

ASHOKA MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2026

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME

STUDY GUIDE

Agenda

Empowering Youth as Catalysts in Combating the Illicit Use and Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs

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01 — UNDERSTANDING THE AGENDA

WHY YOUTH?

The central premise of this agenda is that young people should not be viewed exclusively as **potential victims of drug use or recruitment by criminal networks**.

They can also be:

- educators;
- peer leaders;
- researchers;
- community organisers;
- advocates;
- policy participants;
- and contributors to prevention programmes.

UNODC's **Handbook on Youth Participation in Drug Prevention Work** specifically argues that young people can make meaningful contributions to substance-use prevention, while warning against tokenistic participation where youth are included merely for visibility. ([UNODC](#))

That gives this committee an important distinction:

Youth participation ≠ putting young people on a poster.

Meaningful participation requires:

training + resources + decision-making power + safeguards + evaluation.

02 — WHAT EXACTLY IS THE AGENDA?

The agenda contains **two connected but distinct problems**.

A. ILLICIT DRUG USE

This concerns preventing harmful or non-medical use and ensuring people who develop drug-use disorders can access appropriate support.

B. ILLICIT DRUG TRAFFICKING

This concerns the criminal networks responsible for producing, transporting, distributing and financially benefiting from illicit drugs.

WHY THE DISTINCTION MATTERS

A teenager who develops a substance-use problem and a transnational trafficking organisation are **not the same policy problem**.

Therefore, a strong UNODC response should not treat:

users = criminals = traffickers

as one category.

Instead:

PREVENTION + HEALTH SERVICES

should address vulnerability and drug-use disorders,

while

LAW ENFORCEMENT + INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

should target trafficking networks and illicit markets.

UNODC's 2025 World Drug Report explicitly advocates evidence-based prevention and accessible treatment alongside criminal-justice responses targeting illicit markets. ([UNODC](#))

03 — THE GLOBAL DRUG SITUATION

The scale of the issue remains substantial.

UNODC's **World Drug Report 2025** estimated that approximately **316 million people worldwide used drugs in 2023**, representing growth over the previous decade that outpaced population growth. The report also highlights rapidly changing illicit markets, expanding synthetic drugs and continuing trafficking-related organised crime. ([UNODC](#))

But the committee should avoid reducing the issue to statistics.

The drug market affects:

- public health;
 - families;
 - education;
 - employment;
 - crime;
 - organised criminal networks;
 - governance;
 - and community stability.
-

04 — YOUTH AND DRUG USE

Young people are a particularly important population for prevention.

UNODC's recent reporting highlights the concern surrounding drug use among young people, while its data methodology specifically tracks drug-use prevalence among students aged **15–16** as an important international indicator. ([UNODC](#))

The UNODC's current 2026 data portal also identifies **new psychoactive substances (NPS)** as an area requiring attention among young people, while noting that available youth data remain limited in many regions. ([Data Portal UNODC](#))

DELEGATE TAKEAWAY

Do not argue:

“Young people are naturally more likely to use drugs.”

Instead investigate the **risk and protective factors** influencing behaviour.

05 — WHY YOUNG PEOPLE MAY BE VULNERABLE

Drug-use vulnerability can emerge from multiple interacting factors.

INDIVIDUAL

- poor coping mechanisms;
- lack of information;
- behavioural difficulties;
- exposure to risk.

FAMILY

- weak support structures;
- family conflict;
- inadequate supervision;
- household instability.

SCHOOL

- disengagement;
- poor academic connection;
- bullying;
- lack of support.

COMMUNITY

- social exclusion;
- poverty;
- criminal activity;
- limited recreational opportunities.

DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Technology can create new channels for exposure, recruitment and illicit-market activity.

IMPORTANT

Risk factors do **not** mean that a young person will necessarily use drugs.

They indicate areas where preventive interventions may be useful.

06 — THE PROTECTIVE FACTOR APPROACH

A strong prevention policy should not only ask:

“How do we stop young people from doing drugs?”

It should also ask:

“What makes young people more resilient in the first place?”

Potential protective factors include:

- supportive families;
- positive school environments;
- healthy peer relationships;
- participation in sports and arts;
- life skills;
- access to mental-health and social support;
- meaningful community participation;
- and opportunities for education and employment.

UNODC's prevention guidance emphasises strengthening protective factors in families, schools and communities rather than relying solely on warnings about drugs. ([UNODC](#))

07 — THE BIG SHIFT IN PREVENTION

Traditional prevention often relied heavily on:

“Drugs are dangerous. Don't use them.”

But UNODC's evidence-based prevention framework argues that simply providing information or fear-based messaging is insufficient.

UNODC has specifically noted that older prevention approaches based primarily on warning young people about drugs often produced little behavioural change. ([UNODC](#))

Therefore:

INFORMATION ≠ PREVENTION

Effective prevention combines information with:

skills

-

supportive environments

-

family engagement

-

school programmes

-

community participation

08 — EVIDENCE-BASED PREVENTION

UNODC and WHO's **International Standards on Drug Use Prevention** synthesise scientific evidence concerning effective prevention approaches across different stages of development.

They emphasise interventions involving:

- families;
- schools;
- communities;
- and broader social environments. ([UNODC](#))

THE PRINCIPLE

Prevention should be:

evidence-based

developmentally appropriate

context-sensitive

voluntary where appropriate

measurable

and

sustainable.

09 — YOUTH-LED PREVENTION

This is where your agenda gets interesting.

Young people can contribute through:

PEER EDUCATION

Young people trained to communicate credible prevention information to peers.

COMMUNITY CAMPAIGNS

Youth-designed awareness initiatives.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Student-led prevention and wellbeing initiatives.

POLICY CONSULTATION

Youth representatives participating in policy development.

RESEARCH

Young people contributing lived experience and community-level insights.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Responsible use of social media and digital platforms for prevention messaging.

10 — BUT DON'T MAKE YOUTH PARTICIPATION TOKENISTIC

This is **straight from UNODC's youth-participation guidance** and should absolutely be included in the study guide.

UNODC warns against involving young people merely for visibility.

Meaningful youth participation requires:

INFORMATION

Young participants understand the issue.

TRAINING

They understand evidence-based prevention.

SUPPORT

They have institutional resources.

INFLUENCE

Their contributions can actually affect decisions.

SAFEGUARDS

They are protected from exploitation, stigma or retaliation.

EVALUATION

Their participation is assessed for actual impact.

([UNODC](#))

11 — THE UNODC YOUTH INITIATIVE

UNODC has developed a **Youth Initiative on drug-use prevention** to facilitate youth engagement in prevention efforts.

The Youth Forum brings together young people active in prevention to exchange experiences and contribute perspectives to international drug-policy discussions. UNODC's handbook traces the development of its youth-participation guidance to recommendations raised by young participants themselves. ([UNODC](#))

This gives delegates a useful precedent:

Youth participation in drug policy is not a hypothetical idea.

There is already an institutional model within UNODC.

The question becomes:

How can Member States scale and institutionalise it?

12 — THE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ACCELERATOR

UNODC has also developed **YEA! — the Youth Empowerment Accelerator Framework** as part of its prevention work.

The framework is connected to UNODC's broader move toward meaningful youth engagement and evidence-based prevention. ([UNODC](#))

Delegates should therefore investigate how national youth programmes could connect with:

- UNODC;
 - schools;
 - civil society;
 - health systems;
 - local governments;
 - and youth organisations.
-

13 — SCHOOL-BASED PREVENTION

Schools provide one of the most accessible environments for prevention.

But a good school programme should go beyond:

“Drugs are bad.”

It can incorporate:

- decision-making;
- communication;
- emotional regulation;
- peer-pressure management;
- problem-solving;
- social skills;
- and healthy coping mechanisms.

UNODC guidance identifies schools as an important setting for reaching young people and building knowledge and life skills. ([UNODC](#))

14 — FAMILY-BASED PREVENTION

Families can act as a major protective factor.

Useful approaches can involve:

- improving communication;
- strengthening relationships;
- parental support;
- age-appropriate supervision;
- and early identification of concerns.

UNODC's prevention material identifies programmes supporting parents and strengthening family relationships as important prevention approaches. ([UNODC](#))

KEY IDEA

Prevention should not place the entire responsibility on the teenager.

The surrounding environment matters.

15 — COMMUNITY-BASED PREVENTION

Youth prevention programmes can be connected to:

- sports;
- arts;
- volunteering;
- community service;
- mentoring;
- leadership programmes;
- and safe recreational spaces.

This creates alternatives that strengthen social connection and belonging.

THE POLICY LOGIC

Connection

→

Participation

→

Protective factors

→

Resilience

16 — COMBATING TRAFFICKING

Prevention alone cannot eliminate illicit trafficking.

Trafficking is also an organised-crime problem.

Criminal networks may exploit:

- vulnerable communities;

- transportation routes;
- corruption;
- financial systems;
- and digital technologies.

The **United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)** provides the broader international framework for combating transnational organised crime.

[UNODC — UNTOC](#)

17 — YOUTH AND CRIMINAL RECRUITMENT

One of the committee's questions should be:

Why are young people vulnerable to recruitment into illicit networks?

Potential factors include:

- economic vulnerability;
- lack of employment opportunities;
- social exclusion;
- coercion;
- peer influence;
- criminal environments;
- and lack of legitimate opportunities.

THEREFORE

A trafficking strategy should not focus solely on border interception.

It should also address:

recruitment

community vulnerability

economic opportunity

education

and **prevention**.

18 — ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS

Digitalisation is transforming illicit markets.

UNODC's current drug-market research identifies the use of online environments as part of the evolving landscape of drug trafficking, including illicit activity facilitated through darknet markets. ([Data Portal UNODC](#))

For this agenda, delegates should focus on the **policy implications**, such as:

- digital awareness;
 - responsible platform cooperation;
 - investigation of online criminal networks;
 - protection of young people;
 - and international cooperation on digital evidence.
-

19 — SYNTHETIC DRUGS AND NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

The illicit market is changing rapidly.

UNODC's recent reporting highlights the continued expansion of synthetic drugs and the emergence of new psychoactive substances. ([UNODC](#))

The 2026 UNODC data portal specifically tracks NPS use among young people and notes that available data are limited in many countries. ([Data Portal UNODC](#))

POLICY CHALLENGE

How can governments respond quickly when:

the market evolves faster than regulation and public-health systems?

Possible policy areas:

- early-warning systems;
- laboratory capacity;
- international information sharing;

- healthcare training;
 - youth education;
 - and rapid scientific assessment.
-

20 — TREATMENT AND REINTEGRATION

A comprehensive strategy cannot stop at prevention.

Some people will develop substance-use disorders despite prevention efforts.

They therefore require access to:

- evidence-based treatment;
- healthcare;
- psychosocial support;
- rehabilitation;
- and social reintegration.

UNODC's 2025 reporting highlights the need for **science-based, voluntary and equally accessible treatment and services** alongside prevention and criminal-justice responses. ([UNODC](#))

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Prevention

≠

Treatment

≠

Law enforcement

A good resolution needs all three.

21 — THE PUBLIC HEALTH + CRIMINAL JUSTICE BALANCE

This agenda sits between two policy approaches.

PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

Focuses on:

- prevention;
- treatment;
- rehabilitation;
- early intervention;
- reducing health harms.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE APPROACH

Focuses on:

- trafficking;
- organised crime;
- illicit financial networks;
- investigation;
- prosecution.

THE UNODC APPROACH

The strongest policy doesn't necessarily choose one.

It asks:

Which problem requires which tool?

22 — HUMAN RIGHTS

Drug policy must also consider:

- dignity;
- non-discrimination;
- access to healthcare;
- due process;
- privacy;
- and proportionality.

Young people participating in prevention programmes should also be protected from:

- stigma;
 - exploitation;
 - forced disclosure;
 - and tokenistic participation.
-

23 — DATA AND EVALUATION

One of the easiest ways to write a bad resolution is:

“Launch youth programmes globally.”

Okay.

How many?

Where?

Who runs them?

What training do participants receive?

How much does it cost?

How is effectiveness measured?

What happens if it doesn't work?

Evidence-based policy requires evaluation.

UNODC's prevention frameworks emphasise monitoring and evaluation as part of effective prevention systems. ([UNODC](#))

24 — FINANCING

Youth-led programmes need actual resources.

Potential mechanisms include:

NATIONAL FUNDING

Government prevention budgets.

UNODC TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Training and programme support.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Support for lower-resource states.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Carefully regulated partnerships.

YOUTH GRANTS

Small grants for evidence-based local initiatives.

IMPORTANT

Funding should not create conflicts of interest or allow private actors to shape drug policy for commercial purposes.

25 — INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The illicit drug market is inherently transnational.

Therefore states should consider:

- intelligence sharing;
- customs cooperation;
- financial investigations;
- precursor-control cooperation;
- trafficking investigations;
- extradition;
- mutual legal assistance;
- and joint capacity-building.

But:

International cooperation must still respect domestic law, privacy and human-rights obligations.

26 — REGIONAL APPROACHES

Different regions face different drug-market realities.

Therefore one global youth programme may not work identically everywhere.

Policies should account for:

- cultural context;
- language;
- socioeconomic conditions;
- healthcare infrastructure;
- prevalence patterns;
- and local risk factors.

THE PRINCIPLE

GLOBAL STANDARDS + LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

27 — WHAT SHOULD YOUTH ACTUALLY DO?

This is the question your resolution must answer.

Not:

“Encourage youth participation.”

That's too vague.

Instead:

YOUTH PREVENTION COUNCILS

National or local youth advisory bodies.

PEER-LED PROGRAMMES

Trained youth facilitators working with appropriate supervision.

YOUTH POLICY FORUMS

Formal channels to submit recommendations to drug-policy institutions.

MICRO-GRANTS

Funding youth-led prevention projects.

YOUTH RESEARCH

Including young people in community-level research and evaluation.

MENTORSHIP

Connecting youth organisations with trained professionals.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Building resilience against online recruitment and misinformation.

28 — SAFEGUARDING YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

This should be an explicit part of the resolution.

Youth participants should receive:

- appropriate training;
- adult safeguarding;
- confidentiality;

- informed participation;
- protection from retaliation;
- access to support;
- and clear boundaries concerning their responsibilities.

UNODC's youth-participation handbook specifically stresses that meaningful youth participation requires education, training and organisational support. ([UNODC](#))

29 — THE BIG POLICY DILEMMA

SHOULD YOUTH BE IMPLEMENTERS OR POLICYMAKERS?

IMPLEMENTER MODEL

Young people deliver prevention programmes.

Advantage: direct peer engagement.

Problem: can become tokenistic.

ADVISORY MODEL

Youth advise governments and UN institutions.

Advantage: policy influence.

Problem: recommendations may not actually affect decisions.

CO-DECISION MODEL

Youth participate alongside policymakers in designing programmes.

Advantage: genuine empowerment.

Problem: requires stronger institutional safeguards.

BEST DEBATE

The committee should determine **how much decision-making authority** youth participation should actually involve.

30 — BLOC POSITIONS

HIGH-INCOME / DEVELOPED STATES

Likely to emphasise:

- digital monitoring;
- scientific research;
- early-warning systems;
- sophisticated treatment;
- financial intelligence;
- and international law enforcement.

DEVELOPING STATES

Likely to prioritise:

- prevention infrastructure;
- education;
- healthcare access;
- youth employment;
- technical assistance;
- and international funding.

CORE ARGUMENT

Youth empowerment cannot succeed without investment in the communities in which young people live.

TRANSIT STATES

Likely to focus on:

- border management;
- trafficking routes;
- customs cooperation;

- organised crime;
 - and international intelligence sharing.
-

STATES WITH HIGH YOUTH POPULATIONS

May emphasise:

- school-based prevention;
 - youth employment;
 - community programmes;
 - sports and arts;
 - and large-scale awareness campaigns.
-

STATES WITH STRONG PUBLIC-HEALTH SYSTEMS

May emphasise:

- treatment;
 - rehabilitation;
 - early intervention;
 - scientific prevention;
 - and healthcare integration.
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31 — QUESTIONS THE RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

YOUTH

1. What does “meaningful youth participation” actually mean?
2. Who selects youth representatives?
3. How are they trained?
4. How do they influence policy?

PREVENTION

5. Which prevention programmes are evidence-based?
6. How will effectiveness be measured?
7. How will schools participate?

TRAFFICKING

8. How will youth recruitment into criminal networks be prevented?
9. How will trafficking networks be disrupted?

DIGITAL

10. How should governments address online drug-market activity?
11. How can young people be protected without excessive surveillance?

HEALTH

12. How will young people access treatment?
13. How can stigma be reduced?

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

14. How will states share information?
15. How will developing countries receive technical assistance?

FINANCE

16. Who pays for youth-led programmes?
17. Should UNODC establish a dedicated youth-prevention fund?

ACCOUNTABILITY

18. Who evaluates programmes?
19. What indicators determine success?

32 — DRAFTING FRAMEWORK

A strong resolution could be structured as:

I. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

↓

II. EVIDENCE-BASED PREVENTION



III. SCHOOL + FAMILY + COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES



IV. YOUTH RECRUITMENT PREVENTION



V. TRAFFICKING DISRUPTION



VI. DIGITAL AND EMERGING THREATS



VII. TREATMENT + REHABILITATION



VIII. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION



IX. CAPACITY BUILDING



X. FUNDING



XI. MONITORING + EVALUATION

33 — COUNTRY RESEARCH CHECKLIST

Before committee, research your country's:

DRUG SITUATION

- Major substances of concern
- Youth prevalence
- Major trafficking routes
- Emerging trends

DOMESTIC POLICY

- Drug-control legislation
- Prevention programmes
- Treatment system
- Youth programmes

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Anti-trafficking agencies
- Border controls
- Financial intelligence
- International cooperation

YOUTH POLICY

- National youth strategy
- School programmes
- Youth councils
- Youth organisations

INTERNATIONAL POSITION

- CND voting record
- Drug-control treaty participation
- UNODC cooperation
- Regional drug-control frameworks

35 — BIBLIOGRAPHY

UNODC — MAIN WEBSITE

[United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](https://www.unodc.org/)

UNODC — YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DRUG PREVENTION

[Handbook on Youth Participation in Drug Prevention Work](#)

This is probably the **single most important document for this particular agenda** because it directly addresses the role of young people in prevention. ([UNODC](#))

UNODC — INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ON DRUG USE PREVENTION

[UNODC — International Standards on Drug Use Prevention](#)

UNODC — WORLD DRUG REPORT

[UNODC Data and Analysis](#)

The 2025 report is particularly useful for current global trends and youth-related drug-use concerns. ([UNODC](#))

UNODC — WORLD DRUG REPORT 2026 DATA

[UNODC World Drug Report 2026 Data Portal](#)

Useful for **current country and regional data**, including youth and NPS trends. ([Data Portal](#) [UNODC](#))

UNODC — COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS

[UNODC — Commission on Narcotic Drugs](#)

UNTOC

[UNODC — United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#)
