



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



Youth Forum 2023 Report

13 - 15 March 2023

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





Youth Forum 2023

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WELCOME BACK TO VIENNA!

Short on time?

Please click [here](#) for a video highlight of the Youth Forum 2023, including the Youth Statement.



Since 2012, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Youth Initiative has been connecting young people from around the globe and empowering them to become active in their schools, communities and youth groups for substance use prevention and health promotion. Last year, UNODC celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the launch of the Youth Initiative, commemorating steadfast support for youth in learning about substance use prevention and being empowered to start taking effective action to better protect the health and wellbeing of their peers through the annual Youth Forum. The outbreak of COVID-19 rendered face-to-face conferences and workshops to virtual meetings, limiting social interaction and bonding between participants. But with the global pandemic slowly subsiding, UNODC carefully deliberated circumstances and safety measures to welcome back delegations from all over the world to the

66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND). This included the youthful presence of participants of the Youth Forum 2023, held in-person for the first time since 2020.

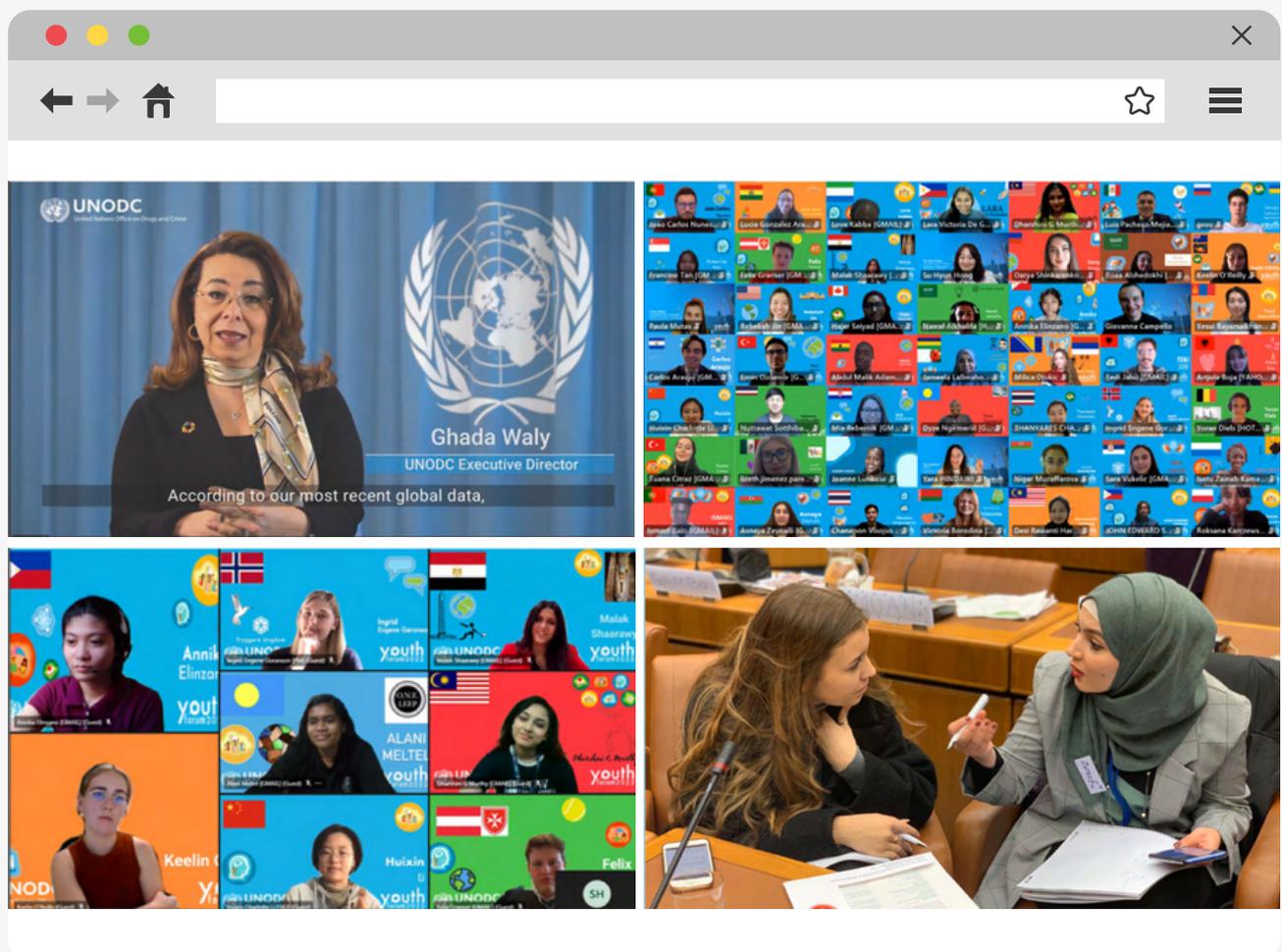
Upholding the aim of the Youth Initiative in providing youth with the opportunity to participate, learn and reflect on the potential impact of substance use and ways to address this growing problem, UNODC started to pave the way for the Youth Forum 2023 in the summer of 2022, with a call for invitation for youth nominations. Member States were asked to nominate youth leaders best suited to participate in the Youth Forum. A total of 60 youths were nominated from 36 countries, who went through a selection process consisting of questionnaire responses, CVs, and individual interviews.

In consideration of the lingering cases of COVID-19 and taking priority in protecting the health of the participating youth, it was decided to limit the number of final participants (in comparison to previous online Youth Fora).

Organized in-person from 13 to 15 March 2023 in Vienna (Austria), this year's Youth Forum brought together 34 young leaders from 28 countries to learn about evidence-based drug use prevention, discuss their perspectives on the world drug problem, and be empowered to embark on or continue action on drug use prevention and health promotion. And, customary to the tradition of the Youth Forum, the youth were welcomed back to the Plenary session of CND to address the global policymakers and present their views.

This is a special and powerful opportunity, as it allows adult policymakers to listen to the voice of the youth, and their perspectives on drug-related matters. Last year's youth participants reminded Member States of the impact and influence they have as decision-makers in bettering the health of all by investing in prevention and also asked that youth be co-creators in the process, *"Change lies in your hands, so join forces with the youth for a future we can look forward to."*

Keep reading to the end to read the messages and aspirations from this year's youth participants.



EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

One of the key experiences of participating in the Youth Forum is meeting other young leaders who are similarly interested in working towards building a healthier, better future. Throughout the Youth Forum (and beyond) the youth establish new comradeships, learn from each other and work as a team through collaboration. In order to support the youth in getting to know each other and build rapport, pre-forum tasks were organized to introduce the youth to their peers.

In the weeks leading up to the event, youth participants interacted with each other and brought together their views and expectations of the Youth Forum. Youth met up virtually prior to the event to get to know each other and break the ice through rounds of “Two Truths and a Lie”. They also shared why they wanted to take part in the Youth Forum, and why this was important to them.

Through these pre-engagement tasks, youths were introduced to background knowledge of substance use prevention that would help them be better prepared for their discussions during the Youth Forum. And with the aim of inspiring youths on how young people could be involved in drug prevention efforts in their communities, youth were also asked to share their past experiences, studies and volunteer activities on drug use prevention and health promotion, and reflect why youth engagement is important and how youth can be better engaged. UNODC extended opportunities for volunteers who wanted to take the floor during the Youth Forum to present about their prevention work from back home.

Pre-forum Task #4
Name: Dervin Lua Wei Jun
Country: Singapore

What are two truths and one lie about you?

Group 3

Group 7

What does Youth empowerment mean to me?

“We are the present and the future, we are the change that we want to see in this world”

Hana Elkaiei
Youth Forum 2023 participant from Egypt

Pre-forum Task #4
Name: Angelina Malashenkova
Country: Russia

What are two truths and one lie about you?

Pre-forum Task #4
Name: Todor Marlov
Country: Bulgaria

What are two truths and one lie about you?

Group 1

Where do you see yourself after the YF?

“I hope that I will be able to support my community, because there is nothing better than helping someone in need”

Todor Marlov
Youth Forum 2023 participant from Bulgaria

KICKING OFF THE YOUTH FORUM

The Youth Forum 2023 was officially kicked off at the Opening Ceremony on 13 March 2023, where Ms. Ghada Waly, Executive Director of UNODC, warmly welcomed youth participants to the home of UNODC in Vienna for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. Through her opening remarks, the Executive Director acknowledged the challenges that the younger generation have faced throughout the pandemic, and expressed UNODC's readiness in working with youth to invest in their skills, education, mental health, and supporting youth to reclaim their prospects and empower them to face the future with confidence. She also urged the youth to capitalize on the opportunity to learn about evidence-based drug use prevention, connect and share ideas and good practices with each other, and use their voices to reach their peers and communities. She went on to say,

"I call on each one of you to keep caring, keep working, and keep innovating."



Youth participants were also welcomed by Mr. Jean-luc Lemahieu, Director of Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, who commended the high level of motivation and commitment of the young leaders, and invited 3 youths to speak of their expectations and aspirations of collective learning and thinking of the various ways of addressing the drug problems that impact communities, countries, and the world.

Attendees were also greeted by previous Youth Forum 2022 alumni, who shared their reflections and learnings from their experience just a year ago, in hopes of inspiring and motivating the youth participants of 2023.



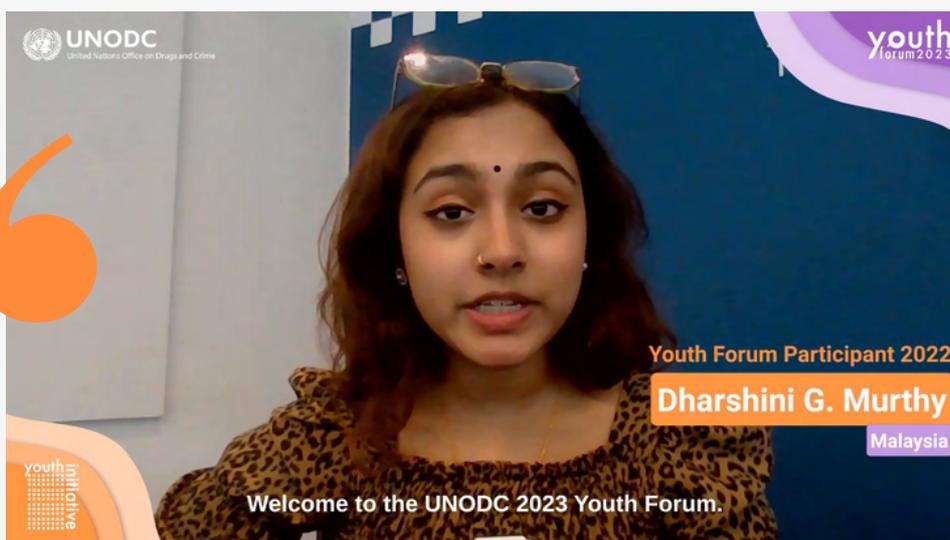
YOUTH ALUMNI

EMIN ÖZDEMİR, YOUTH FORUM PARTICIPANT 2022, TÜRKIYE



“Taking part in last year’s Youth Forum was a truly **enriching experience for me**, on academic and social levels, and I still very fondly remember all the memories I have from last year. It’s a truly **unique opportunity** to be able to converse with youth leaders throughout the world **who are passionate about the same topics as I am**, and **who are passionate about helping the communities around them.**”

DHARSHINI G. MURTHY, YOUTH FORUM PARTICIPANT 2022, MALAYSIA

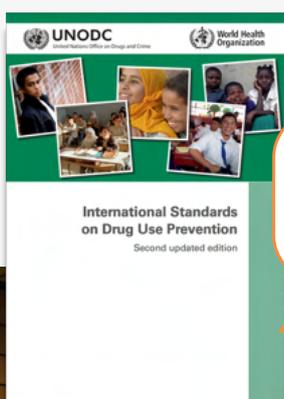


“Even after the Youth Forum, it will be a **continuous learning and continuous experience of putting forward what you have learned and what you have experienced** during the Youth Forum. I hope all of the youth here today enjoy and learn a lot, and **make sure your voices are heard**. All the best.”

EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND EMPOWER...



Youth participants were introduced to the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention as the key fundamental resource that provides evidence-based effective strategies and interventions. Not only does this guiding document provide summaries and characteristics of prevention measures that work, it also provides characteristics of strategies that are associated with a lack of efficacy or with adverse effects, based on expert consultations. So, policy makers and prevention experts are able to shy away from programmes that contain unfavourable characteristics associated with ineffectiveness.



When in doubt, always refer back to the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention!



Throughout the week, youth participants embraced key take-home messages on substance use prevention, absorbed new learnings, and reflected on their Aha moments (moments of sudden insights). UNODC experts from the Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section imparted their knowledge and expertise on substance use prevention, and in particular on prevention strategies found to be effective according to science and research.

The experts highlighted that prevention goes beyond awareness raising and fear arousal, and that it should cover a wide range of settings and age ranges. It can even start when the fetus is still in its pre-natal stages! And most importantly, it needs to support the individual's growth and development, and build resilience. Youth learned of the various protective and risk factors, and environmental influences that impact one's vulnerability to drug use.

Mr. Jean-luc Lemahieu also expressed high hopes to the recommendations that the youth would give to policy makers attending CND and to the international discussions around the world drug problem. And lastly, Mr. Justice Tettey, Chief of Drugs, Laboratory and Scientific Services Branch, wished the youths fruitful discussions in working with and learning from UNODC experts and from each other, and most importantly, to have fun.



Based on their new learnings, youth self-reflected on risk and protective factors that they recognized to be relatable to their communities, and on factors that they deemed needed improvement. In small groups, youths shared their thoughts, good and bad practices from their communities, as well as knowledge and experiences gained through their previous work on drug prevention or health promotion through their schools or NGOs/CBOs. Open and respectful dialogues amongst peers in closed sessions enabled flowing conversations and a collaborative learning environment to be formed for all youth. Youths also exchanged.

Not only did the youth participants discuss substantive matters on drug prevention, they also brainstormed on how youths could be better involved and engaged in projects or activities back in their communities. Youths reflected on their past experience of participation and brainstormed elements that had made it either a positive and meaningful experience, or an unsatisfactory one.

The focus should be on the person, not the drug.



From there, youths were further prompted to reflect on the reasons why youth should be engaged in drug use prevention work, and better ways of being genuinely engaged. The Handbook on Youth Participation in Drug Prevention Work was introduced as a valuable resource that propelled the discussions.

Throughout the Youth Forum, youth participants also had the chance to attend various side events (just as any other adult policy maker or stakeholder attending CND would!) to gain insight on recent trends and latest discussions surrounding substance use and its prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation approaches. And in line with the Youth Initiative's aim of providing more spaces for youths to contribute to the global drug policy-making discussions, youth were also given the floor to give presentations at side events, in addition to the delivery of the joint Youth Statement at the Plenary of the 66th CND.



“Dame. Zettai.” (Never. Ever.) “Value Yourself.”

DRUG PREVENTION APPEAL FROM JAPAN AFTER 30 YEARS

[ORGANIZED BY JAPAN]

Moe Yokoro, along with 2 other students from Japan, highlighted the continued need to pay attention to drug use prevention. They shared how youth in the Japanese community are actively involved in conducting youth-to-youth education sessions in schools, communicating accurate information, raising awareness through prevention campaigns and fund-raising activities. They called for continued action on promoting prevention and moving towards a common goal.

Claudio Llatas shared his inspiring experience of working in the NGO 'LIPREC' in Peru, through the DAPC-supported project by CEDRO. Youth leaders of LIPREC were supported through capacity building workshops on drug use prevention, youth empowerment, social skills development, and contributed as agents for change in the Santa Anita community of Peru. He emphasized the active involvement of youth in the project, from planning to evaluation, which enabled them to make tangible impact in their community.



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR: INCREASING YOUTH PARTICIPATION, SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARENESS THROUGH SCHOOLS AND PREVENTION IMPACT ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (EMPOWERING YOUTH PREVENTION INFLUENCERS) [ORGANIZED BY UTRIP]

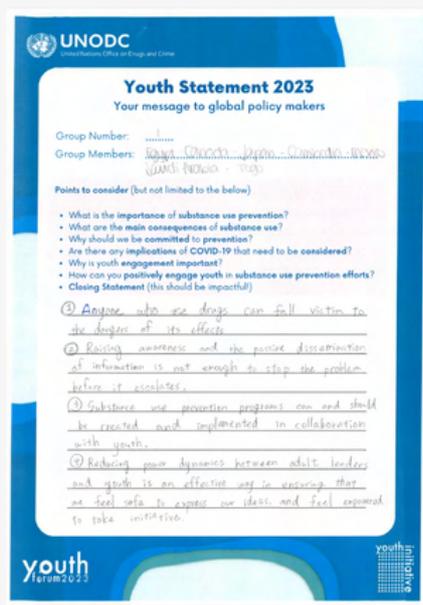
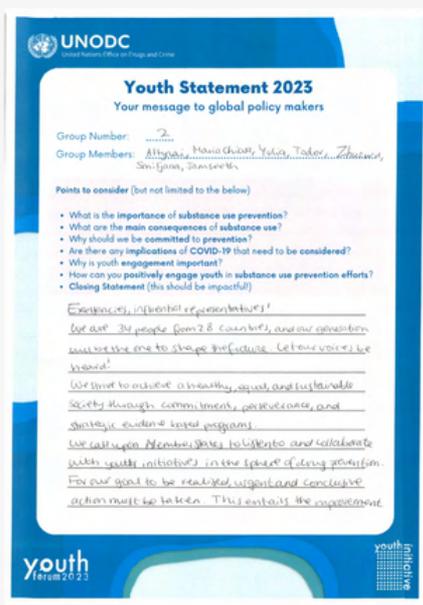
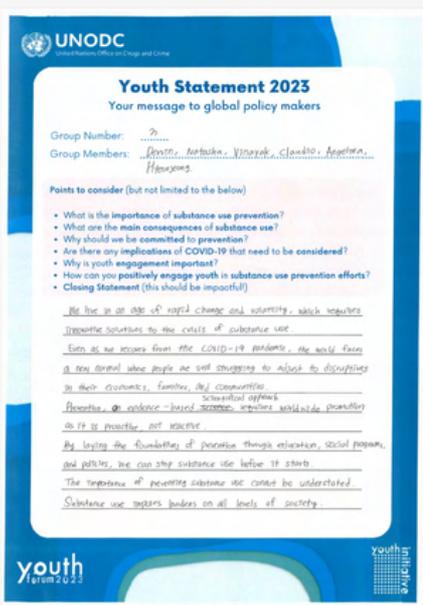


Vinayak Menon shared his journey of contributing to drug use prevention, urged the audience to give youth a seat at the table, and genuinely involve them in prevention work. To champion the next generation of leaders, he recommended to encourage youth involvement in local grassroots environments, provide learning opportunities, and support the nurturing of their leadership skills. He stressed the critical role that young leaders play in rendering positive change: "If we want young people to be the leaders of today and tomorrow, we have to give them autonomy and let them lead their own projects."



PREPARING THE YOUTH STATEMENT

A big highlight of the Youth Forum is the drafting and delivery of the joint Youth Statement, which enables youth voices to be brought to the forefront. Youths were divided into groups and outlined the key messages they wanted to relay to various stakeholders, through a collaborative and inclusive process, ensuring to include equal contributions from all groups. Then, youth collectively reviewed and edited the draft statement to best represent their unified voices. The Youth Statement is a call to action for global policymakers to work with youth on better protecting the health and well-being of the future generation by continuing to invest in effective, evidence-based drug use prevention. Please see the next section to 'listen' to youth voices.



YOUTH STATEMENT

2023

66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

We are 34 youth from 28 countries, and we are honoured to stand before you today.

We realize that substance use is a multifactorial problem that affects young people in every region around the world. For every person that experiences substance use disorders, there are greater burdens placed on healthcare, the economy, and communities. As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faces a new normal where people are still struggling to adjust to disruptions in their lives. With increased substance use during the isolation periods, we need to stay vigilant in addressing these issues to return to a normally functioning society.

The importance of preventing substance use cannot be understated, as prevention is a cost-effective, proactive solution to substance use. Raising awareness and passively disseminating information is not enough to stop the problem before it escalates. We should strive to achieve a healthy, equal, and sustainable society through commitment, perseverance, and strategic evidence-based programmes. By laying the foundations of prevention through education, social programmes, and policies, we can stop substance use before it starts. For example, more social and emotional skills learning that builds resilience at age-appropriate development stages could be implemented within the education system.

For our goal to be realised, urgent and conclusive action must be taken. This entails the improvement of health literacy on a global scale, the implementation of preventative policies, and the promotion of social support networks. The focus must be on the person, not the substance. Cooperation between various stakeholders is necessary and research must be further developed to avail more evidence-based prevention programmes.

We call on Member States to consult with youth to understand our values and needs. Youth engagement is critical in making prevention effective. Young people offer unique insight into constantly evolving substance use issues, foster borderless interconnected awareness, and ensure long-term sustainability. Youth should be actively engaged in the implementation of existing platforms and projects because we have a better understanding of our generation. We can also help create new evidence-based strategies with a holistic and regional context and perspective. Reducing power dynamics between adult leaders and youth is an effective way to ensure that we feel safe to express our ideas and feel empowered to take initiative. Only through collaboration can we reach innovative and practical solutions.

The importance of investing in our generation must not be ignored. We have a responsibility to ensure a safer future for everyone. We know what needs to be addressed, and what our needs are. Youth are the present, not just the future.



Breaking the cycle of substance use tomorrow requires youth engagement in prevention today.

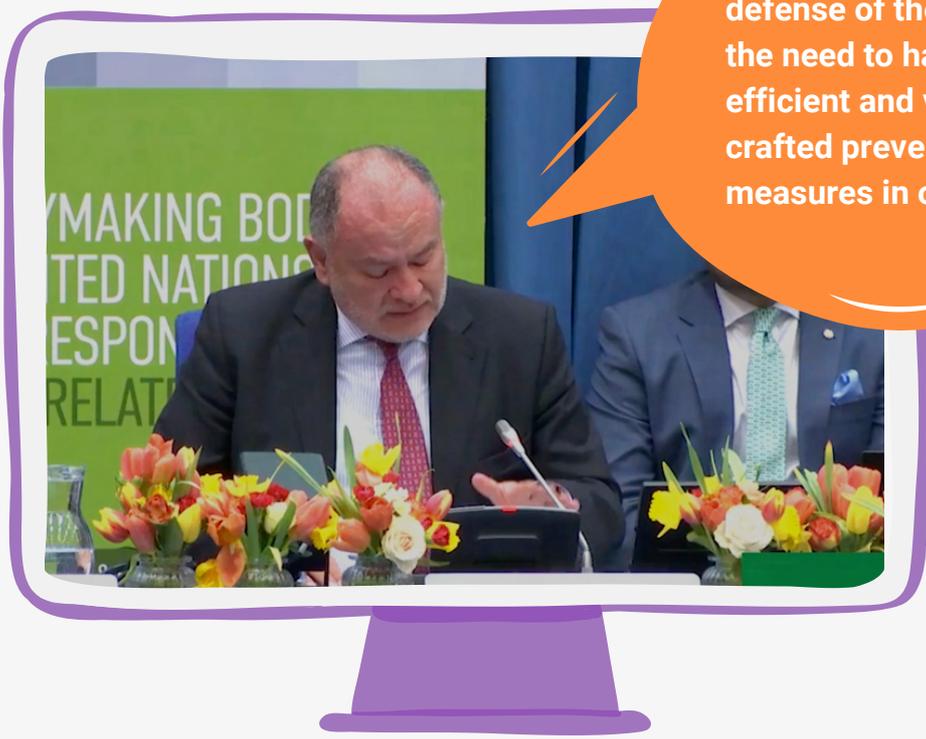


YOUTH STATEMENT 2023

66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs



"This has been the best defense of the value and the need to have efficient and very well crafted prevention measures in our world."



LET'S HEAR FROM YOUTH!

IT WAS TRULY A GREAT LEARNING EXPERIENCE. LOOKING FORWARD FOR MORE SUCH EXPERIENCES IN THE FUTURE.



Yojna Mooloo, Mauritius

I WOULD LOVE TO THANK YOU ALL ONCE AGAIN FOR THIS ASTRONOMICAL EXPERIENCE, I THANK YOU ALL DEEPLY.



Hana Elkaiei, Egypt

I AM GRATEFUL TO THE WHOLE TEAM WHO PLANNED EVERYTHING SO WELL TO ALLOW ME TO HAVE SUCH A MEMORABLE TIME INTERACTING AND ENGAGING WITH MY FELLOW YOUTH.

I WOULD LOVE TO EXPRESS MY SINCERE THANKS AND GRATITUDE ONCE AGAIN FOR THIS LIFETIME EXPERIENCE AND TEAM FOR YOUR GENEROUS GUIDANCE SO FAR. MAY HAPPINESS AND PROSPERITY HAPPEN TO YOU ALL.



Natasha Githinji, Kenya



Hak Bunleng, Cambodia

THOSE 3 DAYS WERE AMONG THE BEST ONES IN MY LIFE! THANK YOU SO MUCH!



Julia Pozdnukhova, Russia

I WAS FASCINATED BY HOW YOUTH COULD ACTUALLY TALK ABOUT THEIR THOUGHTS AND PLANS, AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK FROM OTHER YOUTHS WITH VARIOUS BACKGROUNDS.



Moe Yokoro, Japan

I JUST FELT INSPIRED AND MOTIVATED BECAUSE OF EVERYTHING, SINCE MORE THAN SUBSTANCE USE, WE DISCUSSED YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND HOW WE CAN BE ADVOCATE FOR SEVERAL TOPICS.

AS A SCIENTIST, I KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING BECAUSE IT PROVIDES US WITH A REALISTIC VISION AND DATA TO MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS BASED ON EVIDENCE.



Inês Costa Louro, Portugal



Andrés Felipe Guerra Rodríguez, Colombia

NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF BACKGROUND WE HAVE OR WHAT KIND OF ENVIRONMENT WE HAVE, I THINK THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO MAKE SURE THE PRACTICES WE CONDUCT ACTUALLY MAKE SENSE.



Luxi Cai, China

VISIBLE HIGHLIGHTS

SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

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

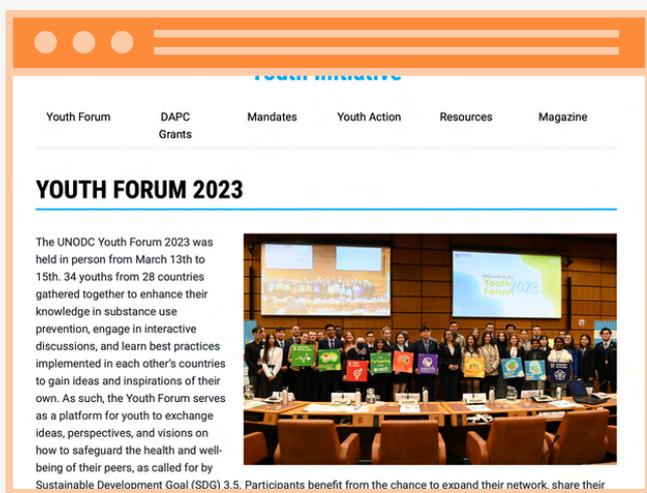
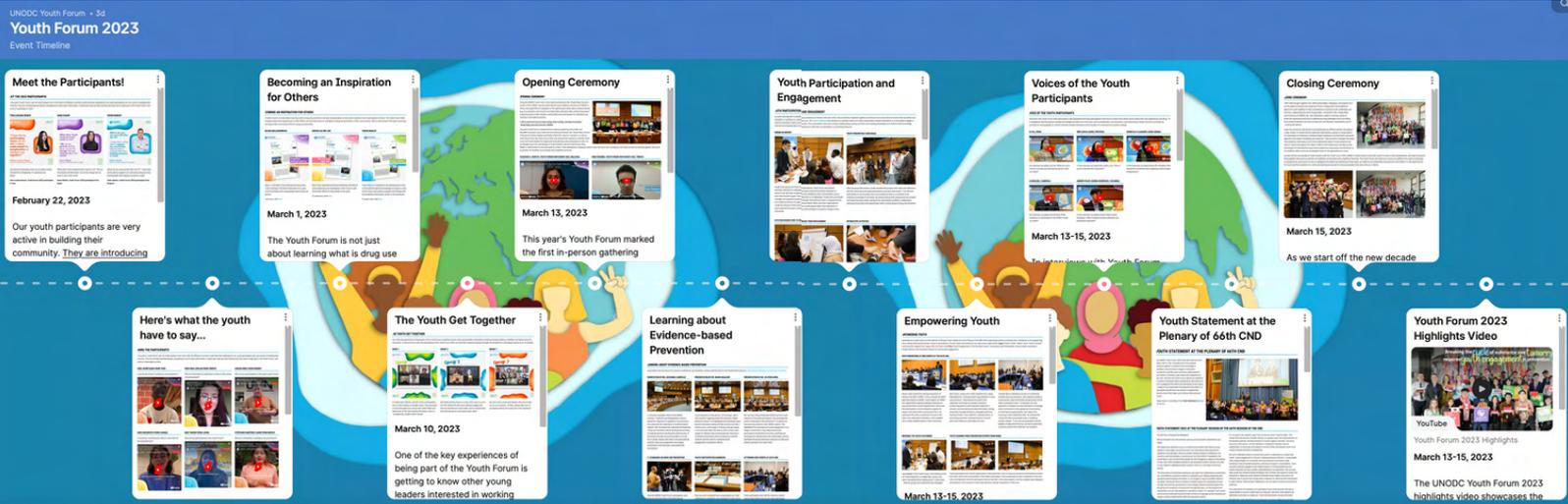
The Youth Forum gained a total of 23,848 media views and impressions, which is indicative of the number of times that people were engaged with a social media post through reactions, comments, shares, and clicks. The table below presents indicators that depict the overall performance from the three main social media channels of the UNODC Youth Initiative during February – March 2023.



Channels	New Followers	Engagement rate	Media Views & Impressions	Posts
Twitter	213	6.84%	17,158	22
Facebook	11	1.84%	1,220	13
Instagram	96	3.91%	5,470	17
Total	320	4.2%	23,848	52

UNODC YOUTH INITIATIVE WEBSITE

The [UNODC Youth Initiative homepage](#) showcased the Youth Forum 2023 through an [interactive Youth Forum 2023 Timeline](#) that demonstrates the events leading up to the Youth Forum, and a [Youth Action](#) article providing sneak peeks into preparations and anticipations by participating youth.



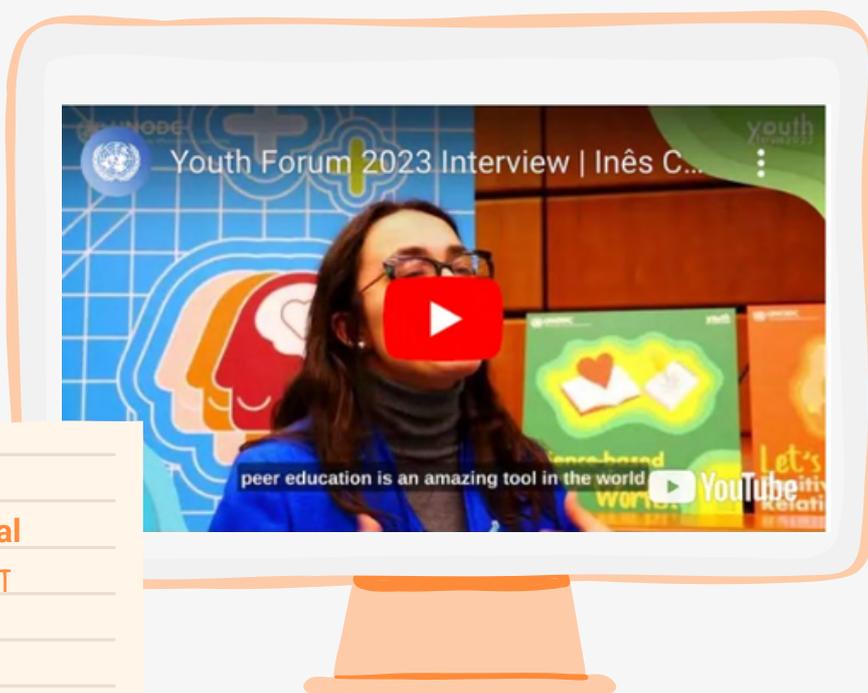
YOUTH INTERVIEWS

The Youth Initiative Team also conducted several interviews with youth leaders who were keen on sharing their views and perspectives with the world. Please click on the thumbnails below to listen to youth voices of inspiration and revelation!



Luxi Cai, China

WHAT ARE SOME SIGNIFICANT CONCEPTS YOU LEARNED DURING THE YOUTH FORUM 2023?



Inês Costa Louro, Portugal

WHY IS YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IMPORTANT?



Sewar Ali K Alnahdy, Saudi Arabia

WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN
ADAPTING EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMMES?



Hak Bunleng, Cambodia

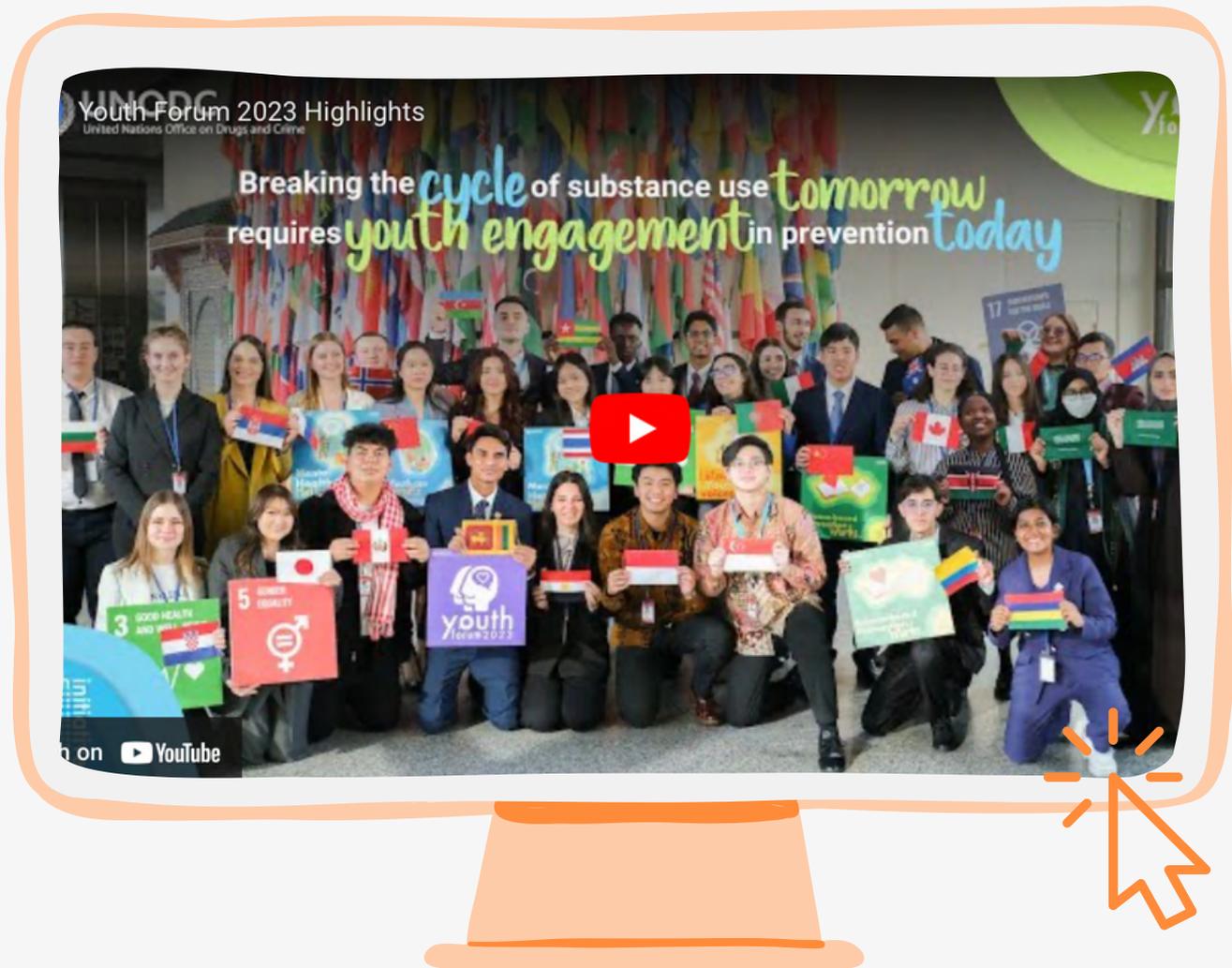
WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
UNODC YOUTH FORUM 2023?



**Andrés Felipe Guerra
Rodriguez, Colombia**

WHY IS EVIDENCE-BASED SUBSTANCE
USE PREVENTION IMPORTANT ?

YOUTH FORUM 2023 HIGHLIGHTS VIDEO



Finally, a video was also created to highlight and summarize the main events of the Youth Forum 2023. It not only showcases youth activities, but also the delivery of the Youth Statement. We invite you to view the [video](#).

YOUTH FORUM 2023 PARTICIPANTS

Name	Country
Jahdai Vigona	Australia
Elnur Mammadov	Azerbaijan
Todor Marlov	Bulgaria
Bunleng Hak	Cambodia
Lauren Anzarouth	Canada
Zhuowu Xie	China
Luxi Cai	China
Andrés Felipe Guerra Rodríguez	Columbia
Nika Baić	Croatia
Hana Elkaiei	Egypt
Enrico Buulolo	Indonesia
Maria Chiara Käser	Italy
Davide Zucchia	Italy
Altynai Luciana Borsoi	Italy
Moe Yokoro	Japan
Natasha Githinji	Kenya
Yojna Mooloo	Mauritius
Stephanie Galilea Martinez Albor	Mexico
Adrian Mikic	Norway
Juan Claudio Llatas Llanos	Peru
Inês Louro Costa	Portugal
Hyeonjeong Kim	Republic of Korea
Angelina Malashenkova	Russia
Yulia Pozdnukhova	Russia
Dzerassa Abaeva#	Russia
Remas Bassam M. Aloqayyel	Saudi Arabia
Sewar Ali K Alnahdy	Saudi Arabia
Smiljana Aleksic	Serbia
Dervin Lua Wei Jun	Singapore
Jamseeth Hassan Kuthoos	Sri Lanka
Phutawan Saelee	Thailand
Manuel Mawê Kama	Togo
Írem Sena Arslan	Türkiye
Vinayak Menon	United States of America

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNODC would like to take this opportunity to extend its gratitude to the countries who have provided support in identifying the outstanding young leaders that participated in the Youth Forum 2023. We look forward to continued support and nominations from Member States in the coming years, to provide youth with a stage and voice in health and drug policy, and to empower youth leaders in countering the world drug problem.

UNODC would also like to acknowledge the main sponsor of the Youth Initiative, the Government of the Russian Federation, for its on-going support in funding the UNODC Youth Initiative. We have witnessed more than 10 years of youth engagement, education, and empowerment through the annual Youth Forum, and look forward to many more to come.



INFORMATION FOR PERMANENT MISSIONS

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

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

When UNODC commences the nomination process for Youth Forum 2024, a guidance document will be provided to Permanent Missions in order to provide assistance in nominating appropriate candidates for participation. In addition to ministries or government entities that work with and support youth to live healthy lives, UNODC also suggests reaching out to youth organizations, groups, leagues, civics groups or other organized activities that are oriented towards empowering youth as leaders working on substance use prevention. Public and private schools, including higher education, may also be settings to identify youth for participation. Please also note that nominations can only be made by Permanent Missions, and thus a coordinated approach should be exercised amongst concerned stakeholders in-country to identify the most appropriate youth.

Again, UNODC would like to thank Permanent Missions that have nominated youth to participate in Youth Forum 2023, and we look forward to expanding the youth community in the years to come. Further information and guidance will be provided in the coming months.



Youth Forum 2023

Adieu

UNTIL



SM.

Illustration by Saptadipa Mallick

Youth forum 2024!