laura A. Montero, "What is a juvenile? A cross-national comparison of youth justice systems", *Youth Justice*, vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 111–130 (August 2018).

[41] Abrams, Jordan and Montero, "What is a juvenile?"; Neal Hazel, *Cross-national Comparison of Youth Justice* (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2008); and Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system.

[42] Winterdyk, ed., *Juvenile Justice*; and World Health Organization, *Preventing Youth Violence: an Overview of the Evidence* (Geneva, 2015).

[43] Nowak, *United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty*.

[44] "The missing peace: independent progress study on youth and peace and security" (see A/72/761-S/2018/86); Tony Roshan Samara, "Youth, crime and urban renewal in the Western Cape", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 209–227 (March 2005).

cycle of mutual mistrust and deteriorating relationships between law enforcement and the public can follow.[45]

47. Law enforcement relies on support and cooperation from the public, including youth, to effectively perform its key functions. Such recent events and movements as Black Lives Matter and End the Special Anti-Robbery Squad have drawn attention to the issues of discrimination, aggressive policing tactics and the lack of mutual trust between authorities and communities. In particular, there is a growing number of calls to move away from coercive law enforcement strategies and adopt an approach grounded in consent, in which the fundamental human rights of all young people are protected. This is also reflected in the contribution of the Major Group for Children and Youth, which highlights the need to view youth as positive change agents and to regularly and meaningfully engage with them to rebuild trust.

48. Young people's attitudes towards authorities are influenced by perceptions of effectiveness and fairness.[46] With this in mind, coercive and aggressive policing strategies have been demonstrated to be counterproductive, while also diverting resources away from addressing the lack of political, social and economic inclusion underpinning crime rates.[47] The intensive and discriminatory use of "stop and search" and "broken windows" policing strategies has been especially damaging to relations between young people and law enforcement in certain jurisdictions.[48] Excessive use of force, apart from raising human rights concerns, is another important source of distrust. COVID-19 mitigation measures have at times been enforced in a way that has exacerbated that mistrust.[49] The Major Group for Children and Youth notes in its contribution that the criminalization of drug users is also problematic in this regard, and more effectively addressed through a public health approach.

49. Recent decades have witnessed an expansion of the types of functions performed by law enforcement. For instance, such countries as the United States and, to a lesser extent, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, have seen a dramatic increase in the number of law enforcement officers based in schools.[50] In combination with zero-tolerance policies and surveillance measures, that increase has led to students being pushed out of school and into the criminal justice system, contributing to what can be seen as the overcriminalization of young people.[51] Furthermore, such measures have been shown to generate a climate of distrust that may foster disruptive or criminal behaviours.[52] Moreover, the funding of law enforcement officers in schools has in some countries taken precedence over the funding of other personnel,

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[45] Kyle Peyton, Michael Sierra-Arévalo and David G. Rand, "A field experiment on community policing and police legitimacy", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 116, No. 40, pp. 19,894–19,898 (October 2019).

[46] Lyn Hinds, "Building police-youth relationships: the importance of procedural justice", *Youth Justice*, vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 195–209 (December 2007).

[47] Rod K. Brunson, and Kashea Pegram, "'Kids do not so much make trouble, they are trouble': police-youth relations", *The Future of Children*, vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 83–102 (spring 2018); and A/72/761-S/2018/86.

[48] Brunson and Pegram, "Kids do not so much make trouble, they are trouble"; and Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (Verso, 2017).

[49] Agnes Callamard, "Police and military use of force in a state of emergency: guidance on the use of force by law-enforcement personnel in time of COVID-19 emergency", COVID-19 Human Rights Dispatch, No. 1 (Geneva, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020).

[50] Margaret Shaw, *Police, Schools and Crime Prevention: A Preliminary Review of Current Practices* (Montreal, International Centre for the Prevention of Crime, 2004).

[51] Vitale, *The End of Policing*.

[52] Matthew J. Mayer and Peter E. Leone, "A structural analysis of school violence and disruption: implications for creating safer schools", *Education and Treatment of Children*, vol. 22, No. 3 (August 1999), pp. 333–356.

such as counsellors, social workers and psychologists.[53] In contrast, cooperation between law enforcement and schools within a broader network of social services, as exemplified by the long-standing practice in Scandinavian countries, has proven to be a constructive approach.[54]

50.   Policy measures intended to improve relations between law enforcement and the public have primarily been centred on improving the training of law enforcement officers and embracing a community policing approach.[55] With regard to training, the expanded use of procedural justice principles and anti-bias training has been a key policy response. The effectiveness of such training has, however, been questioned on the grounds that it often fails to address deeper institutional pressures that drive the behaviour of law enforcement officials.[56]

51.   Community policing approaches, which are centred on regular consultations and non-enforcement interactions with residents, have been widely applied in Europe and the United States to solve local problems collaboratively. While they have had short-term positive effects, evidence of their long-term effectiveness is limited.[57] An important shortcoming is that those most frequently in contact with law enforcement, especially youth, are often underrepresented in community consultations. Communities tend to be represented primarily by long-term residents, local businesses and homeowners, whose perspectives may diverge from underrepresented community members. An interesting correction to this deficit can be found in the United Kingdom, where community and police engagement groups deliberately overrepresent hard-to-reach youth.[58]

2.   Effective rehabilitation and reintegration

52.   To rehabilitate and reintegrate youth that have committed offences, the most effective approach is often to avoid bringing them into contact with criminal justice systems in the first place.[59] Most young people who commit criminal offences do so only once.[60] Furthermore, contact with the justice system can negatively impact educational and career prospects, expose young people to abuse, and introduce negative role models. As a result, it is often counterproductive when it comes to preventing recidivism. Evidence suggests that the earlier a young person is brought into contact with the justice system, the higher the chances of that person being involved with further criminality later in life.[61] For these reasons, the use of diversion has been enshrined in the Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System (Vienna Guidelines), in which Member States are urged to make available a broad range of alternative and educative measures at the pretrial, trial and post-trial stages (Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/30, annex).

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[53] Amir Whitaker and others, *Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff is Harming Students* (American Civil Liberties Union, 2019).

[54] Shaw, *Police, Schools and Crime Prevention*.

[55] Armenia, El Salvador and Uruguay.

[56] Vitale, *The End of Policing*.

[57] Charlotte Gill and others, "Community-oriented policing to reduce crime, disorder and fear and increase satisfaction and legitimacy among citizens: a systematic review", *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, vol. 10 (2014), pp. 399–428.

[58] Dominique Wisler, *Police Governance: European Union Best Practices* (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, 2011).

[59] Nowak, *United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty*.

[60] Marianne Moore, *Save Money, Protect Society and Realise Youth Potential: Improving Youth Justice Systems during a Time of Economic Crisis* (Brussels, International Juvenile Justice Observatory, 2012).

[61] Andrew Coyle and Helen Fair, *A Human Rights Approach to Prison Management: Handbook for Prison Staff*, 3rd ed. (Birkbeck, University of London, 2018).

53. In practice, diversionary measures are fairly varied; they include non-intervention in the form of police cautions, as well as community service, educational programmes, medical treatment and restorative justice processes.[62] The issuance of police cautions for low-level offences is a common practice in East Asia and the Pacific and Europe, where such cautions have played an important role in decreasing the number of youth arrested.[63]

54. Through restorative processes, an alternative to punitive justice, all stakeholders involved in an offence are brought together in a dialogue with the aim of repairing the harm caused. Restorative processes can be applied at all stages of proceedings and function as an important mechanism for diversion. Restorative processes have traditionally been used in parts of Asia, Africa, South America, and Oceania, and have also been widely applied in Western countries in recent decades, especially following their endorsement by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2012/12. They have been demonstrated to decrease reoffending rates, particularly for serious offences.[64] The relative share of suspected offenders who are referred to restorative mechanisms is low.[65]

55. One of the main shortcomings in the application of diversionary measures is that they can be discriminatory and disproportionately benefit youth from privileged backgrounds. For instance, police discretion in issuing cautions may enable discriminatory practices that exacerbate inequalities. Members of marginalized groups are often more likely to be considered at high risk of reoffending and therefore less likely to be diverted, even though diversion measures are most effective for high-risk youth.[66] Gender differences also exist, with young women more likely to be diverted.[67] Moreover, juvenile procedures do not usually apply to people over the age of 18; exceptions can be found primarily in European countries (inter alia, Croatia, Germany and the Netherlands), where juvenile procedures can be applied to people aged up to 21[68] (and up to 22 in the Netherlands).[69] In Germany, people aged under 24 can serve their sentences in juvenile facilities,[70] which tend to offer more opportunities for education and vocational training.

56. Where diversion is not deemed appropriate, such as when individuals have committed very serious crimes and pose a danger to society, the use of special arrangements and modes of rehabilitation and reintegration should be considered to ensure that young people's human rights are respected and their unique needs are met. In such cases, particular emphasis should be placed on minimizing coercive elements while maximizing possibilities for training and development, and the maintenance of family ties.

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[62] Nowak, *United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty*.

[63] Ibid.; and UNICEF, *Diversion not Detention: A Study on Diversion and Other Alternative Measures for Children in Conflict with the Law in East Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, 2017).

[64] James Bonta and others, "Restorative justice and recidivism: promises made, promises kept", in *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, eds., (New York, Routledge, 2006).

[65] Chris Cunneen and Barry Goldson, "Restorative justice? A critical analysis", in *Youth, Crime and Justice*, 2nd ed., Barry Goldson and John Muncie, eds. (London, Sage, 2015).

[66] Traci Schlesinger, "Decriminalizing racialized youth through juvenile diversion", *The Future of Children*, vol. 28, No. 1 (spring 2018), pp. 59–82.

[67] Nowak, *United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty*, chapter 8.

[68] Sibella Matthews, Vincent Schiraldi and Lael Chester, "Youth justice in Europe: experience of Germany, the Netherlands, and Croatia in providing developmentally appropriate responses to emerging adults in the criminal justice system", *Justice Evaluation Journal*, vol. 1, No. 1 (2018), pp. 59–81.

[69] Netherlands, Ministry of Justice and Security, "Penalties for juvenile offenders".

[70] Germany, Youth Courts Law (1974), section 114.

III. Global engagement of youth at the United Nations

A. Youth Delegate Programme

57.   The Youth Delegate Programme of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has continued to enable the active participation of youth in United Nations processes through their inclusion in national delegations at intergovernmental meetings. Among the official delegations represented during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, held in 2019, 66 youth delegates from 39 Member States participated and, in 2020, during the seventy-fifth session of the Assembly, 67 youth delegates participated, including delegates from 32 Member States and 1 delegate from a Permanent Observer to the United Nations.

B. Economic and Social Council youth forum

58.   The Economic and Social Council youth forum is convened by the President of the Council and co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, in collaboration with the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development. The forum is co-convened by the Major Group for Children and Youth and the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations. In 2019, the forum was held under the theme "Empowered, included and equal", and welcomed 34 ministers and over 1,000 youth participants. The 2020 forum, on the theme of "SDG generation: shaping the decade ahead", was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In that context, virtual consultations were held and resulted in a document submitted to the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development. In addition, the youth plenary on the theme of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, which had been scheduled to be held in conjunction with the 2020 youth forum, was held virtually as part of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly.

C. United Nations Youth Strategy

59.   The United Nations Youth Strategy, entitled "Youth 2030: working with and for young people", was adopted in 2018. The Strategy contains an outline of the ways in which an impact can be made on priority issues for youth through the joint action of United Nations entities, leveraging each institution's comparative advantage, together with youth.

60.   A set of Youth 2030 scorecards is in development for both foundational and priority programme areas of the Strategy. The scorecards will serve as strategic planning, performance measurement and accountability tools for both United Nations country teams and United Nations system entities. Routine use of the scorecards is expected to allow the identification of gaps and systemic improvements with a view to stronger programming for and with young people. In addition to the scorecards, technical and operational guidance for country teams, a programming toolkit and an online training curriculum on Youth 2030 are in the pipeline. To mainstream reporting on Youth 2030 across country teams, youth-specific indicators have been included in the information management system of the Development Coordination Office.

61.   To accelerate the implementation of Youth 2030, in 2019, in close consultation with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and with the support of the Development Coordination Office, 10 fast-track countries were identified – Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Morocco, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Uzbekistan. The country selection was based on the presence of key

multi-stakeholder or inter-agency initiatives which underpin the Strategy, country interest and/or the opportunity of a new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework process in 2020. Youth 2030 is an opportunity to enhance the coherence of United Nations support to Governments in these countries, together with young people, as well as to harness the power and potential of several stakeholders, including the private sector, to set each country on a path to accelerated results for youth.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

62.   The present report provides an update on the implementation of resolution 57/1 and of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda, through an analysis of the three thematic areas of youth poverty alleviation; the digital global economy; and juvenile justice, and youth and the law. On the basis of the information and analysis provided above, the following recommendations are put forward to the Commission for consideration:

(a)   **Facilitate youth engagement in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes impacting youth, including those to eradicate poverty and transition youth towards the digital global economy, and those on issues of youth and the law and criminal justice;**

(b)   **Identify and eradicate institutional discrimination against young women, youth minorities and other vulnerable youth, discrimination that worsens poverty, exacerbates vulnerabilities arising from globalization and technological transformation, and perpetuates inequality within the criminal justice system;**

(c)   **Promote the use of education and training, science, technology and innovation, entrepreneurship, and social protection policies to alleviate youth poverty and facilitate innovation to build back better;**

(d)   **Recognize youth as an asset in building just societies and ensure that young people, especially marginalized subgroups most frequently in contact with the law, are adequately represented in participatory mechanisms at the local and national levels;**

(e)   **Expand the use of unconditional and conditional diversion measures and take steps to ensure that they are inclusive and non-discriminatory.**