SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being
TUESDAY 15 APRIL, 11:30 – 1:00

IDENTIFICATION	
Session/plenary title	Navigating Health: Adolescents and Youth in a Digital World
Session/plenary focus	SDG3
Session/plenary UN co-lead UN 1	WHO
Session/plenary UN co-lead UN 2	UNFPA
Session/plenary youth co-lead 1	Commonweath Health Youth Network
Session/plenary youth co-lead 2	International Federation of Medical Students' Association (IFMSA)
Session/plenary youth co-lead 3	International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (IPSF)
Session/plenary UN co-organizer 1	UNAIDS
Session/plenary UN co-organizer 2	UNICEF
Session/plenary UN co-organizer 3	UNODC
Session/plenary youth co-organizers	WHO Youth Council
BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES	

As young people become increasingly engaged with digital spaces—with over 70% of those aged 15-24 online and one in three internet users worldwide being under 18—the rapid digitalization of society is reshaping global health and well-being.

As we approach several key high-level events shaping youth health and digital policies (High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), the Second World Social Summit in Qatar, Beijing 2030), these digital determinants have emerged as critical factors shaping youth health outcomes, particularly through their profound influence on NCDs, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The digital sphere has the potential to perpetuate harmful norms and amplify health inequities, but it can also serve as a powerful tool for positive change and empowerment.

As multinational corporations exercise unparalleled influence through advanced digital marketing and AI-driven targeting, the challenges to youth health have grown more complex. In today's digital era, issues like continuous exposure to ultra-processed food marketing, rising social media addiction, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, cyberbullying, misinformation on SRHR, the intersection of digital transformation with planetary health and climate change, and easy access to illicit substances call for innovative policy responses and renewed regulatory frameworks.

The digital sphere's influence on adolescent health behaviors includes concerns around direct marketing and addiction, but extends far beyond these issues. The algorithms driving social media platforms are not designed with health and well-being principles in mind and can amplify harmful content, including stigma, discrimination, and misinformation. However, they also offer opportunities for health promotion and community building. This duality presents both challenges and opportunities for public health interventions, as access to technology and digital literacy become increasingly critical social determinants of health.

Amidst these challenges, youth-led digital innovations are emerging as powerful forces for positive change. Young people are leveraging digital platforms to create peer support networks, develop apps for health promotion, and use social media to advocate for healthier living environments and access to information and services. These initiatives demonstrate the potential for digital tools to transform from vectors of health risks into instruments of health equity and positive behavior change. The key lies in designing a regulatory framework that protects adolescents and youth from the harms of digital spaces while ensuring their agency, autonomy, and meaningful participation in those spaces is respected and supported

Addressing these digital determinants requires a comprehensive approach that combines policy innovation, youth engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. This understanding must inform how we shape the future of global health governance. The solutions lie not in rejecting digital transformation, but in harnessing its potential while protecting vulnerable populations from its harms, ultimately creating digital environments that promote health and well-being for all.

OBJECTIVES OF SESSION/PLENARY

This session will explore youth perspectives on how digital transformation impacts NCDs, mental health, substance abuse, SRHR, gender equality, and overall well-being. It will analyze challenges and opportunities in the digital health landscape, highlighting youth-led solutions and innovations. Through interactive dialogue, participants will develop actionable recommendations for the upcoming SDG3

review at the HLPF, the NCD High-Level Meeting, and the World Social Summit. The focus will be on leveraging digital tools for health promotion, expanding access to information and services, and addressing harmful digital marketing, social media impacts, anti-rights movements, and health inequities. The session aims to strengthen youth engagement in global digital health governance.

OVERALL FORMAT/STRUCTURE

Opening Plenary – Setting the Stage (20 minutes)
The session will begin with a welcoming address from the ECOSOC President. Key findings from pre-event consultations will be presented, shedding light on youth perspectives and challenges related to digital health. A youth speaker will share a personal story on how digitalization impacts health and well-being. The session will conclude with a brief discussion of the poll results and reflections.

Intergenerational Dialogue – Bridging Perspectives (50 minutes)
A panel discussion will feature a UN representative and a youth expert exploring the integration of youth voices in digital health policy and the role of digitalization in equitable healthcare access. The session will also include interventions from youth and member states, followed by an interactive audience Q&A.

Closing Remarks (5 minutes)
The session will conclude with closing remarks, summarizing key takeaways and reinforcing the importance of youth involvement in policy processes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can we promote safe access to and use of social media by young people to address harmful content, negative health outcomes, and ethical concerns, while leveraging these platforms for health promotion and positive behavior change?
- Given AI-driven recommendation systems' influence on youth behavior, what policy mechanisms can ensure these algorithms prioritize youth well-being over commercial interests? How can we address the tension between rapid digital health innovation and growing digital divides, ensuring digital health solutions reach marginalized youth without exacerbating health inequities?
- How can youth-led digital initiatives be scaled and integrated into formal health systems while maintaining grassroots effectiveness and authenticity? What support structures are needed from member states and UN agencies?
- What mechanisms can strengthen collaboration between young people, tech companies, and policymakers to ensure the safety, health, and well-being of diverse youth in digital platform design and rollout?
- How do we balance digital health data collection's potential for improving youth health outcomes with privacy, consent, and commercial exploitation concerns? What role should young people play in governing their health data?

- What ongoing youth-led solutions foster healthier digital spaces for youth? How can governments, civil society organizations, and tech companies collaborate to harness digital potential for promoting SRHR and gender equality while mitigating technology-facilitated GBV, cyberbullying, misinformation, and harmful content?

NAMES AND TITLES OF SESSION SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR(S)

Opening: Ms Marina El Khawand, Founder of Medonations

Moderator:
- Ms. Kate Ndocko, Public Health Medical Resident – WHO Youth Council Member, HCL, ECL and 2024 Vice-President of the European Network of Medical Residents in Public Health

Panelists:
- Ms. Diene Keita, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for Programme, UN Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Mr. Rehman Hassan, WHO Youth Council Steering Committee Member, Act4Food Youth Leader, and Advisor and Consultant for various UN and governmental agencies

Interventions:
- Ms. Kunda Mwitwa, Grassroot Soccer, Global Partnerships and Special Projects Coordinator
- Ms Grace Huertas, IFMSA VP for members
- Mr Emmanuel Ohiri, NYC Health Department Youth Committee on Mental Health
- Mr Yash Tadimalla, Youth Science-Policy Interface Platform
- Mr Leonardo Bolstad, DTH Lab Regional Youth Champion
- Dr. Sonja Caffe, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

Closing: Ms. Inês Costa Louro, UNODC Youth Forum & Friends in Focus Alumni

OVERVIEW OF PREPARATORY EVENT/CONSULTATION

We conducted online dialogues on the UNDP SparkBlue platform, providing young people with a space to share their perspectives and experiences regarding the digital determinants of health and the policies they thought were needed to safeguard their heath in the digital spaces while preserving their agency. These discussions were structured around two key themes.

The first phase of the online consultations, which concluded on March 31st, focused on safe access and use of social media by young people while the second phase, taking place from April 1st to 7th, explored the potential of the digital era for promoting health equity.

Each theme was explored through three guiding questions, carefully designed to foster in-depth reflection and meaningful engagement.

1. Safe Access to and Use of Social Media by Young People

- What are the key challenges young people face on social media that impact their health and safe engagement in the digital space?
- How can policies be designed to protect youth while still allowing for digital expression, learning, and health promotion?
- How do AI-driven recommendation systems influence young people's mental health and behaviors?

2. Collaborations to Harness Digital Potential for Promoting Equity
   - How can we ensure that digital health solutions reach marginalized youth without worsening health inequities?
   - What measures should be in place to protect health data privacy, consent, and confidentiality?
   - How can digital spaces be designed to empower marginalized youth, especially young women and LGBTQ+ individuals?

The insights gathered will be presented and discussed during the ECOSOC Youth Forum, contributing to policy recommendations on digital health, equity, and youth engagement in digital spaces

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ADDITIONAL DETAILS, SUGGESTED READING, IF ANY

"The Lancet and Financial Times Commission on governing health futures 2030: growing up in a digital world"
https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01824-9/fulltext

World Health Organization. (2018). Digital health. Seventy-first World Health Assembly, WHA71.7. https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/279505/A71_R7-en.pdf?sequence=1

Purba AK, Thomson RM, Henery PM, Pearce A, Henderson M, Katikireddi SV. Social media use and health risk behaviours in young people: systematic review and meta-analysis. BMJ. 2023;383:e073552

World Health Organization. Youth-centred digital health interventions: a framework for planning, developing and implementing solutions with and for young people. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240011717

World Health Organization. Global strategy on digital health 2020-2025. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240020924

Keeley, Brian L. and Céline Little. "The State of the Worlds Children 2017: Children in a Digital World." (2017).

Odgers CL, Jensen MR. Annual Research Review: Adolescent mental health in the digital age: facts, fears, and future directions. J Child Psychol Psychiatry. 2020 Mar;61(3):336-348. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13190. Epub 2020 Jan 17. PMID: 31951670; PMCID: PMC8221420

UNICEF, [Marketing of unhealthy foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children](#), Policy Brief (2021)

Fretes and al, [Digital Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children and Adolescents: A Narrative Review](#), Pre-proof, 2025 Jan

USAID. Artificial Intelligence in Global Development Playbook. Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development; 2024. Available from: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/Artificial%20Intelligence%20in%20Global%20Development%20Playbook.pdf