Youth will bear the brunt of the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, their life chances transformed by the unprecedented disruptions to education and employment, as well as the severe trauma many have experienced. If we are to ameliorate the challenges they face and secure a stable, sustainable, and just future, the international community, governments, and civil society organizations must include young women and men as equal partners in planning and executing pandemic response and recovery efforts.
INTRODUCTION

Today’s young people belong to the largest generation of youth in history: 1.8 billion individuals between the ages of 10 and 24, equivalent to one in four people worldwide. The UN has celebrated this unprecedented youth population as a “unique demographic dividend” that could help drive lasting change.

This year was set to be a turning point in young people’s struggle for recognition as key agents of global change. The youth climate movement would have pressed its demands at the 26th United Nations Climate Conference. And youth activists would have redoubled their efforts for the fifth anniversary of the ground-breaking UN Resolution 2250, which acknowledged youth as essential partners in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

COVID-19 has upended these opportune moments, but the pandemic itself may still make 2020 a watershed year for today’s youth. In many communities, young people are key activists communicating COVID-19 risks to their peers and elders. They are working in healthcare, volunteering to help the most vulnerable, innovating new solutions to the pandemic’s many challenges, building intergenerational solidarity, and planning for the post-COVID-19 future.

At the same time, young people, though less susceptible to the disease, will be among the hardest hit by its socio-economic and political fallout. The pandemic is undermining gains made in education, poverty reduction, peacebuilding, health, and human rights, and it poses a significant threat to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Already dubbed “Generation Pandemic,” an entire cohort of young people is contending with profound disruptions to employment, education, and everyday life that will echo throughout their lives. The future of marginalized youth is particularly challenged, since recovery from disasters tends to reflect existing social disadvantages.

To take advantage of youth’s numbers, energy, and creativity to “build back better” from COVID-19, the international community, governments, and civil society organizations should adopt an intersectional approach in their work and make a bold commitment to engaging with young people as equal partners.

A youth-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery should:

1. Recognize, engage, and include youth as leaders and equal partners
2. Protect human rights and basic freedoms
3. Ensure a recovery that is just and sustainable
4. Invest in education that is inclusive and accessible
5. Support young people’s mental health
6. Incentivize youth-led action

These six pillars will require particular attention to the needs of disadvantaged youth, and a commitment to address socio-economic, gender, and other inequalities. Pandemic policies and actions must explicitly promote youth inclusion and rights, while recognizing the diverse aspirations of young people around the world.

“The world cannot afford a lost generation of youth, their lives set back by COVID-19 and their voices stifled by lack of participation. Let us do far more to tap their talents as we tackle the pandemic and chart a recovery that leads to a more peaceful, sustainable, and equitable future for all.”

— UN Secretary General António Guterres
THE PANDEMIC’S IMPACT ON YOUTH

Young people seem to be less susceptible to severe illness and death from COVID-19, but the pandemic is profoundly affecting their lives, exacerbating previous vulnerabilities and challenges, and undermining their ability to secure their future.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND BASIC FREEDOMS

Given that young people are frequently excluded from fully participating in public life, it should be no surprise that they are disaffected from politics, distrust governments and multilateral institutions, and are ever less likely to vote. Currently, only 2.2 percent of parliamentarians are under the age of thirty.  

The spread of COVID-19 and the resulting emergency measures may well deepen their exclusion. In past instances, some governments have pre-emptively imposed controls to curtail youth activism. Now, some seem to be attempting to consolidate authoritarian control under the guise of fighting COVID-19.  

“An emergency law passed to tackle the pandemic will allow the current Prime Minister, Victor Orbán, to rule by decree indefinitely. Young Europeans have denounced the legislation as a direct violation of fundamental rights.”

- International Labour Organization

For instance, in Hungary, an emergency law passed to tackle the pandemic will allow the current Prime Minister, Victor Orbán, to rule by decree indefinitely. Young Europeans have denounced the legislation as a direct violation of fundamental rights.  

“"The COVID-19 pandemic is creating a multi-dimensional crisis for young people around the world which also threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities within and between countries."”

- International Labour Organization

FIGURE 1. STRINGENCY OF GOVERNMENT COVID-19 CONTAINMENT MEASURES (AS OF 29 MARCH 2020)

Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, Blavatnik School of Government
COVID-19 emergency measures may also deepen the inequalities fueling conflicts and humanitarian crises. Given the predominance of young people in conflict-ridden states, youth will be most affected by any increases in violence. Indeed, prior to the pandemic, one in four young people experienced violence or conflict, according to the UN.$^5$

As documented in the 2018 report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, youth—especially young peacebuilders and young women activists—faced multiple and grave threats and discrimination even before the pandemic. Indeed, violence is one of the main barriers identified by young people to their participation in political life.$^6$

Young people’s actions on a range of issues from government corruption to climate change has relied heavily on mass protests. Similarly, many existing peacebuilding efforts depend on in-person initiatives. Social distancing and emergency laws prohibiting gatherings have effectively shut down much of this work, jeopardizing many of the achievements youth had attained. The current protests against police brutality and systemic racism in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere illustrate the importance of balancing public health concerns with the protection of basic freedoms and the rights to associate, organize, and protest.

Young people around the world now face the daunting prospect of reclaiming hard-won progress from governments that may be reluctant to respect their rights, even after the pandemic subsides.
UNESCO estimates more than 1.5 billion school-aged children and youth have been out of school or university due to COVID-19 lockdowns since the pandemic began. This means nine out of ten students across 191 countries have faced interruptions and/or significant changes to their education.  

To ensure continuity in schooling, many countries have shifted to distance education via Internet to replace classroom learning. However, significant disparities in global connectivity make distance education a major challenge in many countries. Half of the students out of school (approximately 826 million students) do not have a computer at home, while 43 percent (or 706 million students) cannot access the Internet at home. These disparities are particularly acute in the Global South: 89 percent of students in sub-Saharan Africa do not have home computers and 82 percent do not have Internet access. Though many young people use mobile phones as their primary digital device, approximately 56 million students—almost half of them in sub-Saharan Africa—live in areas with no mobile service. 

Many young people have already experienced significant interruptions to their education due to extreme weather disasters, the effects of which are cumulative and long-lasting. Moreover, for many youth, schools are more than educational institutions: they are sources of free or discounted meals, and vital social and health services. School closures may well lead to increased food insecurity and health challenges for many youth. 

As young people face delays to education, some may be forced to take on loans to continue their studies, leaving them with significant debts to repay. With many families facing dire economic prospects, others will be unable to resume their studies or to graduate once the pandemic subsides. Such a loss of education would reduce future employment prospects and the ability to secure a dignified future.
LIVELIHOODS AND EMPLOYMENT

Globally, young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. The 2008 financial crisis pushed youth unemployment from 11.9 percent (in 2007) to 13.0 percent (in 2009), and young people’s job security and wage prospects have never recovered. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 67.6 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 (more than 13 percent of the youth labor force) were unemployed prior to the pandemic.11

Studies show that entering the labor market during a recession significantly reduces earnings and wages, particularly for disadvantaged groups, such as people with limited education or racialized minorities.12 While such economic effects are most pronounced in the first decade following a recession, some health and social impacts last a lifetime. For example, young people who started their careers during the recession of the early 1980s suffer from higher mortality rates, are less likely to be married, and are more likely to be divorced or have no children.13

As with previous financial crises, the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is already hitting young workers hardest, because they are more likely to be working in precarious informal, seasonal, or part-time jobs. Prior to the pandemic, more than four in ten young workers globally—or 178 million youth—were employed in retail, hospitality, food services, manufacturing, and real estate, sectors that are suffering, largely because working from home is impossible.14

The ILO predicts the job and wage prospects for these young people will deteriorate sharply in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. A recent ILO survey on the pandemic’s effects on youth employment indicates that one in six young people are no longer working, while 42 percent report a decline in income.15

Moreover, many economic policies adopted to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic—such as bailouts, extended unemployment insurance, or mortgage freezes—do not take into account the needs of youth, or include them as eligible applicants.

Globally, young people are over-represented in informal work: prior to the pandemic, more than 75 percent of young workers under age 25 were employed in the informal sector as compared to just 60 percent of workers older than 25. Many youth who work informally subsist on daily wages.16

Strict and widespread lockdown measures have caused the collapse of the informal economy in many countries, leaving youth cut off from their only means of subsistence.17 In Nigeria, this dramatic loss of income, along with difficulty in accessing the state’s economic supports, has forced some youth to turn to crime in order to survive.18

YOUNG WORKERS IN CANADA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

In March 2020, more than one million jobs were lost in Canada and the general unemployment rate rose to 7.8 percent—its highest level since 2010. The greatest drop in employment occurred among workers between the ages of 15 and 24 years: one in four young people either lost their jobs or had their hours cut. This effectively increased youth unemployment from 10.3 percent in February 2020 to 16.8 percent a month later.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, nearly two in five youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years lost their jobs. Young workers born after 2000 were hit even harder, with three out of five now facing unemployment. In fact, young workers in the UK were twice as likely to have been working in a shutdown sector as the rest of the workforce.

The pandemic’s powerful impact on young workers is caused primarily by their overrepresentation in economic sectors devastated by pandemic lockdown measures, such as hospitality, service, and retail.

The pandemic has also made farming and herding—main sources of youth employment in sub-Saharan Africa and Central America, and already jeopardized by climate change—even more difficult. Lockdown measures have limited access to quality seeds and fertilizers, and kept pastoralists from moving their herds. In West Africa, 50 million people are now threatened by hunger.19

MENTAL HEALTH

On top of their concerns about the dramatic impacts of climate change, youth now face the additional uncertainty presented by the global pandemic. Young people must quickly adapt to new ways of learning and the abrupt loss of social support networks, including friends, extended family, and school.

In the United Kingdom, 65 percent of young people surveyed about their experiences during the pandemic evinced worry about their mental health. Similarly, mental health emerged as a key issue among participants in a webinar by PRIA Youth, a youth-led organization working for social change in India. In Quebec, Canada, more than a third of adolescents report experiencing high levels of psychological distress due to the pandemic.20

Crucially, an ILO youth survey conducted in May 2020 indicated that globally, those young people who lost their jobs due to the pandemic were most vulnerable to anxiety and depression. Sixty percent of young women and 53 percent of young men said they were fearful about their future career prospects.21

Due to social distancing regulations, young people with pre-existing mental health needs have often lost access to vital mental health services and support, while also finding themselves suddenly isolated—a situation that further undermines their wellbeing. More than 80 percent of respondents to the first UK survey on COVID-19’s impact on young people with mental health needs reported that their mental health had worsened. The top three issues young people highlighted were isolation and loneliness, not having enough to eat, and concern over the deterioration of their mental health.22

For some young people, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals and young women, confinement also increases the threat of violence and abuse in unsupportive homes. Studies from post-disaster contexts indicate that domestic violence surges in the aftermath of a sudden shutdown of economic activity and schooling. Preliminary reports from various countries show rising rates of domestic violence during the pandemic.23


BUSTING THE MYTH OF YOUTH “SUPER-SPREADERS”

Early in the pandemic, a pervasive media narrative in the Global North chided youth about their supposed reluctance to follow social distancing measures, portraying them as dangerously unconcerned about COVID-19. This “super-spreader” narrative, however, does not hold up under scrutiny.

In Canada, several surveys between March and May 2020 showed that young people’s views and actions did not diverge from those of other age groups. Almost 40 percent of young people aged 18-29 reported feeling extremely worried about the pandemic—a figure similar to that of respondents over 60 years of age. Millennials 30-44 reported the highest levels of worry, at 46 percent. Overall, more than 80 percent of youth were more worried about the pandemic’s impacts on the health of vulnerable people and on the healthcare system than they were about their own health.

Similarly, a recent survey of youth in the United Kingdom indicated that more than 90 percent of young people between 16 and 25 strictly observed lockdown protocols. As in Canada, UK youth also reported deep anxiety about the health of others, particularly vulnerable family members.

OF THE 1.8 BILLION YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN 10 AND 24 YEARS OF AGE, APPROXIMATELY 90 PERCENT LIVE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH. THREE QUARTERS OF AFRICA’S POPULATION IS UNDER 35.
The COVID-19 virus can infect anyone—young or old, rich or poor. However, not everyone is equally vulnerable to contracting the virus or suffering its most severe health, social, economic, and political consequences. Due to long-standing health and socio-economic disparities, historically disadvantaged communities are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and suffering from its most serious consequences. In the United States, emerging data indicate that younger African-Americans and Latinos are dying of COVID-19 at much higher rates than other groups.  

Indigenous youth face distinct challenges during the pandemic due to high rates of malnutrition, lack of access to clean water, and discrimination in access to healthcare, among other factors. In Canada, COVID-19 outbreaks in 23 Indigenous communities across the country are compounding the deleterious health and social effects of substandard housing, poor drinking water, high rates of poverty, and pervasive racism. Moreover, social distancing regulations have curtailed Indigenous protests against the continued construction of oil and gas pipeline projects during the pandemic, limiting a vital expression of Indigenous youth activism on climate change and Indigenous sovereignty.

Crucially, the systemic marginalization of Indigenous and racialized communities globally has resulted in critical data gaps on how COVID-19 is specifically affecting them, making it difficult to capture the lived reality of the pandemic for Indigenous and racialized youth. Youth from marginalized communities are not only more vulnerable to COVID-19, they are also overrepresented in the retail, food service, and hospitality sectors, where many jobs are temporary. The pandemic has shut down most of these sectors, leaving millions of already vulnerable youth worldwide without a source of income.
As the pandemic exacerbates poverty and conflict and brings new challenges, the burden of disruptions to livelihoods and education will fall disproportionately hard on young women and girls. In the aftermath of drought or wars, girls are the first to be taken out of school or pushed into early marriages. In Sierra Leone, adolescent pregnancies in villages severely affected by Ebola rose 65 percent, a finding which the girls linked to the closing of schools.

Given the challenges to education many young women already face, the current school closures and economic downturn may lead to significantly higher dropout rates. This danger is heightened by the increase in many young women’s unpaid care responsibilities during the pandemic, as they are called upon to care for siblings, older relatives, and sick family members.

Together, these multiple pressures could well expose young women to an increased risk of exploitation and violence. In Uganda, girls involved in the “Girls as Drivers for Change” project with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts reported they might not be able to return to school once the pandemic subsides, due to the COVID-19 lockdown’s impact on their families.

Young women also face critical barriers to access healthcare, especially for family planning and sexual health. During the Ebola and Zika epidemics, disease containment measures diverted resources away from so-called ‘non-essential’ healthcare, such as family planning, and as a result caused a deepening of gender inequality. A similar scenario now unfolding with COVID-19 could well lead to surges in maternal mortality, adolescent pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases. For young women, sexual health and family planning services are crucial to their long-term wellbeing.

Finally, according to the ILO, young women account for two-thirds of the 1.3 billion youth currently not in employment, education, or training globally. In lower-middle income countries, 40 percent of these youth are young women. Moreover, those that have jobs are over-represented in many hard-hit sectors; for example, young women account for nearly 51 percent of young workers in the food and accommodation sectors.

As the pandemic erodes young people’s chances of securing decent work, it is young women—already more precariously positioned—who will bear the heaviest economic burden.

Regardless of where they live, young women will face immense challenges to their wellbeing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The mental health toll of these combined pressures should not be underestimated: in Canada, nearly twice as many young women as young men report being extremely worried about the pandemic.

WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES
Globally, 11.8 million young people work in healthcare, of whom 74 percent are young women. Female healthcare workers of all ages are more likely to be on the frontlines of the pandemic response, often in lower-paying jobs such as nurses or community health workers.

This unequal exposure to COVID-19 has had predictable consequences: in Spain, 72 percent of infected healthcare workers have been women versus only 28 percent men.

In the United Kingdom, 65 percent of key workers—defined as those persons working in health, retail, and personal service positions—are women. Among key workers, twice as many women as men face the most severe health risks. Also in the UK, almost 40 percent of working mothers are key workers.

Refugees and migrants are profoundly vulnerable populations. They often live in cramped conditions in camps or urban slums, depend on daily wage labor, and lack important legal protections. Young people under the age of 18 account for more than half of the nearly 26 million refugees worldwide, while those under the age of 30 account for fully 70 percent of international migrant flows.

Social distancing measures have restricted migrants’ access to needed services and have halted much resettlement. As a result, more persons remain in camps, where crowded living conditions are ideal for the spread of infectious disease, while necessary prevention measures, such as hand-washing and social distancing, are often impossible to ensure, despite the best efforts of Oxfam and others. In cities as well, migrant youth are at risk of labor exploitation, and may not have access to digital technologies to pursue their education. In addition to restrictions on movement, the pandemic has also augmented the risk of violence, abuse, and sexual exploitation of young migrants.

With most international borders closed indefinitely, refugees and migrants face increasingly limited options for safety. Many countries have suspended their asylum procedures and some have increased deportations. With movement severely curtailed, asylum programs all but halted, and xenophobia on the rise, refugees and migrants will need special attention in the pandemic’s aftermath.
Even before the current crisis, young people were facing enormous difficulties. Yet they have risen to the challenge presented by the pandemic in myriad ways. Young people worldwide are raising awareness about the disease, working in healthcare, volunteering to help the most vulnerable in their communities, innovating new solutions to the pandemic’s many challenges, building intergenerational solidarity, and planning for the post-COVID-19 future. In many of their initiatives, young people are working as volunteers with limited funding and with little or no personal protective equipment.

COMMUNICATING INFORMATION

Young people are trusted local actors who both know and are known in their communities; during previous epidemics, such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, youth therefore played a critical role as communicators. Employing their entrepreneurial bent and online mobilization skills, youth are again at the forefront of successful initiatives to challenge misinformation about COVID-19. Here are a few examples:

Adam, a young activist supported by Oxfam in Mali, founded the Association of Youth for Active Citizenship and Democracy (AJCAD) to support displaced persons and destitute children. Since the onset of the pandemic, she has used web TV and social media to raise awareness of the disease and proper hygiene to prevent it.  

In the Oromia and Somali regions of Ethiopia, with Oxfam’s support, youth are providing shopkeepers in rural communities with loudspeakers and audio public health messages in local languages.  

In the Solomon Islands, young filmmakers working with OMS Films and Dreamcast Theatre have created video messages on COVID-19 awareness, also with Oxfam’s support.  

In the Barguna district of southern Bangladesh, the newly formed Coastal Youth Network disseminates public health information through leaflets, radio shows, and cars with loudspeakers.  

Nelson Kwaje, the 28-year old Program Director of #DefyHateNow, a community organization in South Sudan, started a digital youth group to raise awareness about COVID-19. 

Young Palestinian refugees in the Aida and Azza camps in Bethlehem, who had received community health training to address diabetes, pivoted to create a video and pamphlets about COVID-19 prevention.

They say youth are the leaders of tomorrow, but we are not waiting for tomorrow. We are here to work.  
– Samuel Marot Touloung, African Youth Action Network

Youth have mobilized in many ways in the world since the beginning of the pandemic. It is crucial to underline their participation in the fight, often on a voluntary basis, and to remember that young people are primarily vectors of change rather than of contagion.  
– Oxfam-Québec Youth Observatory
The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, which was created in the context of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, has translated information about COVID-19 into more than 50 Indigenous languages. The Caucus is also part of the COVID-19 Indigenous Health Partnership, a youth-led initiative to communicate health information to Indigenous communities and advocate for their needs and rights during the pandemic.⁴⁵

**INNOVATING SOLUTIONS**

Given the pandemic’s wide-ranging impacts, new and creative solutions will be required for many problems. Here too, youth are leading the charge, working collaboratively across borders to conceptualize creative approaches and bring them to fruition.

For instance, Young Sustainable Impact (YSI), a youth-led organization based in Norway that supports youth-driven sustainable businesses, set up "Program-19" to encourage innovative solutions to COVID-19 challenges. Proposals were solicited worldwide.

The eleven final projects include the "Aerosol Box of Hope," a protective barrier to prevent virus transmission to medical workers, and Hommi, a hardware and software platform that proactively nudges users to regularly wash their hands.⁴⁶ Another YSI project was developed by Ugandan youth: EcoMask uses proprietary treated cotton to make reusable, biodegradable, and affordable facemasks that are effective against pathogens.⁴⁷

**WORKING ON BEHALF OF THE VULNERABLE**

Youth are at the forefront of many efforts to protect the most vulnerable from COVID-19, capitalizing on their local communities’ trust and the global relationships they have forged with diverse groups via social and digital media.

In Montreal, Canada, the youth organization Hoodstock is leading a city-supported initiative to raise awareness about COVID-19. Young Hoodstock volunteers also distribute facemasks, sanitizer, and food in their low-income neighbourhood of Montreal-Nord, one of the hardest hit areas of the city.⁴⁸

Awal Issa Rachid, who just graduated from medical school in Niger is part of the Association of Young Doctors of Niger. He and his colleagues volunteer to care for infected people, including those marginalized in their communities. In the poor neighborhoods of Nairobi, Kenya, the Mukuru Youth Initiative partnered with the telecommunications company Safaricom and Oxfam to give needy residents electronic vouchers they can use to buy soap from local shops and stalls.⁴⁹

*Born into and growing up in an exceedingly interconnected world, young people understand very well that solidarity is the name of the game. They understand that just like the COVID-19 pandemic—conflict, violence, inequality, and climate change—do not stop at national boundaries. That none of us is safe, unless we all are.*

— UNSG Youth Envoy Jayathma Wickramanayake
In Uganda, home to the largest refugee population in Africa, young refugees in the Bidi settlement are working with the refugee-led organization I CAN South Sudan to secure testing facilities and hygiene kits for their communities. Crucially, they are also advocating for the inclusion of youth perspectives in the pandemic response and recovery programs being developed by international organisations such as UNHCR and Oxfam.  

In pursuit of climate justice, youth have appealed to the concept of “intergenerational equity,” namely that the current generation has a duty of care toward future generations. With COVID-19, youth are applying this principle in reverse by caring for the many elderly people whose health is most immediately compromised by the pandemic.

In Uganda, youth have mobilized to support refugees in Kampala who do not have access to food aid. They collect money to buy food and medicine and distribute them to vulnerable refugees, particularly the elderly.

In Europe, the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Associations (FEMYSO) launched a campaign called Outbreak of Generosity to encourage European youth to offer support to the elderly and other vulnerable members of their communities. Their toolkit in sixteen languages guides youth to provide support in ways that are effective and safe.

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**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

Far from advocating a return to “normal,” young people are using this moment to highlight the many systemic injustices and inequalities which the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated. They point to housing shortages, underfunded healthcare systems, weak social safety nets, the overrepresentation of marginalized groups in “essential” service work, climate change, and systemic racism against Indigenous and other historically disadvantaged communities.

In May 2020, “Amplify Youth Voices,” a collaborative transatlantic youth initiative, launched the #YouthWant campaign, to mobilize young people to take part in planning for the post-COVID-19 world.

In Quebec, Canada, a group of university students launched a petition calling for an inclusive public consultation on the post-COVID-19 recovery. Similarly, the European Youth Forum published a response to the European Parliament’s COVID-19 resolution, in which the Forum outlined young people’s vision for a just recovery. In both cases, young people explicitly call for systemic changes to our economies and societies.

“I think folks who have been unaware, unengaged, or even those who have willfully ignored issues because they’ve never been affected by them are getting a rude awakening to the socio-economic issues that have existed around them all this time. Emergency subsidies are not enough. Bailouts for corporations that are unwilling to invest in the future – a green and just future – are no longer acceptable. The pandemic has opened the eyes of many to the flaws and cracks in our systems of governance, in our institutions, in our society. When we come out of this, we have to commit to building better. Building for the future and focusing on people and the planet.”

– Lourdes David, Amplify Youth Voices
Because the pandemic is likely to recur in waves and smaller outbreaks until an effective treatment or vaccine is developed, a strong, coordinated, and evidence-based global response must reinforce social solidarity and community resilience.

It is also crucial that governments focus their efforts on helping both those hardest hit by the pandemic and those who will carry the consequences of this crisis well into their futures lives. Bold action will be needed to ensure young people, and especially young women and marginalized youth, can secure a dignified, just, and sustainable future.

Among the many concrete steps the international community, national governments, and civil society organizations can take, Oxfam-Québec recommends prioritizing the following six:

**RECOGNIZING, ENGAGING, AND INCLUDING YOUTH AS LEADERS AND EQUAL PARTNERS**

- Recognize and meaningfully engage youth, especially young women, Indigenous youth, and marginalized and racialized youth, as leaders and equal partners in shaping pandemic-related policies and actions.

- Work with youth and youth organizations, particularly Indigenous and racialized youth, to gather crucial information about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives in order to inform subsequent health, humanitarian, and economic recovery responses.

- Move away from a risk-based perspective that characterizes youth as a potential problem, and shift to an approach founded on an understanding of youth as positive, transformative, resilient, and deeply engaged individuals.

- Engage young people in monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19 response and recovery policies and actions.

- Include young refugees and migrants in all national and local contingency, prevention, and response plans and interventions.

**PROTECTING RIGHTS AND BASIC FREEDOMS**

- Ensure that governments do not use short-term emergency pandemic measures as an excuse to curtail civil rights in the longer-term.

- Create protection mechanisms for youth activists that address the full range of threats they face (physical, political, economic, socio-cultural, and digital), and ensure flexible, accessible funding.

- Provide specific support to marginalized youth, especially young women, Indigenous youth, racialized youth, and LGBTQ+ youth, to combat the significant discrimination they face.
ENSURING A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY

- Ensure young people and youth-led organizations are meaningfully engaged in the development and implementation of recovery plans and policies.

- Develop an economic recovery plan that explicitly addresses the needs of young workers, especially young women, so they can secure decent and sustainable livelihoods.

- Ensure that COVID-19 recovery initiatives do not discriminate against Indigenous youth by supporting them in the development and implementation of programs for their communities, and by including them in the design of nationwide recovery plans.

- Consider implementing comprehensive employment and training guarantee programs, such as the EU’s Youth Guarantee, to ensure young people are not left behind.

- Implement targeted programs to mitigate the particular challenges faced by marginalized youth, Indigenous, racialized, and LGBTQ+ youth, young women, and other groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

INCENTIVIZING YOUTH-LED ACTION

- Provide accessible, flexible, and multi-year funding for youth innovation and action related to COVID-19 and its various consequences, prioritizing peer-to-peer initiatives.

- Strengthen the capacity of youth and youth-led organizations to engage, design, and deliver responses to the pandemic in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

- Provide specific support to young people tackling the pandemic and its effects among Indigenous, racialized, and migrant communities.

INVESTING IN INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

- Ensure that youth, especially young women, have equal, universal, and inclusive opportunities to continue their studies, during and after the pandemic, whether in classrooms, online, or via other means.

- Develop targeted support for young people facing barriers to accessing online education, with consideration given to the need for equitable access to the Internet for all.

- Scale up development financing to help low-income countries meet young people’s educational needs.

“*We must see the recovery from this crisis as an opportunity for systemic change to our economic system—placing equality and sustainability over profit and exploitation. In this way we can move towards an economy that contributes to social and environmental wellbeing.*”

– European Youth Forum

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

- Provide specific assistance to young people in support of their mental health during and after the pandemic.
Because the pandemic is likely to recur in waves and smaller outbreaks until an effective treatment or vaccine is developed, a strong, coordinated, and evidence-based global response must reinforce social solidarity and community resilience. It is also crucial that governments focus their efforts on helping both those hardest hit by the pandemic and those who will carry the consequences of this crisis well into their futures. Bold action will be needed to ensure young people, and especially young women and marginalized youth, can secure a dignified, just, and sustainable future.

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  - Move away from a risk-based perspective that characterizes youth as a potential problem, and shift to an approach founded on an understanding of youth as positive, transformative, resilient, and deeply engaged individuals.
  - Work with youth and youth organizations, particularly Indigenous and racialized youth, to gather crucial information about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives in order to inform subsequent health, humanitarian, and economic recovery responses.
  - Engage young people in monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19 response and recovery policies and actions.
  - Include young refugees and migrants in all national and local contingency, prevention, and response plans and interventions.

- Protecting rights and basic freedoms
  - Ensure that governments do not use short-term emergency pandemic measures as an excuse to curtail civil rights in the longer-term.
  - Create protection mechanisms for youth activists that address the full range of threats they face (physical, political, economic, socio-cultural, and digital), and ensure flexible, accessible funding.
  - Provide specific support to marginalized youth, especially young women, Indigenous youth, racialized youth, and LGBTQ+ youth, to combat the significant discrimination they face.

- Ensuring a just and sustainable recovery
  - Ensure young people and youth-led organizations are meaningfully engaged in the development and implementation of recovery plans and policies.
  - Develop an economic recovery plan that explicitly addresses the needs of young workers, especially young women, so they can secure decent and sustainable livelihoods.
  - Ensure that COVID-19 recovery initiatives do not discriminate against Indigenous youth by supporting them in the development and implementation of programs for their communities, and by including them in the design of nationwide recovery plans.
  - Consider implementing comprehensive employment and training guarantee programs, such as the EU’s Youth Guarantee, to ensure young people are not left behind.

- Investing in inclusive and accessible education
  - Ensure that youth, especially young women, have equal, universal, and inclusive opportunities to continue their studies, during and after the pandemic, whether in classrooms, online, or via other means.
  - Develop targeted support for young people facing barriers to accessing online education, with consideration given to the need for equitable access to the Internet for all.
  - Scale up development financing to help low-income countries meet young people’s educational needs.

- Supporting mental health
  - Provide specific assistance to young people in support of their mental health during and after the pandemic.
  - Implement targeted programs to mitigate the particular challenges faced by marginalized youth, Indigenous, racialized, and LGBTQ+ youth, young women, and other groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

- Incentivizing youth-led action
  - Provide accessible, flexible, and multi-year funding for youth innovation and action related to COVID-19 and its various consequences, prioritizing peer-to-peer initiatives.
  - Strengthen the capacity of youth and youth-led organizations to engage, design, and deliver responses to the pandemic in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.
  - Provide specific support to young people tackling the pandemic and its effects among Indigenous, racialized, and migrant communities.


ILO, op.cit. “Preventing Exclusion” [May 2020].

17 PRIA Youth, op cit.


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

Bram Wispelwey and Amaya Al-Orzza, “Underlying Conditions,” *The London Review of Books* [April 18, 2020], https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2020/april/underlying-conditions?utm_campaign=20200425%20icymi&utm_content=us-ca_nonsubs_icymi&utm_medium=email&utm_source=LRB%20icymi; Lajee Center: https://video.fjrs10-1.fna.fbcdn.net/v/t39.24130-2/10000000_210650643582119_8235073609896134202_n.mp4?_nc_cat=110&_nc_sid=985c63&efg=eyJ2ZW5jb2RlX3RhZyI6Im9lcF9oZCJ9._nc_ohc=6vSxSB43D8AXqWTYUS._nc_ht=video.fjrs10-1.fna&oh=e84057d21a41b256a056db643fa3695f60e=5FC06D52

Global Indigenous Youth Caucus: https://www.globalindigenousyouthcaucus.org/; Indigenous Health Partnership: https://covidstudentresponse.org/campaigns/indigenous-health-partnership/?fbclid=IwAR2Dy17ECvb6902Wkk4KLdhxzFihB-872cebi3H5n3nH8qWj0PulcC0


Ecomask: https://ecoplastile.com/ecomask/


Outbreak of Generosity: outbreakofgenerosity.org/about/


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