



International Relations Students’ Association of McGill (IRSAM)

McGill Youth Advisory Delegation

Special Consultative Status to ECOSOC since 2006.

Youth Policy Report for the 62nd Session of the UN Commission for Social Development



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Land Acknowledgement

McGill University, IRSAM, and the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation acknowledge that their presence resides on ancestral land of the Kanien'keha:ka, traditional custodians of the Eastern Door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This recognition encompasses confronting the historical and ongoing impact of colonialism in Canada, while actively challenging neo-colonialism within our roles, especially in UN policy engagement. With an awareness of McGill's complex colonial history, we strive to dismantle oppressive structures and uplift marginalized communities. The McGill Youth Advisory Delegation recognizes its privilege, aiming to contribute to positive change and equitable futures by translating awareness into meaningful action.

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Executive Summary

Given the priority theme of CSocD62, “*Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication*”, the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation urges governments to prioritize meaningful youth participation in policy-making. As an entirely youth-led organization, we emphasize the importance of an intersectional approach in the development of draft proposals, the concluding report of the session, and future policies to effectively address the unique needs of the youth demographic.

This policy report presents youth-developed recommendations aimed at dismantling barriers hindering youth participation in global public life. By aligning our proposals with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 4, and 9, our delegation seeks to bridge the gaps in health, education, and infrastructure to accelerate progress on all SDGs, particularly targeting SDG 1 of eradicating poverty. Our policy recommendations underscore the existential challenge of sustainability policy making to incorporate diverse youth leadership. We underline that an intersectional lens must prioritize socially excluded youth, including Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, low-income, youth in conflict zones, and youth with disabilities, to ensure that support extends to where it will make the most impact.

IRSAM’s delegation to the 62nd Session of the UN Commission for Social Development includes the following McGill students: Esme Longley, Judy Zeng, Keith Baybayon, Jeanne Gonelle, Claire Cheng, Jessica Bakar, Lawrence Plastina, Malak Afifi, Anirudh Ram-Mohanram, and Nicole Kastanias. We would like to extend our gratitude to the collective of the youth who attended our consultation events and provided their invaluable feedback, IRSAM, LEAP Africa, Young Diplomats of Canada, The Goodler Foundation, the Students' Society of McGill University, and ReImagine17.

Sincerely,

Esme Longley

Esme Longley, President of the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation 2023-2024



1. Youth & Health Care

In the pursuit of social development and justice, the theme of "Youth & Health Care" recognizes the unique challenges faced by young people in accessing comprehensive healthcare. Addressing issues such as sexual and reproductive health, climate-induced vulnerabilities, and the rise of preventable diseases like malaria, our recommendations advocate for a publicly accessible healthcare information database, the empowerment of community health workers, and targeted initiatives for global health education.

1.1 Healthcare Information Database

A lack of information provided to youth regarding the accessibility of sexual and reproductive health care (SHRC) leaves many individuals vulnerable. According to the WHO, the highest rates of curable sexually transmitted infection occurs among 15-24 year olds. Youth are also uniquely affected due to the navigational challenges associated with transitioning from pediatric to adult care; the stigmatization of SHRC often leaves youth to navigate these issues independently. There also exist greater barriers to treatment among people of lower socio-economic status, queer youth and sex workers. Additionally, SHRC - especially abortion and certain birth control methods - is time-sensitive, which places a greater importance on accessibility.

We propose the implementation of a publicly accessible database, created by states, providing information about clinics which provide SHRC within a given region. It would include details about services provided, hours of operation, and payment options. Additionally, the database would include accessibility information such as lists of transportation options, and public transportation routes and costs. Clinics will be ranked by platform users based on a variety of criteria such as discretion, safe spaces, and accessibility of a clinic.

1.2 Community Health Workers

Climate change is escalating extreme weather events and climate-induced disasters, disproportionately affecting Youth with Disabilities (YwDs) in rural areas. In recognizing their unique vulnerabilities, underrepresentation in disaster risk reduction planning, and the vital role of community health workers in navigating regional nuances and the diverse needs of YwDs, we call upon all levels of government to *implement a twin-track policy framework*: to mainstream disability inclusion and incorporate specialized services for YwDs in disaster risk reduction. This encompasses implementing disability-inclusive education training for community health workers, layering multiple sensory approaches across all phases of disaster risk reduction, and conducting ongoing consultations with YwDs about all stages of disaster risk reduction.

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1.3 Global Health

Malaria is a potentially fatal mosquito-borne disease with a rising number of cases since 2016, primarily affecting youth. However, the rise of vaccine misinformation, alongside a lack of healthcare data and administrative complexities, inhibits many countries from properly administering vaccines.

Recognising the need for accessible and up-to-date information directed towards children, we call upon all levels of government to develop anti-malaria education shaped by national health institutes and consultation with local health workers. These initiatives should be led by local health workers and in collaboration with schools and regional health establishments to promote accurate and child-centric content regarding malaria and vaccines.

Acknowledging that equitable vaccine distribution puts LICs at the mercy of HICs' donations, we call upon LMIC governments to form interregional alliances with the WHO to manufacture mRNA vaccines at scale and for HICs to share their technological knowledge and materials to facilitate the setup.

1.4 Eating Disorders

Eating disorders (EDs) amongst youth of all genders are on the rise. Since food insecurity is associated with the development of an ED, necessitating more inclusive analysis of low-income individuals. Recognising the unaddressed and underfunded social determinants of EDs, we call upon all levels of government to implement comprehensive and culturally-inclusive ED education for youth and public health workers, complete insurance coverage, and robust global research.

Launching targeted public awareness ED campaigns in schools reduce stigma and connect youth with appropriate care while including ED training in medical residency programs could improve identification and treatment. Legislative measures mandating comprehensive insurance coverage for ED treatment, covering all treatment levels, are essential for continuity of care, a major component of full recovery. We call upon governments to support international research on the psychometric properties of ED instruments, particularly in LMICs where research is not yet well understood.

2. Youth & Education

With a commitment to advancing social development and justice, "Youth & Education" underscores the integral role education plays in breaking systemic inequalities. Recognizing historical disparities, we propose a comprehensive approach to uplift underserved communities,

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encompassing support measures, subsidized higher education, and alternate pathways. Our recommendations also address the critical need for digital literacy and the fight against misinformation, aligning with SDGs 4 and 9.

2.1 Equity in Education

As historical systematic discrimination—based on race, gender, and class—continues to perpetuate inequalities in education, marginalized youth are the most affected by these disparities. Access to higher education has the potential to provide youth opportunities in different economic sectors. Thus, addressing these inequalities is crucial to providing youth the resources to break intergenerational poverty.

Therefore, we call upon governments to emphasize equity in education by identifying priority education zones based on interrelated criteria such as income and educational success rates of neighborhoods; however, we encourage governments to consider their countries' individual contexts of educational disparities when identifying under-resourced areas.

Merely identifying underserved communities is insufficient: we urge governments to rectify educational inequality. Uplifting these priority education zones can be achieved through a three-pronged approach, which includes comprehensive support measures from high school to graduation, subsidized higher education through bursaries, and alternate means of entry to higher education for marginalized groups.

2.2 Digital Literacy

A dearth of digital literacy in both basic computer skills and specialized education in current technologies has been identified among the global youth population. Fostering economic development via training a digital literate population to fill roles in tech industries has been shown to increase labour market resilience. Additionally, generalized digital literacy education can promote entrepreneurship and protect citizens against exploitation such as financial fraud.

In recognizing that an increase in global digital literacy can foster economic development, we call upon governments to incorporate a two-fold approach. Firstly, through integration of foundational digital literacy education within public school systems. Secondly, by targeting non-profit and private sector participation to create specialized digital education programs such as bootcamps, focusing on practical coding skills as they apply to cybersecurity, data privacy, and generative AI. Through these tailored approaches, this policy addresses both the digital divide while promoting the economic advantages that arise from digital education.



2.3 Misinformation Education

The rise of misinformation has eroded trust in credible sources and institutions. Misinformation can undermine collective understanding and cooperation when solving global challenges. Youth are particularly susceptible to misinformation: while about 83% of Americans are at least somewhat confident they can differentiate between real and fake news, only 44% of teens reported the same confidence.

We call upon governments to mandate media literacy education within humanities classes. This curriculum, developed in collaboration with misinformation and media literacy experts, should emphasize manipulation technique recognition, lateral reading, and general critical thinking. We call upon local governments to establish misinformation education review boards in schools for youth to investigate their curriculum and make recommendations, and establish resources led by and for youth such as fact-checking networks to assess the validity of viral misinformation.

2.4 Food Insecurity and Housing

The expenses directly associated with post-secondary education—tuition and fees—constitute less than 40% of the total cost of attendance, shedding light on the broader indirect financial burden that accompanies higher education. The financial strain of covering basic necessities like food and housing can be a burden for marginalized youths, creating a tradeoff between working and obtaining a post-secondary education.

We therefore advocate for a two-pronged approach integrating institutional and student-driven efforts to address these opportunity costs. We call on governments to establish exclusive need-based bursaries measured based on smaller and more refined tax brackets and to promote work-study programs with fair pay that enable students to strike an improved balance between their academic pursuits and financial needs. Additionally, we call on governments to support student-led housing and food initiatives by allocating dedicated resources and fostering partnerships between educational institutions and local communities.

3. Youth & Infrastructure

Amidst the overarching goal of fostering social development, the theme of "Youth & Infrastructure" spotlights the vital role of accessible infrastructure in creating opportunities for young people. Our recommendations advocate for addressing financial burdens associated with post-secondary education, community-led climate resilience initiatives, and improved transit accessibility.

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3.1 Political Engagement

The erosion of trust hinders government efforts to foster a thriving society, diminishes citizens' ability and willingness to contribute to society, and heightens inequality as the crucial social support for marginalized groups dissipates. In 2019, only 46% of young people in OECD countries expressed confidence in their national governments.

Thus, we call upon governments to prioritize inclusive political engagement by establishing direct opportunities for youth and other marginalized groups in policy-making alongside NGOs and local organizations, such as implementing local and national advisory boards. Furthermore, we encourage the simplification of government communications and the creation of feedback mechanisms to amplify citizen voices to repair social and institutional mistrust. Citizen engagement is vital, and governments play a pivotal role in working with diverse groups to rebuild trust and promote social cohesion.

3.2 Climate Displacement

Climate change threatens over 3.3 billion people residing in highly vulnerable areas, compromising the education, health, and economic outcomes of youth and their communities. The absence of community-centric disaster preparedness measures and proactive land-use planning heightens vulnerabilities in such regions.

We call upon governments to develop community-led initiatives, leveraging the collective efforts of concerned youth and community members, planners and engineers, and local NGOs. We urge the establishment of climate resilience hubs to serve as educational centers on climate-induced risks, provide disaster response training, and conduct local risk assessments to develop localized response plans.

Furthermore, we advocate for collaboration with environmental NGOs to offer grants for community-led climate resilience projects proposed by urban planners, engineers, and students, targeting climate risks and mitigation strategies specific to their locales. By leveraging human capital in affected regions, governments can promote proactiveness in climate preparedness and foster community resiliency.

3.3 Transit

Rapid urbanization poses mobility and socioeconomic challenges, particularly impacting youth elderly populations in sprawling, car-centric regions. Underdeveloped transportation systems restrict economic opportunities and social interactions perpetuating fragmentation and inequity between communities. Research highlights that investment in public transportation can



have a total impact on the economy up to 5 times the amount invested annually over a period of 20 years due to increase in workforce access, productivity and employment.

We call upon municipal governments to enhance transit accessibility by establishing a unified fare system, enabling passengers to access all transit services with single pass. This fare system should incorporate reduced rates for youth, senior citizens, and frequent transit-users. Furthermore, optimizing schedule coordination is vital to improving the rider experience, involving the alignment of arrival and departure times on popular routes to minimize transfer wait times. Moreover, we encourage the collaborative integration of transit networks through the unified fare system between neighbouring cities, bolstering regional connectivity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this policy brief, crafted by the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, resonates with the priority theme of the 62nd Session of the Commission for Social Development, aspiring to foster social development and justice through targeted social policies. Our recommendations within the themes of Health Care, Education, and Infrastructure are intricately linked to the overarching goal of poverty eradication encapsulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By emphasizing meaningful youth participation, dismantling barriers, and prioritizing inclusivity, these proposals offer a roadmap for governments to accelerate progress on all Sustainable Development Goals. The intersectional approach embedded in our calls to action ensures that socially excluded youth categories receive the attention and support needed for tangible impact. As we advocate for accessible healthcare information, equitable education, and inclusive infrastructure, we envision a future where the youth, regardless of background, contribute meaningfully to global progress, aligning with the core principles of social justice and sustainable development. While these recommendations provide a critical foundation, it is essential to acknowledge that additional support for marginalized communities and global solidarity are imperative for realizing a truly equitable and sustainable future.