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Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Human rights implications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on young people

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present study was prepared in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 48/12, in which the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to conduct a detailed study on ways to mitigate the impact of the global pandemic on the human rights of young people for presentation to the Council at its fifty-first session. The study highlights the systemic barriers to the human rights of youth, particularly with regard to education, employment, social security, health and participation in the face of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. It contains recommendations that States adopt a youth-centred, human rights-based approach to COVID-19 recovery and implement it in partnership with young people, and that States and United Nations entities mainstream youth rights so that young people can fully enjoy their human rights.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 48/12, the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in consultation with and taking into account the views of States and relevant stakeholders, including relevant United Nations agencies, the treaty bodies, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, national human rights institutions, civil society and representatives of youth organizations, to conduct a detailed study on ways to mitigate the impact of the global pandemic on human rights with regard to young people, including the identification of cases of discrimination against young people in the exercise of their human rights, in particular young women and girls, highlighting the contribution of young people to the realization of human rights in society during the pandemic, and to submit the study to the Council for consideration at its fifty-first session.

2. Pursuant to that request, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) solicited contributions and received 61 responses from States, regional organizations, national human rights institutions, United Nations entities, civil society and youth organizations.¹ Inputs were also received during six youth consultations held in May and June 2022 by OHCHR country and regional offices regarding youth rights.

3. The present study builds on OHCHR reports on youth and human rights² and on the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the enjoyment of human rights around the world,³ the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development's statement on youth and COVID-19,⁴ OHCHR COVID-19 guidance,⁵ and the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the intersessional seminar on the challenges and opportunities of young people in the field of human rights, organized by OHCHR in 2021.⁶

II. Youth and human rights in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

4. Responses to the pandemic have negatively affected young people's human rights in manifold, intersecting ways, with significant socioeconomic and psychological consequences for youth, and have also exacerbated inequalities, including between youth. They pose considerable long-term risks to young people's human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly with regard to education, employment and social security, health and participation.

5. The pandemic has fundamentally changed how youth globally live their lives and access education, opportunities and livelihoods. While the challenges young people face vary on the ground and are specific to their contexts, many youth worldwide feel that current social, political and economic systems at all levels ignore their lived experiences and do not adequately prepare them or provide for their future.

¹ All submissions are available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5119-human-rights-implications-covid-19-pandemic-young-people>.

² [A/HRC/39/33](#).

³ [A/HRC/46/19](#).

⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/inter-agency-statement-youth-and-covid-19>.

⁵ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/covid-19/covid-19-guidance#:~:text=With%20regard%20to%20COVID%2D19,to%20address%20the%20health%20situation;and%20https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/covid-19-and-womens-human-rights-guidance>.

⁶ [A/HRC/49/32](#).

6. The Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19, conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), OHCHR and other partners of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, found that the pandemic has had a systematic, deep and disproportionate impact on young people, particularly young women, younger youth and youth in lower-income countries.⁷

7. The pandemic has not affected all youth equally. It has increased inequalities between them and placed youth in vulnerable situations, who face additional barriers to human rights and multiple forms of discrimination, at heightened risk of rights violations. They include young women and girls; youth with disabilities; youth affected by conflict; asylum-seeking, internally displaced, migrant and refugee youth; care-leavers; youth in conflict with the law; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex youth; indigenous youth; and young people in rural areas, among others. Interruptions in education and employment risk compounding inequalities between youth. Youth with lower-secondary education are three times more likely not to be in employment, education or training compared with those with a university degree, which affects future employment and earnings.⁸

8. At the same time, the pandemic has been a moment when youth have again demonstrated their leadership in defending human rights, protecting others and advocating for change. The Secretary-General's call to action for human rights identifies youth as key partners in realizing human rights.⁹ This partnership has been evident in youth movements to address conflict, climate change, and the impacts of economic crises, food insecurity and poverty.

9. Throughout the pandemic, youth supported public health measures to limit the virus' spread and to vaccinate populations and contributed to efforts to combat misinformation and encourage support for pandemic measures. Youth worldwide have engaged in State- and youth-led initiatives, including awareness-raising, helping vulnerable populations, and have participated as health-care and essential workers, scientists and entrepreneurs.¹⁰ They have worked to mitigate and address the pandemic's varied human rights impacts, including discrimination, food insecurity, poverty and increased inequalities.¹¹

III. Legal and institutional framework related to youth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

10. There is no consistent definition of the term "youth". At the United Nations, the age range of 15–24 years has traditionally been used in some settings, but the definition of youth varies across and between United Nations entities. It also differs at the international, regional and national levels between conventions, agreements and stakeholders.¹²

11. Youth is a period of transition from dependence to independence and autonomy, which occurs at different times regarding different rights, for example, education, employment, and sexual and reproductive health. The socioeconomic and cultural context, age and development stage also influence young people's experiences and challenges.¹³

12. The human rights of youth refer to the full enjoyment of fundamental human rights and freedoms by young people. All international human rights instruments apply to youth.¹⁴

⁷ ILO, *Youth & COVID-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Well-Being* (Geneva, ILO, 2020).

⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Youth and COVID-19: response, recovery and resilience", 11 June 2020.

⁹ See <https://www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml>.

¹⁰ See <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

¹¹ See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/04/YOUTH-FLASH-Special-issue-on-COVID-19-1.pdf>.

¹² A/HRC/39/33, paras. 13–15.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., para. 16.

13. While the international human rights framework provides comprehensive human rights protection, youth continue to face challenges to the enjoyment of their human rights, which the pandemic has exacerbated. There are dedicated human rights instruments for youth and guidance on young people's human rights at the regional level. However, there is no universal human rights instrument dedicated to youth rights, as is the case for certain categories of persons such as children, persons with disabilities and women.¹⁵

14. In recent years, the United Nations has increased its focus on youth, recognizing the systemic challenges and barriers young people face in enjoying their human rights and the need for empowerment. The Secretary-General signalled the importance of working with and for youth through the appointment of his Envoy on Youth in 2017, the United Nations Youth Strategy in 2018,¹⁶ and his call to action for human rights, in which he emphasized partnering with youth to advance human rights. Furthermore, the OHCHR Organizational Management Plan for 2023–2024 continues to feature youth as a spotlight population. This prioritization of youth issues has led to the emergence of institutional initiatives and frameworks focused on youth, and the publication of policy guidance by United Nations entities on addressing the challenges for youth emerging from the pandemic.

15. In March 2020, the Secretary-General underlined the long-term, pandemic-related challenges for youth and their specific vulnerabilities to its socioeconomic dimensions, particularly with regard to education, mental health, employment and social protection. He called for long-term planning, solidarity and a youth-centred approach to pandemic recovery.¹⁷

16. The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development issued a statement in April 2020 on COVID-19 and youth, establishing a framework for ensuring that pandemic responses uphold young people's human rights and are youth-centred.¹⁸

17. In the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Our Common Agenda", he identified human rights as a catalyst for change and placed working with and for youth at the centre of the future work of the United Nations, including through building trust, inclusion and improved participation.¹⁹

18. OHCHR, the special procedures and treaty bodies have issued guidance on a human rights-based approach to COVID-19 and pandemic recovery and raised concern about pandemic-related human rights violations. The impact on education and health systems, employment and social protection; lack of meaningful participation; and vaccine inequity are particularly concerning.²⁰ The Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women issued guidance on the pandemic's impact on children²¹ and on young women and girls, respectively.²² The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued guidance on the pandemic's impact on human rights, particularly on education and unemployment and the need to protect jobs, income and social protection for all workers.²³ The Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has published

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf.

¹⁷ See <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

¹⁸ See https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Youth/COVID-19_and_Youth.pdf.

¹⁹ [A/75/982](#).

²⁰ See, for example, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/TB/COVID19/External_TB_statements_COVID19.pdf; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2021/12/comprehensive-inclusive-and-universal-covid-19-human-rights-policies-urgently>; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/covid-19>.

²¹ See https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/INT_CRC_STA_9095_E.docx.

²² See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/TB/COVID19/Guidance_Note.docx#:~:text=States%20parties%20to%20the%20Convention,discriminate%20against%20women%20and%20girls.

²³ [E/C.12/2020/1](#).

guidance and initiatives related to youth and COVID-19.²⁴ The Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health has highlighted the challenges and opportunities concerning sexual and reproductive health rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵

IV. Challenges and discrimination faced by young people in the realization of their rights during the COVID-19 pandemic

19. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected youth worldwide, causing loss of life and livelihoods and affecting their rights to education, employment, social security, health and participation as well as housing and freedom of religion, expression, movement and information.

A. Education

20. The pandemic created the worst education crisis ever recorded.²⁶ Unprecedented global shutdowns of educational institutions left youth with limited or no alternative learning methods. The long-term consequences of such measures include disrupted and lost learning, deepening educational inequalities, increased rates of youth not completing education, lost access to a safe space, and interrupted access to health-care and support services and human contact. This affects young people's social and behavioural development and mental health and has long-term social and economic costs for society and the employment world.

21. In March 2020, over 1.52 billion young people in more than 165 countries were out of education, representing 87 per cent of the world's enrolled school and university population.²⁷ As of September 2021, 27 per cent of national education systems remained fully or partially closed, some without reopening plans.²⁸ According to the Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19, over 70 per cent of youth who were studying or studying and working were adversely affected by academic institutions closing. Nearly one in eight saw their education completely stop, and 65 per cent reported having learned less since the pandemic had begun, underlining the multiple challenges of remote and online learning.²⁹

22. Many countries implemented remote learning modalities to support continued learning, including online platforms, television and radio programming, and take-home packages. However, the distribution, uptake and effectiveness of such programmes varied greatly between and within countries, and mostly did not adequately replace in-person education.³⁰ An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study across 59 countries found that, although most countries established alternative learning methods, only approximately half of all students could access most or all of the curriculum.³¹ Technical and vocational education was particularly affected, given the focus on practical and workplace-based learning, and online alternatives were not adequate replacements.³²

²⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/submission-a-hrc-51-19-covid-youth-un-OSGEY.pdf>.

²⁵ [A/76/172](#).

²⁶ World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery* (Washington, D.C., Paris and New York, 2021).

²⁷ See <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf> (p. 9).

²⁸ World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, *The State of the Global Education Crisis*.

²⁹ ILO, *Youth & COVID-19*.

³⁰ World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, *The State of the Global Education Crisis*.

³¹ Fernando M. Reimers and Andreas Scheicher, *Schooling Disrupted, Schooling Rethought: How the Covid-19 Pandemic Is Changing Education* (OECD, 2020), available at https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=133_133390-1rtuknc0hi&title=Schooling-disrupted-schooling-r.

³² ILO and World Bank, *Skills Development in the Time of COVID-19: Taking Stock of the Initial Responses in Technical and Vocational Education and Training* (Geneva, 2021).

23. The shift to online learning exposed a “digital divide”, resulting in major learning losses.³³ Accessibility varied within countries, as less than 10 per cent of the poorest households have electricity in some countries. Digital divides between urban and rural communities were greatest in East and Southern Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. These significant digital disparities between developed and least developed countries, within countries and regions, and between low-income and middle- and high-income households exacerbated inequalities and left many youth excluded from education. Young people with limited or no access to digital connectivity and devices were unable to learn and access online learning, particularly youth affected by poverty, youth with disabilities, youth in rural areas and youth in developing countries.³⁴ Youth in lower-income countries have far more limited access to online classes and testing than in high-income countries.³⁵ Furthermore, some youth do not have adequate space or support to learn at home.³⁶

24. Closing educational institutions severs young people’s links to medical, nutritional and social services delivered through schools and universities, such as mental health and sexual and reproductive health services and school meals.³⁷ It interrupts protective factors such as daily routines, recreational activities and social interactions that foster good physical and mental health,³⁸ and also interrupts access to libraries, which provide a safe space and support.³⁹

25. Pandemic-related restrictions affected research and extension activities at higher education institutions, and international travel restrictions limited students’ and faculty’s international mobility. While most countries experienced no significant difference in overall university enrolment, lower-income countries were more greatly affected. Fourteen countries experienced up to 20 per cent decreases in enrolment, and Armenia, Hungary and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) reported decreases of 21–40 per cent.⁴⁰

26. Closing academic institutions increases barriers to young women and girls’ education and the likelihood of their leaving education, due to increased domestic and care responsibilities and reduced access to devices and the Internet for online learning. This exposes them to additional risk of denial of their sexual and reproductive health and rights and of gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage, and early pregnancy.⁴¹ These serve to engrain existing gender inequalities and, as young women and girls may typically be more likely to leave education earlier, also affects women’s leadership and participation prospects in the longer term.

27. Pandemic-related education measures did not systematically include reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. Remote learning modalities were not always adequately tailored for sign language interpretation and other required adaptations, and access to in-person educational and support services was restricted or halted. These students were not consistently considered in national responses, with only 33 per cent of low-income countries taking reasonable accommodation measures.⁴² As institutions re-opened, youth with disabilities and/or vulnerable to COVID-19 were less likely to return and did not always have access to adapted measures for safe return or alternative learning methods.

³³ World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, *The State of the Global Education Crisis*.

³⁴ [A/75/982](#), p. 39; ILO, *Youth & COVID-19*; and Human Rights Council resolution 47/16.

³⁵ ILO, *Youth & COVID-19*.

³⁶ World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, *The State of the Global Education Crisis*.

³⁷ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/COVID-19_and_Youth.pdf.

³⁸ OECD, “Supporting young people’s mental health through the COVID-19 crisis”, 12 May 2021.

³⁹ Submission from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

⁴⁰ World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, *The State of the Global Education Crisis*; and UNESCO, *COVID-19: Reopening and Reimagining Universities, Survey on Higher Education through the UNESCO National Commissions* (Paris, 2021).

⁴¹ UNESCO, *When Schools Shut: Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 School Closures* (Paris, 2021); [A/HRC/46/19](#); [A/HRC/49/32](#); and https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/COVID-19_and_Youth.pdf.

⁴² World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, *The State of the Global Education Crisis*.

28. The impact of learning loss, and of disruption to or exclusion from education, considerably affects young people's aspirations and mental health. Twenty-two per cent of youth who thought their education would be delayed or that they might fail were likely to be affected by anxiety or depression, compared with 12 per cent of students whose education continued.⁴³

B. Employment and social security

29. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected young workers and those transitioning from education to employment, compounding already existing problems and increasing instability. Youth have disproportionately faced precarious employment conditions, reduced employment hours and income, a lack of decent work, unemployment, limited or no social security support, and limited or no new job or self-employment opportunities. Furthermore, as with previous economic crises, young people graduating will struggle to find decent work, which delays financial independence.

30. Youth, particularly young women, are over-represented in the most affected sectors, including the informal, care, retail, hospitality, agriculture and tourism sectors, and in family businesses. They are often employed in less secure forms of work, including part-time, short-term, "zero-hour" or "gig economy" contracts with unstable working conditions, making them vulnerable when crisis strikes.⁴⁴ While some economies have partially or fully recovered, great divergences in employment and labour income persist.⁴⁵

31. Pre-pandemic youth unemployment globally remained in a precarious state following the 2008 financial crisis. About 20 per cent of the world's youth were not in employment, education or training, and two in every three were young women. Furthermore, youth unemployment rates were approximately three times higher than for other workers.⁴⁶

32. Youth unemployment figures have increased globally since the onset of the pandemic. Job losses for youth in 2020 were 8.7 per cent higher than for older workers, with unprecedented global employment losses of 114 million jobs compared with 2019.⁴⁷ This fall was greater in middle-income countries.⁴⁸ More than one in six young people have stopped working since the pandemic began.⁴⁹

33. As the pandemic continued, the prevalence among young people of non-involvement in employment, education or training; labour market inactivity; and informal work increased more than youth unemployment.⁵⁰ Young people aged 18–29 who were working prior to the pandemic reported an average 23 per cent reduction in working hours and 42 per cent reduction in income.⁵¹

34. Young people and their futures are significantly impacted by reduced or lost income or employment; lack of access to decent work, work-based learning and employment opportunities; and unemployment. As a result, their transition to autonomy and financial independence is delayed, and their enjoyment of human rights, particularly education, adequate standard of living, health, adequate housing and participation, are negatively affected.

⁴³ ILO, *Youth & COVID-19*.

⁴⁴ See <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf> (p. 18); and ILO, "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", 3rd ed., 29 April 2020.

⁴⁵ See https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_845642.pdf.

⁴⁶ OECD, "Youth and COVID-19: response, recovery and resilience", 11 June 2020; and ILO, *Youth Employment in Times of COVID: A Global Review of COVID-19 Policy Responses to Tackle (un)Employment and Disadvantage among Young People* (Geneva, 2021).

⁴⁷ ILO, "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", 7th ed., 25 January 2021.

⁴⁸ ILO, *An Update on the Youth Labour Market Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis* (June 2021).

⁴⁹ ILO, "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", 4th ed., 27 May 2020.

⁵⁰ ILO, *Youth Employment in Times of COVID*.

⁵¹ ILO, *Youth & COVID-19*.

35. As of 2021, the pandemic had pushed 124 million people into extreme poverty, including many youth.⁵² Youth are more likely to experience poverty when faced with reduced employment or unemployment due to having limited or no savings.⁵³

36. Throughout the pandemic, social protection systems have enabled economies to survive and individuals in some countries to avoid the pandemic's worst impacts, including extreme poverty, and to continue to enjoy their human rights, including adequate housing, food and health care.⁵⁴ However, the human right to social security is not always a practical reality for all youth, and COVID-19 has exposed their precarious situation.

37. Globally, 71 per cent of people, including almost two thirds of children, have only partial or inadequate social security coverage, or none at all.⁵⁵ Young people often do not benefit from social protection because they work in the informal sector or have short-term or part-time employment and, consequently, are not entitled to social protection. Furthermore, young workers experience relatively larger decreases in post-support labour income. Therefore, even in countries where job retention schemes limited decreases in post-support labour income to moderate levels, youth experienced relatively larger decreases, indicating that such schemes were less effective in protecting young workers.⁵⁶

C. Physical and mental health

38. The pandemic has considerably affected young people's enjoyment of physical and mental health. They have struggled to access health-related information and physical and mental health treatment in a timely manner, and they have faced increased risks of physical and psychological violence, exposure to the virus as frontline and key workers, and immense mental health pressures. Health-related pandemic responses have been compromised by years of underinvestment in public health services and a lack of universal access to health care.⁵⁷

39. The health response to the virus and pandemic-related measures have placed colossal pressure on overwhelmed health systems, disrupting access to information and routine health services for medical treatment not related to COVID-19. These pressures have caused delays in accessing essential, time-sensitive, and life-saving medications and services; delayed or cancelled appointments; disruptions to immunization schedules. In addition, they have caused illnesses and medical conditions to worsen or go undiagnosed.⁵⁸

40. Some young people are disproportionately affected by having limited or no access to timely, quality health care. They include young women, youth living with HIV/AIDS and youth with disabilities, who have experienced discrimination and significant disruptions to home, community and social services, including personal assistance.⁵⁹

41. Access to and continuity of sexual and reproductive health and safe abortion services have been restricted and delayed throughout the pandemic, particularly during lockdowns. Sexual and reproductive resources, information and facilities, including for maternal health, have also been limited or redirected, posing additional risks to young women's health and safety.⁶⁰

42. Limited access to health insurance coverage, especially in low- and middle-income countries without universal health coverage, means youth struggle to access appropriate and

⁵² See <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-looking-back-2020-and-outlook-2021>; and <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects>.

⁵³ OECD, "Youth and COVID-19: response, recovery and resilience", 11 June 2020.

⁵⁴ [A/HRC/46/19](#), para. 15; and [A/75/982](#), p. 28.

⁵⁵ [A/HRC/46/19](#), para. 14.

⁵⁶ ILO, "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", 7th ed., 25 January 2021.

⁵⁷ [A/HRC/46/19](#), para. 5.

⁵⁸ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/COVID-19_and_Youth.pdf.

⁵⁹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *COVID-19: Working with and for Young People* (New York, 2020); and <https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/campaign/COVID19-survey>.

⁶⁰ [A/HRC/49/32](#); [A/HRC/50/50](#); [A/76/172](#); and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/covid-19-and-womens-human-rights-guidance>.

timely health care. Young people in poverty or working in the informal sector are particularly impacted.

43. The risk of domestic and gender-based violence increases during lockdowns and economic and social crises, particularly for young women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex youth. In addition to being confined with abusers, access to support services and shelters is severely disrupted.⁶¹ Since the pandemic began, online enquiries to violence prevention hotlines in Europe increased up to five times while emergency calls reporting domestic violence against women and children increased by 60 per cent compared with the same period of the previous year.⁶²

44. The multiple challenges involving the pandemic and young people's mental health have the potential to create an unprecedented mental health crisis. Youth are particularly at risk of increased anxiety and mental health concerns⁶³ as most mental health conditions develop during adolescence and youth.⁶⁴

45. The pandemic and response measures have also drastically affected young people's mental health, generating colossal mental health needs, which require significant and sustained investment.⁶⁵ They have experienced stress, anxiety, isolation and loneliness, and moderate increases in symptoms of depression and sadness due to physical distancing and quarantine measures, the fear of infection and adjusting to the "new normal".⁶⁶ A lack of clear, accessible communication about pandemic measures contributed to mental health stresses for some.⁶⁷

46. Lockdown measures have restricted young people's freedom of movement and of peaceful assembly and association, and have also restricted their access to social interactions, support services and positive coping mechanisms, including sports, social and community initiatives, and formal and non-formal education. These restrictions negatively affect youth's mental health, causing feelings of isolation and increasing the risk of youth employing negative coping mechanisms, such as alcohol and drug abuse, self-harm or other harmful behaviours.⁶⁸

47. Mental health systems globally faced decades of chronic underinvestment prior to the pandemic and struggled to meet existing demand. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing delays to and pressures on mental health systems, overwhelming them and causing further lengthy delays. Consequently, youth cannot access timely, quality mental health support, leaving conditions to go undiagnosed or worsen.

D. Participation

48. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen emergency measures introduced en masse, at a level not seen in recent years on such a global scale, profoundly affected young people's meaningful political and public participation. Youth faced extraordinary barriers to and limits on their access to information, mobilization, and physical and social gatherings; a shift to online engagement; and a loss of power in their engagement with duty-bearers. Pandemic response measures created new obstacles to youth participation, including by hindering youth-led protests. The resulting limitations on youth participation may have had the effect

⁶¹ UNFPA, *COVID-19: Working with and for Young People*.

⁶² World Health Organization, "Statement – During COVID-19 pandemic, violence remains preventable, not inevitable", 7 May 2020.

⁶³ See <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

⁶⁴ See <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/UN-Policy-Brief-COVID-19-and-mental-health.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Ibid. See also [A/HRC/49/32](#).

⁶⁶ OECD, "Youth and COVID-19: response, recovery and resilience", 11 June 2020; and UNICEF: *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind – Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health* (New York, October 2021).

⁶⁷ [A/HRC/46/19](#); and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/covid-19/covid-19-guidance>.

⁶⁸ UNFPA, *COVID-19: Working with and for Young People*.

of undermining potential progress in response to COVID-19.⁶⁹ The pandemic also demonstrated the importance of participation in ensuring the right to health. Young women and girl activists face particular gender barriers to participation, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic, yet their role in supporting communities and awareness-raising on COVID-19 and responses thereto has been critical.⁷⁰

49. The narrowing of civic space resulting from COVID-19 response measures exacerbated pre-pandemic challenges to participation for youth.⁷¹ Lockdown and physical distancing measures and limited understanding of the pandemic's impact on youth led to discrimination towards and the exclusion of youth from decision-making and restrictions or prohibitions imposed on their gatherings. This affected their peaceful assembly, association, freedom of expression, movement and information rights, which are essential for meaningful participation.⁷² The Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19 found that one in three young people noticed a significant impact on their right to participate in public affairs during the pandemic. This was higher for youth in low-income countries (40 per cent) compared with those in lower-middle (36 per cent) and high-income countries (28 per cent).⁷³ In 2021, the global proportion of parliamentarians under 30 was 2.6 per cent.⁷⁴

50. The shift to online forums, initiatives and platforms for civic engagement created multiple challenges for youth participation, in particular for those with poor quality, limited or no digital connection or devices. Many young people could not engage with online rallies, mobilization and digital alternatives to make their voices heard.⁷⁵ The shift to online engagement has enabled State authorities to monitor, track and restrict young people's statements and mobilization online, threatening their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and privacy. Social media users as young as 14 have been arrested for publishing videos or online stories related to COVID-19 that are critical of authorities.⁷⁶ Violence against youth in civic space increased offline since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁷ Conversely, pandemic-related changes in participation modalities have also resulted in some positive impacts, including reaching previously excluded or underrepresented groups and ensuring broader access in some forums due to digital participation.⁷⁸

51. Participation in pandemic-related decision-making processes was also highly limited as normal channels were restricted or shut down. Most young people did not have the opportunity to have their views and experiences heard. This was concerning in educational forums, especially schools, with student participation restricted and essential participatory mechanisms, such as school councils, suspended.⁷⁹

52. Young people and youth-led organizations consistently play a strong role in community change and social action. Such engagement both supports communities and equips youth with participation skills and experience. However, the pandemic hindered youth volunteering, denying them vital opportunities to learn and develop to their full potential. Throughout the pandemic, essential opportunities, such as visits to government institutions, debates, and volunteering, reduced by at least half.⁸⁰ This has long-term repercussions on young people's opportunities to acquire the expertise central to political and public participation.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ [A/HRC/50/25](#).

⁷¹ [A/HRC/39/33](#).

⁷² See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/COVID-19_and_Youth.pdf.

⁷³ ILO, *Youth & COVID-19*.

⁷⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Youth Participation in National Parliaments* (Geneva, 2021).

⁷⁵ See https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/COVID-19_and_Youth.pdf.

⁷⁶ [A/HRC/46/19](#), para. 20.

⁷⁷ See <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2020/10/joint-statement-on-recent-violent-escalations-during-youth-led-protests-around-the-world/>.

⁷⁸ [A/HRC/51/13](#).

⁷⁹ UNESCO and Council of Europe, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Student Voice: Findings and Recommendations* (Paris and Strasbourg, 2021).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

53. Restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly and volunteering have negatively affected the functioning, funding and sustainability of youth organizations, especially access to their community and those they support, affecting their effectiveness and reach. Youth organizations rely heavily on volunteers and the pandemic has compounded pre-existing challenges for such organizations in seeking reliable, sustained funding.⁸¹ For example, young human rights defenders in West Africa faced pandemic-related challenges to fulfil their mandate of protecting and promoting human rights. Out of 57 youth organizations in Türkiye, 33 struggled to access funding and 32 struggled to reach their target audience during the pandemic.⁸²

E. Transition to autonomy for youth in vulnerable situations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

54. As indicated throughout the study, youth in vulnerable situations face additional barriers to realizing their human rights, including multiple forms of discrimination, that may affect their transition to autonomy. They have faced stigma and often been invisible in State policy, exacerbating existing discrimination and vulnerabilities. Certain additional challenges are elaborated here.

55. Youth with disabilities are among those most marginalized and at increased health risk. In some cases, they were denied treatment and not consulted on an equal basis. Youth with disabilities in institutions were often isolated, denied family contact, and at risk of neglect and abuse, instead of being supported through community-based solutions.⁸³ Young deaf persons were sometimes unable to access emergency and public health information and services, and excluded from education, employment and other forms of public life as information and services related to COVID-19 were not consistently accessible.⁸⁴ Youth with albinism experienced increased discrimination due to misconceptions about albinism and the prevalence of COVID-19 and limited or no access to treatments and prophylaxis, causing significant skin deterioration.⁸⁵

56. Young people deprived of their liberty were not visibly reflected in State policy, despite the human rights impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternatives to deprivation of liberty, where possible and safe, were not always considered. Youth deprived of their liberty in different settings, including prisons, pretrial detention, immigration detention, institutions, compulsory drug rehabilitation centres and others may face social isolation; higher mental health impact, higher infection risk due to overcrowding and insufficient space for physical distancing and isolation; and a lack of mitigation measures and personal protective equipment. For youth in the justice system, mitigation measures such as bans on external visitors affected access to family, legal support and social workers, as well as to education, information, and equality in preventive and other health care.

57. The COVID-19 pandemic considerably impacted conflict-affected youth, causing loss of safe spaces, disrupting access to health-care, educational, judicial and social services and increasing the risk of violence and recruitment by parties to the conflict.⁸⁶ Migrant youth, which comprise more than 30 per cent of migrants, including refugees, were disproportionately affected due to discrimination; stigma; a lack of access to information, health-care and prevention measures, employment, social protection and education; and financial, language and cultural barriers. They also faced barriers to accessing services due to laws, policies, administrative regulations and practices, including due to irregular immigration status, and may have avoided seeking health care due to fear of detention,

⁸¹ UNFPA, *COVID-19: Working with and for Young People*.

⁸² Submission from Youth Organizations Forum.

⁸³ See https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/05/sg_policy_brief_on_persons_with_disabilities_final.pdf.

⁸⁴ Submission from World Federation of the Deaf.

⁸⁵ Submission from African Albinism Network.

⁸⁶ See the inputs of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5119-human-rights-implications-covid-19-pandemic-young-people>.

deportation and penalties as a result of their immigration status. Young migrants faced increased barriers to migration due to pandemic-related policies in several countries. The pandemic has exposed young women and girls on the move to increased risk of violence, abuse and exploitation.⁸⁷

V. Promising practices to support young people during and after the pandemic

58. Governments, United Nations entities, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations are undertaking promising practices to support youth, some of which are elaborated below.

A. States

59. The Government of Albania is developing a youth guarantee programme targeting youth who are not in employment, education or training, which will provide a quality offer for employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship within four months.

60. The Austrian National Youth Council conducted a survey on COVID-19's impact on youth and youth work. Youth information centres, which support youth development and provide accessible, free information, can reach hundreds of thousands of young people through digital youth information offers.

61. The Government of Azerbaijan covered tuition fees for over 20,000 students in vulnerable situations affected by COVID-19. A student loan fund was established in June 2021 to broaden access to quality higher education, especially for students from low-income families, through long-term loans for tuition fees of 40 per cent for self-funding students.

62. The Government of Chile provided additional funding to public schools and subsidized private schools for the safe resumption of face-to-face classes. They financed sanitary equipment, including personal protective equipment and air filters.

63. In Croatia, initiatives to ensure Roma students' inclusion in education included providing physical materials during the delivery of education through distance learning and establishing a Roma community education programme to improve conditions for Roma students and monitor online teaching.

64. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of Czechia issued a methodological recommendation for distance learning and methodology guidance for schools on mental health. It also developed a cybersafety course with the National Cyber and Information Security Agency to explain online risks, supported by youth outreach initiatives.

65. In Cuba, teaching staff were provided with support to deal with the personal experiences of students affected by the pandemic, including those who had been ill or isolated for long periods, or who had experienced loss.

66. The Youth Directorate of Ecuador strengthened youth participation in policy development. The National Council for Intergenerational Equality, consisting of five State body representatives and five representatives of different generations (children, adolescents, youth, adults and older adults), contributed to draft legislation on violence against women and digital sexual violence.

67. The Government of Egypt established the Shabab El Balad Initiative in January 2022, a partnership between the public and private sectors, civil society and youth to develop skills and connect youth worldwide with a view to sharing experiences and solutions to unemployment.

⁸⁷ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/covid-19/covid-19-guidance>.

68. In Honduras, the Ministry of Education prepared educational materials for students and teachers who lacked digital devices or Internet access and distributed workbooks to youth in rural areas lacking digital devices and Internet access.

69. The Italian Ministry of Youth Policies increased national funding for youth policies to 35 million euros and also increased support for multisectoral interventions, including psychosocial support, in youth development, participation and inclusion, especially at the local level, and in education, sports and social sectors.

70. The Government of Malaysia implemented several initiatives to support youth mental health, including one on student mental well-being in the new normal, psychoeducational support materials, a psychosocial support line and capacity-building for teachers.

71. The Government of Mauritius amended labour legislation to prevent employers from terminating employment contracts on financial grounds and require businesses in financial difficulties to seek government support to avoid job losses, including of young workers. They delivered online training on youth entrepreneurship and youth participation.

72. The Ministry of Public Education of Mexico ensured access to education for indigenous students through a radio strategy for indigenous communities and peoples. Online engagement with young people on topics relevant to them included consultations on pandemic and response impacts, on restrictions of participation rights and on digital safety, and webinars on preventing family violence and on children's rights and the pandemic.

73. The revised 2021 national budget of Norway included new funding to increase activity among young people with disabilities and a supplementary scheme to make up for lost learning. Volunteering support systems were established to increase youth participation in cultural activities, sports and volunteering during the pandemic.

74. In 2020, Portugal introduced a new scheme for nine-month internships to support young people's transition to the labour market.

75. In Qatar, students had access to online learning resources, including television and YouTube and a distance learning portal. Blended learning was implemented at all levels through a bubble system, and through rotating attendance. In addition, students could choose between online and in-person attendance when institutions re-opened.

76. The Republic of Korea launched its first five-year basic youth policy plan, with a detailed focus on employment; housing; education; welfare/culture; and participation/rights. The Government established measures to increase youth engagement in government committees and, in August 2021, introduced special measures for youth to alleviate COVID-19's impact on youth and their transition to autonomy.

77. In 2020, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation implemented a student employment programme through which students were employed as digital assistants; psychological consultants to work with vulnerable populations; foreign language teachers; and student tutors.

78. The Government of Türkiye ensured access to educational content for students at all levels through its education information network. During remote learning, 15,263 support points were established nationwide to help students who lacked technology or Internet access. Provisions included television and online platforms to support learning for foreign students and materials for students with visual or hearing impairment.

79. In Uzbekistan, accessible educational resources were created, including a video portal with more than 200 lessons, an electronic library of audiobooks, and distance learning courses to support learning for students and professional development for teachers. The "online school" television lessons for students with disabilities were conducted with sign language.

B. Regional bodies

80. In 2020, the European Commission and Council of Europe youth partnership launched a knowledge hub focused on the pandemic's impact on young people and the youth sector.

81. The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children released policy recommendations on the pandemic and children's rights and conducted a project with UNICEF on the impact of pandemic-related State measures on children's rights.

C. United Nations entities

82. The OHCHR Regional Office in Central Asia, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict provided inputs to the study, demonstrating the pandemic's wide-ranging impacts on young people and sharing recommendations on supporting youth in pandemic recovery.

83. The Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, together with the World Health Organization and UNICEF, highlighted the pandemic's mental health impact on youth through their #CopingwithCOVID webinars. Among other initiatives, including measuring how United Nations country teams have worked with youth in COVID-19 responses, the Envoy highlighted challenges for marginalized youth in particular.

84. UNFPA programming includes facilitating the sharing of best practices on coping with COVID-19 by youth in East and Southern Africa, holding youth forums with the OHCHR office in Guatemala to address pandemic-related challenges and solutions, and supporting youth community participation in Colombia.

85. UNODC projects include creating a platform for online engagement of youth and youth-led organizations in Peru, engaging youth in an awareness-raising participatory video project in the State of Palestine, and supporting young people to train school students in the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

86. OHCHR worked with youth in the Middle East and North Africa to raise awareness of their human rights and pandemic-related restrictions, particularly regarding freedom of expression, and with youth and women human rights defenders in West Africa on a study of the impact of COVID-19 and of their role in the post-pandemic reconstruction. The OHCHR office in Guatemala published a guide for increasing accessibility for students who have visual or hearing impairments in remote learning programmes.

87. The treaty bodies consistently raise the pandemic's impact on human rights in their respective areas in their work.

D. Civil society organizations

88. Caritas Iraq ran programmes for youth, including providing psychosocial services, livelihood programmes, peacebuilding courses and rehabilitation via skills training.

89. The "Not my crime, still my sentence" campaign of Children of Prisoners Europe provided a platform for young people who had parents or caregivers in prison to share challenges and solutions to pandemic-related restrictions on prison visits.

90. The European Youth Forum identified State- and youth-led promising practices to support youth mental health, including awareness-raising campaigns in Denmark and Romania; additional support in Belgium for front-line caregivers; the strengthening of services in Iceland; and helplines in Cyprus, the Netherlands and Portugal.

91. Libraries in Australia, Lithuania and Türkiye offered "bibliotherapy", allowing students digital access to resources to support coping and well-being.

92. World Vision International established a digital platform project with young people, which provides digital space and opportunities to promote social change.

93. The Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action published guidance to help practitioners to best consider youth in their pandemic responses.⁸⁸

VI. Role of young people in COVID-19 responses, vaccination and recovery efforts, and ways to encourage it

94. The pandemic has created a crisis for realizing youth rights, but it has also shown young people's power and their important role in responding to economic, political and social crises, advocating for human rights, and effectuating social change. In the face of adversity and structural barriers, they demonstrated leadership and solidarity and shared innovative solutions to the challenges engendered by the pandemic. This has further demonstrated the value of investing in and empowering youth, including with human rights education, which equips them with the skills and knowledge to advance human rights. In short, realizing youth rights also strengthens society, social change and progress.

95. Young people were mobilized and relied upon in COVID-19 responses, yet often experienced restrictions to their rights to information, peaceful assembly and association, and movement; limited meaningful consultation; and little transparency in State communications. This created a deepening sense of youth exclusion and disconnect from the structures, mechanisms and processes that represent them and with which they engage. Youth face significant structural, material and power barriers to participation, including limited resources and functioning with skeleton or voluntary staff. The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges.

96. A key strand in stakeholder submissions was youth's role in COVID-19 response, recovery and vaccination efforts. Young people played an instrumental role in promoting public health and vaccination campaigns worldwide, especially through social media, including in Cuba, New Zealand, South Africa and the Syrian Arab Republic.

97. In July 2020, UNFPA and the Governments of Benin, Ghana and Togo supported the participation of approximately 350 youth engaged in the response to COVID-19 in a virtual exchange on innovative youth-led activities for young people, which were launched during the pandemic.

98. The Government of Czechia mobilized medical students to assist the social and health-care services, and with mobile vaccinations, and cooperated with young influencers on a social media vaccination campaign aimed at the younger population.

99. The Government of Nepal engaged youth networks to promote factual information about COVID-19, vaccination, and hygiene and health-care behaviours to communities, and mobilized youth groups to conduct initiatives such as decontamination, isolation centre management and other mitigation measures.

100. In Portugal, a national youth competition entitled "Stay at the helm!" was developed to encourage a participatory and multidisciplinary dynamic and dialogue between young people and educational staff on pandemic experiences and innovative solutions.

101. In Qatar, many youth volunteered to support health-care services; quarantine, isolation and vaccination facilities; awareness-raising and information campaigns; and the pandemic public hotline.

102. In Romania, young people volunteered in vaccination campaigns and centres; mobile vaccine clinics and COVID-19 call centres; and in a programme of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations on first aid, humanitarian aid and mainstreaming prevention measures.

103. In 2020, the Russian Federation launched a mutual support campaign, including volunteer support in medical organizations. From March 2020 to February 2022, over 253,000 volunteers helped more than 6.6 million citizens; 75.2 per cent of volunteers were aged 14–35.

⁸⁸ See <https://www.youthcompact.org/technical-guidances-and-briefs>.

104. In Togo, young people developed a mobile application that provides information and care online, provided educational assistance to schoolchildren and created electric handwashers.

105. The Uzbek Youth Affairs Agency launched an online database of all volunteers nationally. More than 10,600 young volunteers supported charitable coordination centres in pandemic response.

VII. Conclusions

106. **The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis that has exposed systemic and structural causes of inequality, exclusion and discrimination globally and has demonstrated that many countries – developed and developing – need to establish and strengthen human rights frameworks and their implementation.⁸⁹ It has further highlighted the interrelatedness and interdependence of young people’s rights. The effects of pandemic responses on the social, cultural, economic, and civil and political rights of the 1.8 billion youth globally – the largest ever youth population – are far-reaching and multiple.**

107. **Ongoing, renewed and new challenges to young people’s human rights related to the pandemic have caused increased discrimination and inequalities, including between youth. The pandemic’s severe impact on youth rights has increased feelings of youth exclusion, and has threatened their ability to develop to their full potential and their long-term prospects. In short, it has created a crisis for young people and their futures. Young people are less well-equipped and face greater barriers during their transition to independence than they did prior to the pandemic, and they will need targeted, specific support to be recognized as rights-holders, to access their human rights and to realize their potential.**

108. **As the world enters the next phase of the pandemic response and recovery, the multitude of human rights challenges facing youth, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, must not be forgotten and must continue to be a priority for States and the international community in efforts to build back better from COVID-19 in partnership with youth.**

VIII. Recommendations

109. **Recognizing that protecting human rights and working to ensure inclusion are crucial elements of the human rights-based approach to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the High Commissioner invites Member States to:**

(a) **Adopt a human rights-based approach to pandemic recovery that is focused on building a sustainable and equitable future for all, grounded in a new social contract. This approach must be founded on solidarity that gives proper place to the human rights of youth and is designed and implemented in partnership with youth. All COVID-19 recovery responses must be guided by an intersectional approach to young people’s human rights;**

(b) **Address inequalities and discrimination through the adoption and implementation of targeted measures in recovery plans that integrate an intersectional approach and focus on youth; mitigate the pandemic’s short-, medium- and long-term impacts on them; and address the systemic and structural barriers they face. These measures should be responsive to youth’s specific contexts and challenges. Particular focus should be given to mitigating the disproportionate impact on youth in vulnerable situations, including developing a gender-sensitive response;**

⁸⁹ [A/HRC/46/19](https://www.ohchr.org/en/covid-19/covid-19-guidance#:~:text=With%20regard%20to%20COVID%2D19,to%20address%20the%20health%20situation.), para. 2; and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/covid-19/covid-19-guidance#:~:text=With%20regard%20to%20COVID%2D19,to%20address%20the%20health%20situation.>

Right to education

(c) Plan for future crises and ensure that educational institutions and the educational, health and social services they provide remain open at all times, whenever possible. When institutions must close, provide alternate learning methods for all students and monitor participation to ensure their effectiveness and that no one is excluded from education. This includes ensuring the expansion of information and communications technology infrastructure and access and increasing digital literacy so that students without digital connectivity can be connected and reasonable accommodations are provided;

(d) Support young people with learning loss to access and complete high-quality, inclusive education and successfully transition to employment;

(e) Provide quality education to all youth, including civic and human rights education, to equip them with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development and advance human rights;

Right to employment and social protection

(f) Recognize the right to decent work for youth with a view to regulating non-standard and precarious forms of work and ending unpaid internships;

(g) Invest in job creation and upskilling and reskilling youth so they can enjoy the right to decent work;

(h) Ensure legal provisions and adequate resources for youth in social protection systems so that all young people benefit from social security;

Right to health

(i) Invest in universal, free and accessible physical and mental health services for youth, including mental health, sexual and reproductive health services, and services for youth with disabilities; and ensure that these services are human rights-based, always available, especially during crises, and fully resourced. Recovery efforts should be focused on community-based responses, where possible;

(j) Ensure access to safe spaces, protection services, shelters and domestic violence support at all times, including during crises;

Right to participation

(k) Engage young people meaningfully in the design, implementation and evaluation of legislation, policies, programmes and strategies affecting them, including in pandemic responses;

(l) Recognize youth as key partners and leaders in defending human rights and making social change and work with them to build trust. This includes listening to them and to their lived experiences, views and solutions, providing targeted capacity-building for youth, establishing well-resourced, permanent youth participation structures, and providing financial and other support to ensure that youth organizations can build sustainable structures;

(m) Ensure that youth can exercise their rights to participation, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and expression, safely and without intimidation, and can access justice and remedy when violations occur;

(n) Consider aligning the minimum voting age and the minimum age of eligibility to stand for elections, to encourage young people's political participation.

110. Recognizing the importance of mainstreaming youth rights at the national, regional and international levels in addressing human rights issues affecting young people, including those issues emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the High Commissioner also encourages Member States to adopt and implement legislation, policies, programmes or strategies to ensure young people's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled at the national level, while involving youth organizations or

youth-led structures in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such measures.

111. To build back better for a stronger, more sustainable, rights-respecting world for all, engaging with and empowering youth and ensuring they have a proper place within programmes and policies is crucial. For this to happen, the following are essential:

(a) Member States, international and regional organizations, and civil society need to fundamentally change how they view youth, their experiences and their views in order to further encourage youth activism. These changes are essential for young people to believe that their rights, needs and future are a priority. It is necessary that they can see these changes replicated at all levels and for resources to be invested to that end;

(b) Strengthened solidarity with and a renewed commitment to youth and their human rights are key elements in encouraging their role in pandemic response and recovery. Participation is critical to restoring and creating trust between youth and government, an essential component of the new social contract needed to secure young people's futures as well as that of wider society and the planet;

(c) Duty-bearers should respond to the lived realities and specific contexts of youth and work with them as partners to further encourage youth leadership. Investing in the creation of strong and resilient youth-centred communities is essential. Trust, inclusion, protection, participation and a focus on priority issues for youth are crucial.

(d) Human rights education for youth will empower them to uphold human rights and participate in public affairs and democratic decision-making processes. Sustainable funding, training, materials and in-kind support are equally important in building resilient youth communities and social engagement.

112. Recalling the recommendations made in previous reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,⁹⁰ the High Commissioner invites the Human Rights Council to consider and assess the extent of the barriers and discrimination faced by young people with a view to considering what measures would most effectively advance youth rights, such as the following:

(a) Mainstreaming the human rights of youth through existing mechanisms, policies and programmes;

(b) Creating a special procedure mandate under the auspices of the Council;

(c) Considering the possibility of an international instrument;

(d) Introducing a mechanism that would ensure permanent, structured youth participation in the Council's work, such as an annual youth forum as an ongoing component of the Council.

⁹⁰ [A/HRC/39/33](#) and [A/HRC/49/32](#).