



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



UNODC Youth Forum 2024

Questions and Answers

Introduction

The Youth Forum is an annual event organised by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (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 often a life changing experience to the participants - the Forum allows for networking among the participants as well as learning from the experiences of other youth from different regions of the world, on UNODC, and on global policymaking structures and discussions in the field of drug use prevention and health promotion.

Participatory thematic discussions, facilitated by UNODC experts, lead to the development of a short consensus statement by the youth that is delivered to the delegates of the CND - the policy making body of UNODC.

What age are the participants?

UNODC understands that youth can be broadly defined depending on regional preference. Nominees should be at least 14 years old and no more than 23 years of age. Any youth younger than 18 years of age must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Activities are designed to accommodate the needs of the participants, including small group sessions with similarly aged attendees, as well as times when the groups are merged to promote sharing of ideas, experiences and community engagement.

Does UNODC cover the cost of travel for the youth and/or the guardian?

UNODC has a limited amount of funding to support youth from low- and middle-income countries. In general, it is expected that the travel cost of participants from high-income countries are covered by their respective country. Decisions about funding support are not made until the full list of participants is confirmed and the amount of funding available can be compared to the travel costs of the nominees. If UNODC offers to cover the cost of travel for a nominee, and the nominee is younger than 18 years of age, the travel cost of one parent or guardian is also covered.

Who can nominate Youth Forum participants?

The Permanent Mission is the only entity that can nominate youth to participate in the UNODC Youth Forum. Please understand that UNODC is not in a position to verify that a nomination arriving directly from the capital is from the mandated authority. A coordinated approach among all the concerned stakeholders in-country to identify the most appropriate youth is strongly recommended.

How many youths can be nominated?

The number of nominations should be limited to no more than 2 youth from one Member State, keeping in mind that it is perfectly acceptable to nominate one youth. Moreover, please note that in cases where more than one youth is nominated, and provided that funds are available, UNODC is in a position to support the travel of only one participant.

If a youth is nominated by the Permanent Mission, does that automatically mean they participate in the Youth Forum?

After the Permanent Mission nominates the youth candidate(s), UNODC contacts the youth and asks them to provide a CV, complete a survey and participate in an interview. UNODC selects the best candidates to participate in the Youth Forum, based overall on their language abilities, interest, and experience in substance use prevention. UNODC does not discriminate based on the basis of race, colour, national origin, sex/gender/sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status or disability. If a youth is not selected to participate in the Youth Forum, it is most often because they are not between the ages of 14 and 23, they do not have sufficient language skills, or their interest/experience lies in areas other than substance use prevention. Moreover, if the nominated youth are not responsive to the abovementioned selection process, they will not be considered for selection to participate.

Are simultaneous interpretation services available during the Forum?

The Youth Forum is a highly interactive environment where UNODC seeks to create a community of learners and advocates for effective prevention implementation, for which it would be difficult to provide effective simultaneous interpretation services. That is why it is critical that the participants understand and speak English so they can interact with each other. No simultaneous interpretation is available.

Is the session open for Permanent Missions, civil society or other external partners to participate?

The UNODC Youth Forum is a safe space for youth from all over the world to come together and discuss the science and evidence around prevention of substance use behaviours. Therefore, the Youth Forum is a closed session in order to protect the confidentiality of the youth and create a safe place for them to ask questions, interact and learn. It should be noted that parents or guardians are welcome to be in the room.

Are youth representing the Member State during the Commission on Narcotic Drugs?

Youth are participants in the UNODC Youth Forum that takes place on the fringes of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. They have access to the Vienna International Centre and to the activities associated with the Youth Forum. They do not have access to participate in the Sessions or Side Events associated with the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. However, special permission is arranged each year for all the participants in the Youth Forum to attend the Plenary Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs during the delivery of the Youth Statement as part of the Youth Forum. UNODC encourages Member States to have youth be a part of their delegation to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and provide a valuable youth perspective. However, the Youth Forum participants do not have the time to be full-time delegates during the year they participate in the Youth Forum.

Are youth representing the Member State during the Youth Forum?

No. The Youth Forum is a safe place for youth to exchange experiences, learn, and develop a statement sharing their hopes and visions with CND. Therefore, although they are nominated by Member States, they participate in the Youth Forum in their personal capacity.

Do youth have responsibilities prior to the Youth Forum or following the Youth Forum?

UNODC strives to create a community of learners and therefore, prior to the actual Youth Forum, shares information and create communities through our social media platforms. This allows us to answer any questions the youth may have prior to the event, and also help them prepare for the Youth Forum. Following the Youth Forum, UNODC expects youths to continue participating in the youth community, implementing substance use prevention activities that reflect their learnings from the Youth Forum, and being role models for future Youth Forum participants. Through these processes, UNODC continues to provide technical assistance and information to the youth as necessary. It should be noted that all activities following the Youth Forum are voluntary and UNODC provides an advisory role only.

What are the dates and schedule of events for the Youth Forum in 2024?

The Youth Forum is organized around the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Typically, the Commission is held in March each year. The Youth Forum is expected to be three days, with the final day being the day that the full group of youth deliver a statement to the Plenary Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

With the COVID-19 pandemic slowly subsiding, the Youth Forum 2023 was cautiously organized as an in-person event. As long as the health and safety circumstances allow, UNODC anticipates the Youth Forum 2024 to be in-person, in which case it is important to note that sufficient time will be needed for the processing of travel-related administration. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that nominations of youth candidates are made within the designated deadlines to accommodate the consideration of the respective youth in funding support and/or other travel-related arrangements. In addition, this would also imply that the selection may be more competitive compared to the virtual format, in order to ensure that the in-person gathering of all youth participants is at a manageable level from the participatory and budgetary points of view.

An agenda and schedule of events will be provided to all Youth Forum participants, and parents or guardians, prior to the event and with enough time for planning. It should be noted that UNODC primarily uses e-mail to disseminate information regarding logistics, and the focal point from the Permanent Mission who nominated the youth is copied on these e-mails.

Suggestions on possible ways to identify youth candidates to nominate

The following are suggestions that may be helpful for Permanent Missions in selecting and nominating appropriate candidates to participate in the UNODC Youth Forum.

Who can help you to identify youth?

The first logical step would be to identify Ministries or Government Agencies that work with youth and empower youth to live a healthy, happy life. This could include, but is not limited to the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Justice, or the Ministry with responsibility for substance use prevention activities. It may be helpful to ask one Ministry to coordinate the process, as the number of youths that can be nominated is limited to 2. UNODC also suggests reaching out to youth organizations, groups, leagues, civics groups or other organized activities that are oriented toward empowering youth as leaders and/or working on substance use prevention. Public and private schools, including higher education, may also be settings to identify youth for nomination.

What method should be used to identify up to 2 youth to participate in the UNODC Youth Forum?

The methods for identifying youth to participate will vary from country to country, and there is no one right way. A few suggestions that may work include, 1) implementing a nation-wide application process with pre-established criteria, 2) create a contest or competition and select the highest achievers, or 3) call on Ministries or civil society organizations to recommend or nominate youth based on a pre-established criteria with a national level committee making a final selection for the Permanent Mission to put forth. UNODC encourages Member States to use a process that is transparent, fun, creative, interactive and empowering for the youth. This will help to identify youth who will be successful at the UNODC Youth Forum and continue to contribute at the national and global level far beyond the event.

Are there elements that should be in the recommended inclusion criteria?

As a reminder, the youth to be nominated by the Permanent Mission must be at least 14 years of age and no older than 23 years of age. We advise that the English language skills of the youth are assessed in advance of their nomination. The youth should have knowledge of and interest/experience in substance use prevention or health promotion. And as a final reminder, UNODC will need to maintain regular communication with the youth via e-mail and other social media platforms, so it is advised to nominate youth that have the means and capacity to connect online.