



General Assembly Plenary Committee Background Guide 2022

Written by Leah Madelaine Schmidt and Hiroko Ozaki





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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022 National Model United Nations Japan Conference (NMUN • Japan)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the General Assembly Plenary (GA). Leah Madelaine Schmidt is the Director and Hiroko Ozaki is the Assistant Director. Leah has a Masters in Philosophy from the University of Cambridge, focusing on international gender issues, and is currently a Gender Advisor for the Government of Canada. Hiroko is majoring in International Relations at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies and runs a non-profit job-hunting support organization for students.

The topics under discussion for the General Assembly Plenary are:

1. Promoting Mental Health and Improving Access to Care
2. Adapting Energy Systems for Energy Security and Climate Change Mitigation

As one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, the General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking, and representative body of the organization. With universal membership, the General Assembly provides a global forum for world leaders to discuss a variety of topics across the United Nations system. In order to accurately simulate the committee, it will be key for delegates to focus on consensus building and best practice-setting approaches of the General Assembly, as opposed to operational work.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) on 1 November 2022 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN • Japan Position Papers](#) page.

Two resources, available to download from the [NMUN website](#), serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

1. [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#) - explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not start discussion on the topics with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) - include the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the Conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact Marleen Schreier at dsg.japan@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sincerely,

Leah Madelaine Schmidt, Director
Hiroko Ozaki, Assistant Director

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Committee Overview

Introduction

As per the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), the General Assembly is one of the six main organs of the United Nations (UN).¹ It has universal membership and is the main deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the UN rendering it a “unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter.”² Outcomes reached by the General Assembly may define new norms that can promote peace, human rights, and development.³ As the normative center of the UN, the General Assembly is a generator of ideas, a place of international debate, and a hub for new concepts and practices in the political, economic, humanitarian, social, and legal spheres.⁴

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

The mandate of the General Assembly is defined in Chapter IV (Articles 9-22) of the Charter.⁵ As stipulated by Article 10, the General Assembly is broadly tasked with discussing “any questions or any matters within the scope of the [Charter] or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the [Charter],” and it may make relevant recommendations to Member States or the Security Council.⁶ It further holds “informal interactive debates on current issues of critical importance to the international community.”⁷

Only resolutions adopted by the Plenary are put into effect as official resolutions of the General Assembly.⁸ However, unlike Security Council resolutions enacted under Chapter VII of the Charter, General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding on Member States even after adoption by the Plenary.⁹ Nonetheless, General Assembly resolutions represent policy norms agreed upon among Member States, and they often lead to concrete action by the Member States and the international community at large.¹⁰

Broadly speaking, the following non-exhaustive list summarizes the General Assembly’s mandate:

- The General Assembly **will generally**: request or consider studies and reports; make policy recommendations to promote international cooperation on matters of peace and security, human rights and fundamental freedoms, economic and social development, humanitarian assistance, culture, education, and health; promote the development and codification of international law; coordinate efforts by its subsidiary bodies; follow-up and review progress towards these activities; create subsidiary or ad hoc bodies and convene high-level thematic debates; discuss the regular UN budget.¹¹
- The General Assembly **will not generally**: consider matters currently discussed in the Security Council; design and implement projects or programming on sustainable

¹ *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 7.

² United Nations, General Assembly. *Workings of the General Assembly*. n.d.

³ United Nations, General Assembly. *2005 World Summit Outcome (A/RES/60/1)*. 2005.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Ch. IV.

⁶ *Ibid.* Art 10.

⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly*. n.d.

⁸ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 68.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 52.

¹¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d.; Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 13; United Nations, General Assembly. *Subsidiary organs of the General Assembly*. n.d.

development; direct other UN bodies to develop or implement specific projects or programs.¹²

Governance, Structure, and Membership

All 193 UN Member States are represented in the General Assembly, with each Member State having one vote.¹³ The General Assembly may grant Observer status to intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and non-Member States or entities, which allows them to participate in sessions but does not grant them voting rights.¹⁴ The General Assembly makes the majority of its decisions via consensus.¹⁵ When a vote is held, regular decisions require a simple majority of members present and voting, while important decisions require a two-thirds majority.¹⁶

The General Assembly has six Main Committees that are topically organized around the General Assembly's main fields of responsibility: the Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee); the Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee); the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee); the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee); the Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee); and the Legal Committee (Sixth Committee).¹⁷ The Main Committees discuss agenda items assigned to them, adopt draft resolutions, and submit a report on their work to the Plenary.¹⁸ The Plenary then considers these reports and "proceeds without debate to the adoption of the recommended resolutions and decisions. If adopted by consensus in the committee, the Plenary decides by consensus as well; likewise, if adopted by a vote in the committee, the Plenary votes on the resolution or decision in question."¹⁹ The Plenary may also decide to address an issue without prior reference to a committee.²⁰ As a main organ of the UN, the General Assembly does not report to any other organ, while it receives an annual report on the work of the UN by the Secretary-General.²¹

Each year, the General Assembly's regular session begins in September and is considered in session throughout the year.²² The busiest period, otherwise known as the "main part of the General Assembly," lasts from the start of the session in September until the end of December; it includes the general debate and most of the Main Committees' work.²³ The remainder of the year, or the "resumed part of the General Assembly," involves thematic debates, consultation processes, and working group meetings.²⁴ In addition to the regular session, the General Assembly may also hold special or emergency special sessions on individual issues at the request of either the Security Council or a majority of Member States.²⁵

¹² United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d.; Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 13.

¹³ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*. 2021. p. 12; *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 18.

¹⁴ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 30.

¹⁵ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*. 2021. p. 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 12.

¹⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d.

¹⁸ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 68.

²⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d.

²¹ *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945. Art. 98.

²² United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *All sessions*. n.d.; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*. 2021. p. 17.

The President of the General Assembly (PGA) is the mostly ceremonial head of the General Assembly, elected each year by a simple majority of Member States to a nonrenewable one-year term.²⁶ The PGA's duties are to facilitate Plenary sessions by directing discussion, managing the administration of meetings, and enforcing the General Assembly Rules of Procedure.²⁷ The PGA does not preside over all six General Assembly committees; rather, Chairs and Vice Chairs are the facilitators of individual committees while there are also 21 Vice-Presidents supporting the organizational functions of the PGA.²⁸ The PGA also performs executive duties, such as meeting regularly with the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, and the President of the Economic and Social Council; communicating with the press and the public; and organizing high-level meetings on certain thematic issues.²⁹

Annotated Bibliography

Charter of the United Nations. 1945. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

The Charter of the United Nations outlines in its Chapter IV the composition, functions and powers, voting, and procedures of the General Assembly. Further provisions on the workings and scope of the General Assembly can be found throughout the document. Delegates can gain an understanding of the purpose of the General Assembly, its mandate as well as its limits. Additionally, it may be helpful for delegates to differentiate the General Assembly's work from other main organs, particularly the Security Council.

Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: https://research.un.org/ld.php?content_id=36397685

The GA Handbook provides a comprehensive overview of the organization of the General Assembly. Delegates may learn about the mandate, the structure and role of the President of the General Assembly, its Vice-Presidents, Committees and Committee Chairs. It explains the membership including observers and its relation to UN entities and the UN system as a whole, as well as civil society. Additionally, delegates learn about the key events of the General Assembly, including the high-level week, the general debate, the high-level political forum, and thematic debates.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

While this website provides a succinct overview of the functioning of the General Assembly, it is particularly interesting for further research following the links provided under each section. The sections include the functions and powers of the General Assembly, the main committees, the general debate, the decision-making process of the body, its subsidiary bodies, its regional groups, the special and emergency special sessions, and the revitalization agenda that has progressed over the past six years. Delegates should familiarize themselves especially with the mandate and general tasks the General Assembly assumes to ensure their proposed resolutions stay within the limits of the body's powers.

Bibliography

Charter of the United Nations. 1945. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

²⁶ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. p. 16.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 16.

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 17-18.

²⁹ Ibid. pp. 16-17; United Nations, General Assembly. *Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly*. n.d.

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *United Nations Handbook 2021-2022*. 2021. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Peace-Rights-and-Security/Our-work-with-the-UN/UN-Handbook-2021-22.pdf>

Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations. *The GA Handbook A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. 2017. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: https://research.un.org/ld.php?content_id=36397685

United Nations, General Assembly. *All sessions*. n.d. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/sessions/>

United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. n.d. Retrieved 28 August 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

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1. Promoting Mental Health and Improving Access to Care

“One in four people experience a mental health episode in their lifetime, but the issue remains largely neglected.”³⁰

Introduction

Mental health is defined by the United Nations (UN) as a “concept related to the social and emotional wellbeing of people and communities.”³¹ Mental health not only impacts how people think and feel, but also their physical health, psychosocial health, and the health of their families and communities.³² The UN estimates that one in four people worldwide will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime.³³ Additionally, mental health problems are among the ten leading causes of disability in both developed and developing countries, and can include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders, and other mental ailments.³⁴ Persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities often face stigma and discrimination and may “experience high levels of physical and sexual abuse, which can occur in a range of settings, including prisons, hospitals and homes.”³⁵ As a result, poor mental health can have a range of negative consequences on an individual’s education, income, and work, with over 15% of the world’s working population estimated to be experiencing a mental disorder at any given time.³⁶

The UN Sustainable Development group notes that the global economy loses more than \$1 trillion USD per year due to depression and anxiety; that depression affects 264 million people around the world; and that suicide is the second leading cause of death in young people aged 15-29.³⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly increased the existing global mental health crisis, with the UN citing examples such as Spain being forced to reconvert over 60% of its mental health beds to care for people with COVID-19, reducing the number of people attending emergency mental health services by 75%.³⁸ The UN has also received reporting from the United Kingdom that 32% of people living with existing mental health issues agreed that the pandemic had made their mental health much worse.³⁹ While there is a need for more comprehensive global data, post-pandemic data for the United States of America show that up to 80% of US Americans struggle with mental illness.⁴⁰ In addition to the number of people experiencing mental illness, access to mental health support remains a global issue, with 76%-85% of people with mental illness in low- and middle-income countries receiving no treatment for their conditions, and worldwide there being less than 1 mental health professional for every 10,000 people.⁴¹ The pressure of COVID-19, in addition to the historical under-investment in psychological support, mean that the need for emergency mental health services, proactive support to marginalized groups, and better mental health infrastructure, continues to increase globally.⁴²

³⁰ United Nations, Sustainable Development Group. *Mental health ‘neglected issue’ but key to achieving Global Goals, say UN chiefs*. 2018.

³¹ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Understanding Mental Health*. n.d.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Mental Health and Development*. n.d.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.; NCD Alliance. *20 things you should know about mental health today*. 2022.

³⁷ United Nations, Sustainable Development Group. *Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health*. 2020. p. 5.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 5.

³⁹ Nealon. United Nations Chronicle. *The Pandemic Accelerant: How COVID-19 Advanced Our Mental Health Priorities*. 2021; United Nations, Sustainable Development Group. *Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health*. 2020. pp. 9, 13.

⁴⁰ Nealon. United Nations Chronicle. *The Pandemic Accelerant: How COVID-19 Advanced Our Mental Health Priorities*. 2021.

⁴¹ United Nations, Sustainable Development Group. *Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health*, 2020. p. 5.

⁴² Kelland. World Economic Forum and Reuters. *U.N. warns of global mental health crisis due to COVID-19 pandemic*. 2020.

International and Regional Framework

The right to mental health is established in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, which states in article 25 that, “[e]veryone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family (...).”⁴³ This right is further underlined in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), which establishes that “everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,” and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), which establishes the right of self-determination, a key component of effective mental health support.⁴⁴ Together with the UDHR, these documents make up the International Bill of Human Rights and provide the original global framework for mental health rights.⁴⁵ The *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006) also underlines mental health as a human right, specifically in article 17, which states that “[e]very person with disabilities has a right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity on an equal basis with others.”⁴⁶

Outside of the human rights framework, UN General Assembly resolution 46/119 (1991), titled *The protection of persons with mental illness and improvement of mental health care*, is a foundational document that establishes fundamental freedoms and basic rights for persons with mental health challenges, including the social and economic rights and protections that these persons are entitled to.⁴⁷ Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO)’s *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030* (2012) builds upon its predecessor Mental Health Action Plan, and establishes 17 years of actions for Member States, the UN, and other key partners for improving mental health and well-being for all.⁴⁸ Some of the recommendations include strengthening effective leadership and governance for mental health, and implementing better strategies for preventative mental health support systems.⁴⁹ While the proposed plan of action has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021 the 74th World Health Assembly endorsed updates to the action plan, including changes to implementation and indicators to get the plan re-aligned with the originally projected timeline.⁵⁰

Finally, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, establishes several key targets on mental health in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 on “[e]nsur[ing] healthy lives and promot[ing] well-being for all at all ages,” and target 3.4, which states that “[b]y 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.”⁵¹ However, current data shows that none of the global goals on effective leadership and governance for mental health, provision of mental health services in communities, mental health promotion and prevention, or strengthening of mental health information systems under the WHO’s SDG 3-aligned *Comprehensive*

⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948.

⁴⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106)*. 2006; Hoffman et al. *Is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Impacting Mental Health Laws and Policies in High-Income Countries? A Case Study of Implementation in Canada*. 2016.

⁴⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *The protection of persons with mental illness and the improvement of mental health care (A/RES/46/119)*. 1991.

⁴⁸ World Health Organization. *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030*. 2021.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 6, 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015; United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*. n.d.

Mental Health Action Plan, are close to being achieved.⁵² In 2020, just 51% of the WHO's Member States reported that their mental health policy was in line with international human rights targets and the WHO's Mental Health action targets, and only 52% of countries met targets relating to mental health promotion and prevention programs, well below the 80% goal.⁵³ While many Member States adopted more holistic mental health policies, plans, and laws, the percentage of government health budget spent on mental health globally remains around 2%, and only 39% of responding Member States stated that they had sufficient expertise and human and financial resources to support their domestic mental health system.⁵⁴

Role of the International System

Ensuring access to appropriate mental health support globally is a priority shared across the UN system.⁵⁵ At the forefront of this work is the UN General Assembly, which acts as the "chief deliberative, policymaking, and representative organ of the UN."⁵⁶ As the forum for multilateral discussions across the full range of topics under the UN, the General Assembly is uniquely positioned to discuss mental health care as a multifaceted issue, as well as coordinate the facilitation of mental health care support across multiple UN bodies by receiving reports and recommendations.⁵⁷ It can also take action across all pillars of the United Nations, including looking at the political, economic, humanitarian, social, and legal implications of mental health care, as well as examining the progress made towards relevant SDG targets by publishing the annual *Sustainable Development Goals Report*.⁵⁸

In practice, this includes receiving briefings from relevant civil society actors, such as the Secretariat of the Global Mental Health Action Network, establishing frameworks such as the *UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy*, and hosting mental health events and relevant substantive meetings during the UN General Assembly High-Level Week.⁵⁹ Often mental health is placed within a larger global context, such as General Assembly resolution 74/2, *Political Declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage* (2019), which established that mental health is a precondition for and an outcome and indicator of the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development; resolution 75/130 on *Global Health and Foreign Policy: Strengthening Health System Resilience through Affordable Healthcare for All* (2020), the foundational document that established mental health support as a key component of strengthening health system resilience and ensuring affordable health care for all; and resolution 75/131, *United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)* (2020), which frames mental health as a key component of health at each life stage.⁶⁰

In collaboration with the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) establishes mental health as a core human right.⁶¹ HRC oversees the mandate and reporting of the Special Rapporteur On The Right Of Everyone To The Enjoyment Of The Highest Attainable Standard Of Physical And Mental

⁵² Votruba et al. *Sustainable development goals and mental health: learnings from the contribution of the FundaMentalSDG global initiative*. 2016; World Health Organization. *WHO report highlights global shortfall in investment in mental health*. 2021; World Health Organization. *World Misses Most of 2020 Mental Health Targets*. 2021.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ World Health Organization. *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030*. 2021.

⁵⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*. n.d.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; United Nations. *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*. 2022.

⁵⁹ Global Mental Health Action Network. *BRIEFING: 76th UN General Assembly*. 2021; United Nations, COVID-19 Response. *From the UN Secretary-General*. n.d.; World Health Organization. *Urgent call to capitalize new NCD and mental health fund during the UN General Assembly*. 2021; United Nations, Healthy Workforce. *What We Are Aiming to Achieve*. n.d.

⁶⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *Political declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage (A/RES/74/2)*. 2019; United Nations, General Assembly. *Global Health and Foreign Policy: Strengthening Health System Resilience through Affordable Healthcare for All (A/RES/75/130)*. 2020; United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) (A/RES/75/131)*. 2020.

⁶¹ International Justice Research Centre. *Special Rapporteur On The Right Of Everyone To The Enjoyment Of The Highest Attainable Standard Of Physical And Mental Health*. n.d.

Health, sometimes referred to as the Special Rapporteur on Health, who communicates with governments on alleged mental health rights violations, undertakes country visits and recommendations, and submits reports to the UN General Assembly and HRC.⁶² In particular, the Special Rapporteur repeatedly highlights the fact that (a) there is no health without mental health, and (b) good mental health means much more than the absence of mental impairment, in all of their recommendations.⁶³

Additionally, the WHO coordinates analysis, recommendations, and programmatic support on mental health.⁶⁴ The WHO currently works on mental health care support in over 110 countries, focusing specifically on integration into general health care infrastructure, support of marginalized groups, suicide prevention, quality of care, mental health policy and legislation, mental health of children and adolescents, and mental health promotion.⁶⁵ The WHO has also launched several targeted initiatives, including the *WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health (2019-2023): Universal Health Coverage for Mental Health* to increase mental health support in 12 priority countries with immediate mental health infrastructure needs, including Bangladesh, Ghana, Jordan, and Nepal; the *WHO QualityRights Toolkit* (2012), which provides countries with practical information and tools for assessing and improving mental health care, such as assessment frameworks and data collection best practices; and also hosts World Mental Health Day annually.⁶⁶ Recent reports by the WHO, including the *World Mental Health Report 2022* and the *WHO Mental Health Atlas 2020* demonstrate examples of best practices globally on areas ranging from information systems and research for mental health to mental health system governance to mental health promotion and prevention, and also focus on people's current lived experiences.⁶⁷

Other UN bodies also work on mental health support, such as the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which includes a mental health discussion and annual recommendations as part of its annual Youth Forum; and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which acts as an umbrella organization to comprehensively assess all human rights-related mental health impacts.⁶⁸ The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) focuses specifically on the rights and health of children and youth, including mental health in school settings, parenting approaches, and community-based mental health care.⁶⁹

Mental health is also addressed in regional frameworks, through models such as *the European Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020* by WHO's Regional Office for Europe and the African Union's *Youth Mental Health Campaign* (2021), both of which aim to destigmatize mental health challenges and increase support in their respective regions.⁷⁰ While the European Parliament has called for a new mental health action plan to be adopted by the European Commission for 2021-2027, the European Commission has addressed mental health as part of non-communicable disease activities deprioritizing a standalone EU common strategy on the issue.⁷¹ Non-governmental organizations and think tanks also support the UN in mental health care access issues, including programs such as the Global Burden of Disease Study,

⁶² Ibid.; United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Special Rapporteur on the right to health*. 2022.

⁶³ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *The Right to Mental Health*. 2022.

⁶⁴ World Health Organization. *Mental Health*. 2022; World Health Organization. *Adolescent Mental Health*. 2021.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ World Health Organization. *The WHO special initiative for mental health (2019-2023): universal health coverage for mental health*. 2019; World Health Organization. *WHO QualityRights Tool Kit*. 2012; World Health Organization. *World Mental Health Day*. 2022.

⁶⁷ World Health Organization. *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. 2022; World Health Organization. *Mental Health Atlas 2020*. 2021.

⁶⁸ United Nations, Economic and Social Council Youth Forum. *"COVID-19 recovery: Youth taking action for a sustainable future"*. 2022; United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Mental Health and Human Rights: OHCHR and the right to health*. 2022.

⁶⁹ United Nations Children's Fund. *Mental Health*. n.d.

⁷⁰ World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe. *The European Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020*. 2012; African Union. *Youth Mental Health Campaign: #HowRUFeeling*. 2021.

⁷¹ Galperti. Hanover. *Towards a Comprehensive European Mental Health Strategy*. 2022.

and the Grand Challenges in Global Mental Health Initiative, which both collect independent data and conduct analysis on the current state of global mental health.⁷²

Mental Health of Children and Youth

Psychosocial distress and poor mental health impact millions of children each year, and these patterns are exacerbated by conflict, poverty, and lack of access to education and support.⁷³ As a group, children and youth have unique mental health needs due to their developmental age, distinct from the health needs of adults and elderly populations.⁷⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the need for children and youth to have specific, targeted, and urgent mental health support.⁷⁵

UNICEF leads the response on providing mental health support to children and youth globally, and co-reports on its recommendations and progress to both the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC.⁷⁶ In UNICEF's most recent *The State of the World's Children 2021* report, UNICEF highlights the particular need for increased mental health support for children, youth, caregivers, and teachers in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁷ From their data collection, UNICEF has noted that one in seven children have been directly affected by lockdowns, including 1.6 billion children suffering some loss of education, and students who live in poverty or who rely on support for mental health challenges being particularly impacted.⁷⁸ In this same report, UNICEF also provide tips and resources for parents to talk to their children about mental health, how to break the stigma around mental health, and that youth should understand that mental health cannot be addressed without a deeper understanding of the influence of cultural and contextual factors that shape it.⁷⁹

In another 2021 report *On my Mind: How Adolescents experience and perceive mental health around the world*, UNICEF used extensive focus group research to make specific recommendations on adolescent mental health.⁸⁰ Among many recommendations, the report noted that adolescents experienced a range of mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, psychological distress, addictions, and disordered eating which may lead to among others suicide, self-harm, substance abuse, violence, or aggression.⁸¹ The report also noted gender differences in mental health, for instance boys were seen to face greater struggles with substance abuse and interpersonal violence, whereas girls talked more about sexual violence and eating disorders.⁸² Children in marginalized groups, such as LGBTQI+ youth and children in environments of conflict, faced additional challenges to receiving support and need targeted assistance.⁸³

In addition to providing these qualitative and quantitative findings, UNICEF also provides models of successful implementation of mental health support for children and youth, including case studies among others on supporting the socio-emotional learning and psychological wellbeing of children through a

⁷² Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. *Global Burden of Disease*. 2022; National Institute of Mental Health. *Grand Challenges in Global Mental Health*. n.d.

⁷³ United Nations Children's Fund. *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind - Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*. 2021.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ United Nations Children's Fund. *About Us*. n.d.

⁷⁷ United Nations Children's Fund. *The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind - Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*. 2021.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 100.

⁷⁹ Ibid.; United Nations Children's Fund. *On my Mind: How Adolescents experience and perceive mental health around the world*. 2022.

⁸⁰ United Nations Children's Fund. *On my Mind: How Adolescents experience and perceive mental health around the world*. 2022.

⁸¹ Ibid.

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⁸³ United Nations Children's Fund. *Supporting the socio-emotional learning and psychological wellbeing of children through a whole-school approach (China)*. 2022; United Nations Children's Fund. *A multi-level, cross-sectoral response to improving adolescent mental health (Mongolia)*. 2022; United Nations Children's Fund. *Mental health promotion and suicide prevention in schools (Kazakhstan)*. 2022.

whole-school approach from China; multi-level, cross-sectoral response to improving adolescent mental health from Mongolia; and mental health promotion and suicide prevention in schools from Kazakhstan.⁸⁴

Despite these program successes, lack of access to care for children and youth persists globally, particularly in terms of access to universal health coverage, ensuring health professionals have relevant training specifically for children and youth, and ongoing social stigma.⁸⁵ Today, in some of the world's poorest countries, governments annually spend less than \$1 USD per person on mental health, and even in upper-middle-income countries, the annual expenditure is only around \$3 USD per person.⁸⁶ These issues around promotion and access remain issues where global efforts are urgently needed.⁸⁷

Low-cost Community Investment

While there are many inequities when it comes to accessing mental health support, one of the most glaring divergences is the result of income inequality.⁸⁸ The UN Secretary-General noted in his 2021 message for World Health Day that in low- and middle-income countries, over 75% of people with mental health conditions do not have access to any form of treatment or support.⁸⁹ He further notes that UN Member States only spend an average of just over 2% of total health budgets on mental health, pointing to a habitual global underfunding of mental health support.⁹⁰

While investing effectively in mental health has not consistently been Member States' priority, there are proven low-cost methods to increasing Member States' investment that align with the UN General Assembly's best practices on capacity-building, such as focusing investments in primary care, and incorporating mental health into health policy and legislative frameworks.⁹¹ Member States have endorsed the WHO's updated *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan (2021)*, which provides updated guidelines and new tools to improve mental health investment.⁹² Most notably, these recommendations include a shift from high-cost long-stay mental hospitals being the primary location for care, to increasing non-specialized community-based mental health settings.⁹³ This is best exemplified in the WHO's Mental Health Action target 2.2, which aims to have 80% of countries double their "number of community-based mental health facilities by 2030."⁹⁴

In order to meet this ambitious goal, the WHO offers a number of recommendations and resources.⁹⁵ The WHO Secretariat can provide Member States with technical support in multisectoral resource planning, budgeting, and expenditure tracking for mental health, particularly at the community level.⁹⁶ Similarly, the UN is working to mobilize partners and stakeholders to strengthen associations and organizations of people with mental disorders and to increase their integration into community disability organizations.⁹⁷ For Member States, the WHO also recommends that they engage in measured resource planning,

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ United Nations Children's Fund. *On my Mind: How Adolescents experience and perceive mental health around the world.* 2022.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 16

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Highlighting Underbudgeting, Glaring Inequities in Mental Health Services, Secretary-General Urges Greater Investment to Ensure Quality Care for All.* 2021.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 2021.

⁹¹ World Health Organization. *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030.* 2021; World Health Organization et al. *Integrating Mental Health into Primary Care: A Global Perspective.* 2008.

⁹² United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Highlighting Underbudgeting, Glaring Inequities in Mental Health Services, Secretary-General Urges Greater Investment to Ensure Quality Care for All.* 2021; World Health Organization. *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030.* 2021.

⁹³ World Health Organization. *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030.* 2021.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

including allocating a budget across all sectors to implement community-based healthcare investment.⁹⁸ The WHO also recommends Member States take a more active involvement in the reorganization, delivery, and evaluation of community-based services to become more responsive to the needs of individuals, as well as involving community organizations such as religious leaders, school teachers, and police officers.⁹⁹ While taking concrete steps such as these at the community level will not solve all income-based mental health support disparities, they represent an evidence-based framework for mitigating some of the economic disparity's overall impact on mental health support.¹⁰⁰ However, issues still remain, including the fact that 67% of existing financial resources remain allocated to stand-alone mental health hospitals, despite their legacy of human rights violations and poor outcomes for patients.¹⁰¹ Overcoming this legacy of ineffective funding choices, in addition to the chronic lack of resources, training, and data within many Member States to meet the WHO targets, and a lack of political will to prioritize mental health funding in domestic budgets, remain ongoing challenges.¹⁰²

Conclusion

While the need for greater mental and psychosocial support globally has always existed, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting global mental health crisis has brought these issues into greater prominence.¹⁰³ In addition to providing immediate mental health support, there exists a global need for understanding the cultural context surrounding “good” mental health, and how factors such as age, education, gender, violence, and work can impact an individual’s access to appropriate resources.¹⁰⁴ People in marginalized communities, such as children, LGBTQI+ persons, and people facing civil unrest and violence, may face additional stigma and discrimination, as well as logistical obstacles in reaching support.¹⁰⁵ The UN recommends that these issues be tackled holistically and calls upon Member States to take key next steps in addressing this important issue as the world recovers from COVID-19.¹⁰⁶

Further Research

When researching this topic, delegates should consider the following questions: how does your Member State define “mental health”? What resources currently exist for mental health support domestically and regionally, and what work remains to be done to provide better infrastructure? How has the COVID-19 pandemic increased mental health needs in your Member State? What international programs and investments provide useful models for meeting these increased needs? How can a combination of funding and expertise be best utilized to increase mental health support? What role can the UN General Assembly play in leading this increased investment?

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⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Nealon. United Nations Chronicle. *The Pandemic Accelerant: How COVID-19 Advanced Our Mental Health Priorities*. 2021; United Nations, Sustainable Development Group. *Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health*. 2020.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Mental Health and Development*. n.d.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations Children’s Fund. *Supporting the socio-emotional learning and psychological wellbeing of children through a whole-school approach (China)*. 2022; United Nations Children’s Fund. *A multi-level, cross-sectoral response to improving adolescent mental health (Mongolia)*. 2022; United Nations Children’s Fund. *Mental health promotion and suicide prevention in schools (Kazakhstan)*. 2022.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Annual Thematic Reports: Special Rapporteur on the right to health*. 2022.

This resource by the American Psychiatric Association provides a useful list of resources on Global Mental Health. Providing links to documents on Education and Training, Model Curriculums, Research, Practice and Programs, Populations and Cultures, Human Rights, Cost and Economics, Systems and Services, and Strategic Priorities, this list is comprehensive and accessible. Delegates will find this document a useful starting point to understanding the basis of global mental health issues and finding additional resources.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. n.d. *Mental Health and Development*. Retrieved 4 July 2022 from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/mental-health-and-development.html>

This resource provides a number of useful links, including relevant WHO toolkits, relevant press discussions, and literature reviews. While an older source, the definitions and resources provided on this webpage remain topical and useful as a starting point for delegates' research. Delegates will also find the "Other Resources" section useful for additional understanding on the topic, as it links to important work done by non-profits, mental health survivors, and think tanks.

World Health Organization. *Adolescent Mental Health*. 2021. Retrieved 4 July 2022 from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

This introductory article to the WHO's work on adolescent mental health, including many of the sub-categories of work that the WHO works on, such as promotion and prevention, and early detection and treatment. This article also provides a discussion of the social determinants of adolescent mental health, and how these can be mitigated through policy. Delegates will find this resource useful to finding further research on the second sub-topic, as well as understanding the broad scope of WHO's policy and programmatic work.

World Health Organization. *World Misses Most of 2020 Mental Health Targets*. 2021. Retrieved 4 July 2022 from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102492>

This resource provides a succinct and useful summary of the WHO's Mental Health Atlas annual summary of international mental health progress over the past year. This report provides an in-depth discussion of how and why mental health targets were missed over the past year, as well as recommendations for future progress. Delegates will find this resource practical when looking at the current status of mental health support globally and finding concrete ways to move the topic forward.

World Health Organization. *Mental Health*. 2022. Retrieved 4 July 2022 from: https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1

Acting as an umbrella page for the WHO's work on mental health, this useful page links to all relevant work that the WHO is currently doing on this topic. This resource provides links to fact sheets, data, guidelines, UN resolutions, country profiles and WHO teams on mental health, acting as an excellent reference for the topic. Delegates will find this page the perfect starting point for beginning their research on this issue.

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2. Adapting Energy Systems for Energy Security and Climate Change Mitigation

“Energy is the golden thread that connects economic growth, increased social equity, and the environment that allows the world to thrive.”¹⁰⁷

Introduction

Energy usage is key to addressing climate change.¹⁰⁸ While energy drives global social and economic development, energy production and its use have a significant negative impact on climate change, increasing climate disasters such as heatwaves, droughts, and floods that affect billions of people around the world.¹⁰⁹ According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions are created by energy-based industries around the world.¹¹⁰ The last decade was recorded as the warmest period in human history, at 1.1°C warmer than in the late 1800s, primarily because of the burning of fossil fuels.¹¹¹ Fossil fuels include coal, oil, and gas, and are the largest contributor to climate change, accounting for over 75% of greenhouse gas emissions.¹¹² However, in spite of growing awareness about climate change, fossil fuels still compose approximately 80% of global energy demand.¹¹³

There are many efforts to phase out or replace fossil fuels, however at the same time, 733 million people still do not have access to electricity or energy security as of 2020.¹¹⁴ Energy security refers to the availability of energy at all the times in its various forms, in sufficient quantities, and at affordable prices.¹¹⁵ The COVID-19 crisis has also negatively impacted progress on achieving global electrification, as the annual increase of people gaining access to electricity fell from 0.8% to 0.5% during the pandemic, a decrease of approximately 103 million people.¹¹⁶ More than three quarters of people without access to electricity are living in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 19 out of the 20 countries with the lowest percentage of people who have access to clean cooking fuels and technology are in Africa.¹¹⁷

Improving energy security and achieving access to energy for all while promoting the use of sustainable energy requires the adaptation of energy systems.¹¹⁸ According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), an energy system is composed of an energy supply sector such as a coal mine, power plant, or electricity grid, and energy end-use technologies such as a furnace or electric arc system, which deliver energy to consumers.¹¹⁹ Energy systems are a combination of various technology and distribute various types of energy, from lighting, heating, cooling, and cooking at home, to industrial energy use.¹²⁰ Adapting energy systems, including the use of new technologies and renewable energies, or the improvement of older equipment to make it more energy efficient, are potential climate mitigation

¹⁰⁷ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, Report of the Secretary-General (A/70/422)*. 2015.

¹⁰⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Mitigation*. n.d.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*. n.d.; United Nations Environment Programme. *Why does energy matter?* n.d.

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¹¹⁶ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development et al. *Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report*. 2022. pp. 2-5.

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¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme. *World Energy Assessment: Energy and the Challenge of Sustainability*. 2000. p. 4.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 176.

strategies, which are defined as actions that aim to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emission.¹²¹ While it is crucial to implement access to renewable energy in order to combat climate change, more efforts are needed to make green energy accessible and reliable for all people all of the time.¹²²

International and Regional Framework

In 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* established the right to an adequate standard of living for all, including housing which the international community has interpreted to also include heating, cooling and lighting or energy for cooking at home.¹²³ The standard for adequate living was further emphasized in *The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1967), which acknowledge the right to pursue economic, social, and cultural development for the “continuous improvement of living conditions.”¹²⁴

2015 was a landmark year for building global policy for climate change with the adoption of several important agreements, including *the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and the *Paris Agreement on Climate Change*.¹²⁵ The *Sendai Framework* was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, and provides seven targets and four priorities for action to address risk reduction and build resilience against disasters.¹²⁶ These targets include: better understanding of risks, strengthened governance and management, investment and preparedness to respond, and to “Build Back Better.”¹²⁷ The framework also notes climate change mitigation as an important action to address the drivers of climate disaster.¹²⁸

The *Paris Agreement*, a legally binding international treaty on mitigating climate change, was adopted at the 21st session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.¹²⁹ The agreement sets long-term temperature goals to guide Member States in limiting global temperature increases to below two degrees Celsius by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.¹³⁰ To achieve this, the agreement calls for building multilateral cooperation.¹³¹ It also requires all parties to the agreement to establish a National Determined Contribution (NDC), a climate action plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate impact, and to update it every five years.¹³² It further emphasizes the need to promote universal access to sustainable energy in developing countries, particularly noting the need to implement renewable energy in least-developed regions in Africa.¹³³

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a call to action on important global issues, including

¹²¹ United Nations Environment Programme. *Mitigation*. n.d.

¹²² United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy*. n.d.

¹²³ United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948; European Commission. *Energy Poverty*. n.d.; Commonwealth of Australia. Attorney-General's Department. *Right to an adequate standard of living, including food, water and housing*. 2022.

¹²⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200A(XXI))*. 1967.

¹²⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Do you know all 17 SDGs?* n.d.

¹²⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (A/RES/69/283)*. 2015.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² United Nations, Climate Action. *All about the NDCs*. n.d.

¹³³ Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

energy issues.¹³⁴ The SDGs consist of 17 goals, including SDG 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy and SDG 13 on Climate Action.¹³⁵ SDG 7 target 7.1 aims at affordable and reliable energy for all people encouraging cooperation between Member States to supply such energy in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and Landlocked-Developing Countries (LLDCs).¹³⁶ Promoting the use of sustainable energy for climate change mitigation in alignment with SDG 13, runs across all targets of SDG 7, specifically increasing the share of renewable energy in the global energy use and increasing energy efficiency promoting clean energy research and technology.¹³⁷ SDG 13 encourages Member States to strengthen capacity and resilience to climate-related disasters and create effective plans for climate change.¹³⁸ UN Secretary-General António Guterres states that all goals are closely connected, and energy in particular plays an important role in sustainable development and combatting climate change.¹³⁹

In 1991, European countries already adopted the *European Energy Charter* to promote international energy cooperation for overcoming economic division and energy imbalance in the early 1990s, at the end of the Cold War.¹⁴⁰ The first 51 signatories of the charter as well as the European Union (EU) recognized the necessity of a global legally binding agreement to provide a more efficient and balanced framework for international cooperation, which became *The Energy Charter Treaty* (1994).¹⁴¹ *The Energy Charter Treaty* was signed on 17 December 1994 and entered into effect in 1998, together with the *Protocol on Energy Efficiency and Related Environmental Aspects* (1994), as an international legal foundation for energy security.¹⁴² *The Energy Charter Treaty* legally binds all 53 signatories, including international Member States outside of Europe, in strengthening the rule of law on energy issues and promoting energy security worldwide.¹⁴³ *The Energy Charter Treaty* also established the Energy Charter Conference that meets regularly on energy issues among the Treaty's signatories.¹⁴⁴ In 2015, the government of the Netherlands hosted the International Energy Charter Ministerial Conference where the *International Energy Charter* was adopted to update the *European Energy Treaty* and making an important statement on energy security.¹⁴⁵ The *International Energy Charter* is a non-binding declaration that provides common principles for international cooperation in the energy field and reflects the current energy challenges of the 21st century, such as the “trilemma between energy security, economic development, and environmental protection,” as well as “the need to promote access to modern energy services, energy poverty reduction, clean technology, and capacity building.”¹⁴⁶

Role of the International System

Ten years ago, the UN General Assembly designated 2012 as the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All in resolution 65/151, highlighting the importance of energy issues for sustainable development and for the achievement of the post-2015 development agenda.¹⁴⁷ The designation built on

¹³⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy*. n.d.

¹³⁷ Ibid.; United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*. n.d.

¹³⁸ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*. n.d.

¹³⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, Report of the Secretary-General (A/70/422)*. 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Energy Charter Secretariat. *The Energy Charter Process*. 2015.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.; Energy Charter Secretariat. *The Energy Charter Conference*. 2022.

¹⁴⁵ Energy Charter Secretariat. *The International Energy Charter*. 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *United Nations General Assembly declares 2014-2024 Decade of Sustainable Energy for All*. 2012.

the work done in 2011, when former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the “Sustainable Energy for All” initiative bringing together Member States, the private sector, and civil society for three objectives: to provide universal energy access, to double the global energy efficiency improvement, and to double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.¹⁴⁸ The International Year of Sustainable Energy for All is now an independent international organization, directly supporting 27 countries in electrifying 25,000 health facilities in Africa by 2025 and in building energy facilities.¹⁴⁹

The UN General Assembly has also historically recognized the importance of renewable energy and the use of energy for global sustainable development by declaring 2014-2024 as The Decade of Sustainable Energy for All in December 2012 through resolution 67/215.¹⁵⁰ Even though it does not provide any numeric targets, the UN Secretary-General report on the Decade of Sustainable Energy for All published in 2015 noted that the decade was playing a key role in driving actions towards energy issues, and leading the UN systems and Member States to ensuring energy access for sustainable development.¹⁵¹ The UN General Assembly has also adopted several resolutions related to energy systems including resolution 53/7 (1998) on the World Solar Programme 1996 - 2005, which was the first resolution that focused on the topic of sustainable energy.¹⁵² The program especially focused on the acceleration of rural development in Africa, and promoting renewable energy.¹⁵³ Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the UN General Assembly has put the topic of “Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” on its agenda every year.¹⁵⁴ The latest resolutions 75/221(2020) and 76/210 (2021) also consider recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for Member States’ further commitment towards energy for all, highlighting the necessity of support for SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs.¹⁵⁵ The UN General Assembly resolution 69/15, on the topic of “SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway”, and resolution 69/137 including the “Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024” also urge the international community to provide support for countries in need, particularly LDCs, and to leave no one behind in energy development.¹⁵⁶

The UN General Assembly resolution 74/225 (2019) invited the UN Secretary-General to a high-level dialogue in 2021 promoting the implementation of the energy-related goals of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.¹⁵⁷ The High-level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE) in September 2021 was the first global dialogue on energy under the UN General Assembly and it accelerated action towards SDG 7 targets addressing investments and partnership between stakeholders.¹⁵⁸ It was concluded with the UN Secretary-General's Global Roadmap (2021) for the targets for clean, affordable energy for all.¹⁵⁹ The Roadmap projects that 500 million more people should gain access to electricity and 1 billion more people should gain access to clean cooking sources by 2025, and that in order to achieve this goal, it will require \$2 billion USD to \$35 billion USD as an annual investment for access to electricity and clean cooking.¹⁶⁰

Since the UN system previously had no entity solely responsible for its energy-related agenda, the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination established UN-Energy in 2004.¹⁶¹ UN-Energy serves in

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Sustainable Energy for All. *Annual Report 2021*. 2021.

¹⁵⁰ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *United Nations General Assembly declares 2014-2024 Decade of Sustainable Energy for All*. 2012.

¹⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Promotion of new and renewable source of energy (A/RES/67/215)*. 2013.

¹⁵² United Nations, General Assembly. *World Solar Programme 1996–2005 (A/RES/53/7)*. 1998.

¹⁵³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *World Solar Programme 1996-2005*. 1997.

¹⁵⁴ United Nations, General Assembly. *Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (A/RES/76/210)*. 2022.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ United Nations, High-level Dialogue on Energy. *Mandate*. 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations, High-level Dialogue on Energy. *New commitments at UN energy summit a major stride towards affordable and clean energy, but much work ahead to halve energy access gap by 2025*. 2021.

¹⁶¹ United Nations-Energy. *About UN-Energy*. 2022.

an oversight capacity, and also acts as the “United Nations' mechanism for inter-agency collaboration in the field of energy,” aiming to promote collaboration within the UN system on energy issues.¹⁶² UN-Energy currently brings together 30 organizations and works with 190 countries, aiming at implementing the SDGs and the UN Secretary-General’s Global Roadmap.¹⁶³

Another important actors is UNDP which has worked for two decades to highlight energy as an enabler for poverty eradication, social progress, gender equality, enhanced resilience, and environmental sustainability.¹⁶⁴ UNDP particularly focuses on energy with three interrelated challenges: (1) the social challenge, especially the existence of the disparities in access to reliable energy services; (2) the economic challenge, which is the lack of affordable and reliable energy services; and (3) the environmental challenge, including the threat to the ecological balance and climate.¹⁶⁵ UNDP is also collaborating with the United Nations Environment Assembly through the United for Efficiency (U4E) platform, an initiative to double the energy efficiency rate of products such as air conditioners or refrigerators.¹⁶⁶ U4E brings together the public and private sector to support and promote the transition to higher efficiency appliances and equipment.¹⁶⁷

As climate change concerns and global interest in renewable energy increased in the 2000s, global leaders gathered at several high-level forums to discuss the topic of renewable energy, financing, and technology, including the World Summit for Sustainable Development 2002 adopting *The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development* and the Bonn International Energy Conference in 2004, which was concluded with the establishment of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).¹⁶⁸ IRENA plays an important role to support governments in their transition to renewable energy and provides practical tools and policy advice to accelerate renewable energy deployments such as annual reviews of renewable energy employment, renewable energy capacity statistics, or cost studies.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ Center for Energy, and civil society organizations and think tanks such as the Overseas Development Institute are collaborating with the UN agencies to work towards global energy security.¹⁷⁰

Net-Zero and Renewable Energy

As greenhouse gas emissions are the biggest cause of climate change, more Member States are committing to zero-emissions of greenhouse gas by 2050.¹⁷¹ This “net-zero,” reducing greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible, has been a common target for the international community since the *Paris Agreement* was signed in 2015.¹⁷² During the UN Climate Change Conference in 2021 (COP26), parties revised their NDCs and included urgent actions to further cut greenhouse gas emissions, as they are required to reduce emissions by at least 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050.¹⁷³ Currently, over 70 Member States, including the three largest greenhouse gas emitters, the United States of America, China, and the European Union, which cover 76% of global emissions, have set net-zero targets.¹⁷⁴

At COP26, the UN Secretary-General also highlighted the necessity of more credible and robust standards to measure, analyze, and report on net-zero emission pledges by non-state entities, including private

¹⁶² United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. *UN-Energy*. n.d.

¹⁶³ United Nations-Energy. *UN-Energy Plan of Action towards 2025*. 2022.

¹⁶⁴ United Nations Development Programme. *Delivering Sustainable Energy in a Changing Climate*. 2016.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations Climate Change. *United for Efficiency*. 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ International Renewable Energy Agency. *About IRENA*. n.d.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Sustainable Energy for All. *Partners*. n.d.

¹⁷¹ United Nations, Climate Action. *For a livable climate: Net-Zero Commitments must be backed by credible action*. n.d.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

businesses and regions.¹⁷⁵ To strengthen standards for the net-zero emission pledges and increase implementation by stakeholders, in March 2022 the UN Secretary-General established the High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities.¹⁷⁶ The Expert Group will make recommendations for environmental integrity in four areas: “current standards and definitions for setting net-zero targets;” “credibility criteria used to assess the objectives, measurement, and reporting of net-zero pledges;” “processes for verification and accounting of progress towards net-zero commitments and reported decarbonization plans;” and “a roadmap to translate standards and criteria into international and national level regulations.”¹⁷⁷ The UN Secretary-General emphasizes that the international community has been focusing on the national governments’ responsibility to achieve net-zero emissions, but now “we also urgently need every business, investor, city, state and region to walk the talk on their net-zero promises.”¹⁷⁸

Currently, there are mixed results in the level of commitments for net-zero, particularly between developed and developing Member States, due to their differences in energy efficiency and capacity to access renewable energy.¹⁷⁹ IRENA reports that it costs approximately \$21 trillion USD globally to transform energy systems by 2050.¹⁸⁰ While these costs are expected to be recouped in the future from financial savings due to more efficient energy, this is a significant initial investment.¹⁸¹ More enhanced governance, education, and training will also be required to maximize the benefit of energy transformation in each country, which also requires further financial commitments for most countries.¹⁸² Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international financial flows for developing Member States have declined from \$24.7 billion USD in 2017 to \$10.9 billion USD in 2019, and developing Member States are facing difficulties in expanding the use of renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and ensuring commitment to net-zero in light of lowered budgets.¹⁸³ In 2020, renewable energy in developing Member States reached 245.7 watts per capita, an increase of 57.6% since 2015, but SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs were still behind these numbers, even though they are those most affected by the ensuing climate risks.¹⁸⁴ The latest UN General Assembly resolution 76/210 on “Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” recommends the identification of energy needs from each LDC and SIDS, and encourages deploying appropriate technical and financial assistance to approach energy access shortages.¹⁸⁵

Energy Security and Rising Energy Costs

The global community has witnessed recent rises in energy prices in many domestic economies, due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.¹⁸⁶ Currently, the world is facing the worst global energy crisis

¹⁷⁵ United Nations, High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities. *UN Secretary-General to push business, investors, cities to walk the talk on net-zero pledges; Expert Group launched amid worsening climate crisis*. 2022.

¹⁷⁶ United Nations, Climate Action. *High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities*. n.d.

¹⁷⁷ United Nations, High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities. *UN Secretary-General to push business, investors, cities to walk the talk on net-zero pledges; Expert Group launched amid worsening climate crisis*. 2022.

¹⁷⁸ United Nations, Climate Action. *High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities*. n.d.

¹⁷⁹ United Nations, Climate Action. *Net-zero pledges grow; ambition falls short*. n.d.

¹⁸⁰ International Renewable Energy Agency. *Transforming the Energy System*. 2019. p. 19.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* pp. 48-49.

¹⁸³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all*. n.d.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (A/RES/76/210)*. 2022.

¹⁸⁶ United Nations, Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance. *Brief NO.2: Global Impact of war in Ukraine: Billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation*. 2022. pp. 5-6.

in a generation, affecting over 2.4 billion people globally.¹⁸⁷ 90 million people in Asia and Africa and 15 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa who would have access to energy, cannot afford to pay basic energy costs.¹⁸⁸

The UN Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy, and Finance, established by the UN Secretary-General on 14 March 2022 to address the impact of the war in Ukraine and continuing influence of the pandemic, states that the increase of oil and gas prices have negatively impacted energy security especially for marginalized communities.¹⁸⁹ When oil and gas prices increase, the world's investment shifts into extractive industries and fossil fuel-based energy generation.¹⁹⁰ However, the UN Global Crisis Response Group notes that this situation may present an opportunity to promote the shift to alternative energy resources in some countries, in order to strengthen their energy resilience, lower energy dependency on fossil-fuel based energy, and build better energy security.¹⁹¹

The energy sector is also affected by additional market instabilities.¹⁹² In 2021 and 2022, the price of steel, copper, or aluminum also increased, which is used for solar modules, wind turbines, and other power generation technology.¹⁹³ With the higher material and transportation costs, this then impacts on-going or in-progress projects on renewable energy, and can halt the procedure towards sustainable energy for all.¹⁹⁴

The UN General Assembly notes the importance of upscaling renewable energy policies and practices in its resolution 76/264 (2022) as a means to overcome the energy crisis, and also notes the threat that energy insecurity presents to other areas globally, including food and work.¹⁹⁵ While the high cost to shift to renewable energy often prevents stakeholders from implementing renewable energy systems, IRENA highlights the overall decline in prices for renewable energy infrastructure investments, such as wind and solar power, by 91% since 2010.¹⁹⁶ It also emphasizes that renewable energy transition will eventually decrease energy costs and stabilize power prices, as the global renewable energy capacity added in 2021 is expected to reduce the costs of electricity generation in 2022 by at least \$55 billion USD.¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

Energy is a great enabler for social and economic development, and it plays a key role in climate change mitigation.¹⁹⁸ Even though the international community has been working on energy efficiency and climate change mitigation through collaboration among governments, the private sector, and civil society, global progress is still far behind the targets called for in the *Paris Agreement* and the SDGs.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, new obstacles have appeared, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, global market instability, and the war in Ukraine, that are driving up global energy prices and decrease energy security.²⁰⁰ To achieve both energy security and climate change mitigation, Member States will be required to step up and align with UN recommendations on this important issue.²⁰¹

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁹ United Nations, Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance. *Brief NO.1: Global Impact of war in Ukraine on food energy and finance systems*. 2022. p. 10.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 10.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 10.

¹⁹² International Renewable Energy Agency. *Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2021*. 2022. pp. 50-52.

¹⁹³ Ibid. pp. 50-52.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. pp. 55-56

¹⁹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *State of global food insecurity (A/RES/76/264)*. 2022.

¹⁹⁶ International Renewable Energy Agency. *Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2021*. 2022. pp.14-15.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. pp. 14-15.

¹⁹⁸ United Nations Environment Programme. *Emissions Gap Report 2021*. 2021.

¹⁹⁹ United Nations, Climate Action. *For a livable climate: Net-Zero Commitments must be backed by credible action*. n.d.

²⁰⁰ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals. *Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy*. n.d.

²⁰¹ United Nations, Climate Action. *For a livable climate: Net-Zero Commitments must be backed by credible action*. n.d.

Further Research

Delegates' research should be guided by the following questions: What are the barriers for my Member State that may halt progress towards achieving SDG 7? Considering current international pressures, what issues may further act as obstacles to implementing energy security and mitigating climate change and how can these be overcome? What are the obstacles for SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs to install clean energy? How can stakeholders on the national, regional, and international level leverage renewable energy to be back on track with "net-zero"? How can fossil fuel usage such as coal, oil, or gas be reduced for climate change mitigation?

Annotated Bibliography

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development et al. *Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report*. 2022. Retrieved 30 June 2022 from: https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/sdg7-report2022-full_report.pdf

This report is written by the five SDG 7-related agencies and supported by other SDG Technical Advisory Group members and relevant stakeholders. The report assesses achievements in universal access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy by 2030, and provides data and progress reached by each region and Member State. It also discusses the impact of COVID-19's social and economic disruptions, as well as the challenges caused by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on the pace of progress on achieving SDG 7. This resource will provide delegates with a broad overview of the global efforts on SDG 7 targets, and the existing obstacles to reaching universal access to energy.

International Renewable Energy Agency. *Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2021*. 2022. Retrieved 25 August 2022 from: https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2022/Jul/IRENA_Power_Generation_Costs_2021.pdf

This document includes data and reports collected by IRENA on various renewable energy costs during 2010-2021 and discusses how energy costs have changed and how Member States can utilize renewable-based energy rather than fossil fuels. As the document also includes the current energy crisis and how it impacts the energy sector in many ways, delegates can gain ideas of how to deal with the current challenges and commit to the implementation of renewable energy system while ensuring energy security in each state.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. Retrieved 12 July 2022 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/1>

To understand not only this Committee's topic but the current global agenda, delegates should be familiar with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This resolution will enable delegates to understand each SDG and target. Delegates should pay attention to SDGs 7 and 13 and how energy and climate action are connected with other goals. When delegates read the resolution, they should aim to think about how the goals and targets are interrelated in terms of energy security and climate change mitigation.

United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, Report of the Secretary-General (A/70/422)*. 2015. Retrieved 30 June 2022 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/70/422>

This report by the UN Secretary-General was published one year into the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All 2014 to 2024 and describes the actions taken to coordinate the activities of the decade by the UN system. The report also provides an overview of how international organizations work together to reach the targets of SDG 7. Delegates will find this report useful to learn about the efforts taken to achieve access to sustainable energy for all and remains to be implemented until 2024.

United Nations, High-level Dialogue on Energy. *Global Roadmap for Accelerated SDG7 Action in Support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change*. 2021.

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This global roadmap was adopted at the High-level Dialogue on Energy in 2021. The roadmap provides Member States and international organizations including UN-Energy with milestones and actions to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. Delegates will find this source useful to understand in which areas the international community need to act and what kind of efforts are required by the Member States and other stakeholders.

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