

International Inclusion of Youth in the Climate Agenda

STUDY GUIDE FOR ATUMUN CLIMAMUN – HERNING 2019

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Study Guide ATU SummcercampMUN

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Welcome from the chair

Dear delegates,

It is a true pleasure to welcome you to the committee and to facilitate the discussions of the body on the topic of International Inclusion of Youth in the Climate Agenda. The climate agenda is one which is of utmost importance on the international, as well as national level, and it is therefore only proper that the committee addresses this topic.

The study guide before you is intended to prepare you at a general level to the discussions at hand, and as such, will provide only a basic introduction to the topic at large. It therefore neither intends, nor purport to intend, to cover the full complexities that is the topic of the committee. It therefore looked upon favourably if delegates conduct further research about the topic outside of the study guide prior to sessions commencing at the summer camp.

We your chairs look very much forward to the discussions to be had, and hope that this study guide will provide a sufficient introduction for the discussions.

Abbreviations

IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

GHG – Greenhouse gasses

ECOSOC – Economic and Social Council

Introduction to the topic

The planet and its many intricate ecosystems are facing increasing pressures from the consumption and behaviour of humans. Anthropogenic (i.e. human-induced) global warming is therefore becoming an increasingly important and prolific topic in international fora, and rightly so. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C, which laid out the immense consequences of such an increase in average temperatures. Further, the issue of climate change is probably the issue with the highest degree of intergenerational importance, as those who will suffer the most under the consequences of global warming are those who are taking their first steps on the planet, or worse yet, not born yet.

As global warming is an issue that crosses borders regardless of border policies, it is truly an international issue, for which reason the committee is called upon to deliberate on the issue. As the United Nations General Assembly, you are called upon to provide resolutions that can facilitate international inclusion of youth in the climate agenda. But, since the scope of the general assembly is wide in what it can deliberate, its resolutions are only recommendations to the member states and therefore not legally binding on any member states, unless they bind them through domestic or regional legislation.

The current state of climate change and current pathways

As this is an issue with much public discourse, and in the era of increasing variability in news stories' validity, it is essential to start any deliberation on a factual basis. This section seeks to establish such a basis by providing a quick introduction to the current scientific literature on global warming but will inevitably fall short of providing a detailed analysis.

The common consensus amongst climate change scientists, as expressed by the IPCC, is that the majority of the current global warming is anthropogenic, due to human emissions of primarily CO₂ but also other Greenhouse Gases. Measuring the global warming up to now from the pre-industrialised times, the consensus is that the planet has warmed a total of 1,0°C, with confidence interval of between 0,8°C and 1,2°C, with a current estimated global warming of 0,2°C per decade due to past and ongoing emissions. This increase stems from emissions of CO₂ and CO₂ equivalents, which is emitted from mainly four sources, according to the International Energy Agency: Electricity and Heat Production(49,04%), Transport(20,45%), Manufacturing Industries and Construction(19,96%), and Residential buildings & commercial and public services(8,60%).

These emissions are contributed to by mainly three Greenhouse Gasses: CO₂(accounting for 77% of CO₂Equivalent emissions), Methane(CH₄, responsible for 14% of CO₂Equivalent emissions), and nitrous oxide(N₂O, summing to 8% of CO₂Equivalent emissions). The total emissions summed to 36,18 Giga tonnes of CO₂Equivalent emissions in 2015.(for more easily available data see ourworldindata.org)

The current level of emissions far exceeds that which will keep global warming below 1,5°C. As such, the IPCC projects that global warming will reach around 3°C by 2100, far exceeding the target of keeping global warming below 1,5°C as per the Paris Climate Agreements ambition. Urgent action is therefore needed as the effects of even a 1,5°C increase in average temperatures can result in considerable climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth. It is estimated that the additional annual investments required to limit global warming to 1,5°C for the period leading to 2050 is in the range of 830 Billion USD, not including the currently pledged and planned investments.

With these projections it is clear that far reaching reforms are to take place if the world is to reach the goal of limiting global warming to 1,5°C over pre-industrial levels. Such reforms are to be rapid and far reaching transitions in energy, land, and industrial systems, etc., which will require an increasing and inclusive dialogue, especially with a focus on civil society, the private sector, local communities and youth. This inclusion is equally important when it comes to responses to climate change. Climate change responses can be divided into two categories: Mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation refers to the active combatting of climate change, such as the political and commercial decisions on energy supply, pollution policies and transportation, and thus is often seen as the most essential response. However, adaptation to climate change is equally important for the successful responding to climate change, as it relates to the redesign of cities to build resilience to changes in the environment, to new agricultural and social actions in light of changing circumstances.

The above quick discussion provides a good introduction to the effects of climate change and global warming, and the consequences it can and potentially will have on humans and ecosystems, it also provides some light for the responses of us as an international community in the face of the impending disaster.

Youth and climate change

The above distinction between climate change responses in the categories of mitigation and adaptation provides a good starting point for a twofold discussion of youth in the climate agenda. As such, let us progress with Youth and climate change mitigation, before proceeding to climate change adaptation.

Youth and Climate Change mitigation

While there is a need for consumers, and thus populations to change their habits in combatting climate change, there needs to be a coordinated response from governments, local and national, civil society and the private sector to limit emissions to stay within the 1,5°C global warming limit. With the main contributors to global warming being electricity and heat production, the manufacturing industry, and residential buildings & commercial and public services, Youth are often excluded from the decision-making process, something the ECOSOC Youth Forum pointed to in its 8th annual session. As such, the main issue is for youth to engage in formal decision-making and holding their governments accountable to their commitments. The ECOSOC Youth Forum further pointed to the importance of youth-led constituencies, such as national youth forums, youth advisory groups, etc., and in organising and administering educational and awareness programmes through multiple forums and medias. While there are multiple such initiatives existing and running around the world currently, these are essential starting places for the inclusion of youth in the climate agenda.

While access to the decision-making process is a big hurdle for youth engagement in the climate agenda, limiting youth engagement to access to decision-making is restricting the potential for youth inclusion. The ECOSOC Youth Forum further emphasised the importance of considering youth as the key innovators and entrepreneurs in the global climate agenda, in developing innovative solutions and starting social enterprises either to mitigate climate change or to provide adaptation solutions. However, the youth forum further emphasised that one key obstacle to social entrepreneurship is in the availability of capital willing to finance these entrepreneurs.

While youth is playing an important role in the proliferation of sustainable campaigns via social media, there is also noted a lack of standard sustainability education in youth education initiatives. As such, a further, though long-term, solution to youth inclusion in climate change mitigation might be the inclusion of standard sustainability curricula in all forms of education to build young peoples' capacities to become agents of change in their communities and in the world.

Youth and climate adaptation

As it is the current youth and the generation to follow them that is going to experience the fullest effect of the global warming, it is essential that youth is also part of the adaptation processes. And while there is a considerable overlap between the solutions to climate mitigation and adaptation, due to their increasing interconnectivity and interdependence, there should be explicit focus on adaptation efforts.

One issue that immediately arises is the access to formal decision-making of the constituents of countries below the age of 18. As the decisions made in countries the world over are going to have transformative importance for the current and coming generations, their representation in these processes is of high importance. The ECOSOC Youth Forum proposed the establishment of youth constituencies as a climate change response, where such constituencies can form to act as advisers to the governments on the concerns of youth in climate change responses. It is further noted that collaboration and learning across borders between such forums can be a vital source for knowledge transfer and sharing of best practices.

The point of youth entrepreneurship applies equally to climate change adaptation, with youth being in a position where their individual implementation of climate adaptation initiatives can be more long term, provided these are facilitated by the availability of financing and backing from other entrepreneurs, to build the innovative capacities, especially in developing countries and the Least Developed Countries.

International Youth Inclusion

On a final note, it should be recognised that since this is definitionally a global problem, which is being discussed particularly in international forums, so youth could be formally included in these processes and summits. Barriers exist to this inclusion, including logistical and representational barriers, as those who are able to participate in these summits and forums seldom are representative of the overall capabilities of countries' youth, especially in the developing and least developed countries. Some steps have been taken to ensure the inclusion of youth in the work of the UN, through youth delegates at UN summits and meetings, the UN Youth Envoy, and notably the ECOSOC Youth Forum which runs prior to, but resembles the ECOSOC High Level Political Forum, the annual event of the ECOSOC to facilitate the majority of the councils work.

Questions a resolution should answer

As the committee starts considering actions to be taken and recommendations to be made, it might benefit from considering the below questions which a resolution could answer. However, it is entirely the committee itself decides on its approach to the topic of discussion.

1. How can the international community harness youth in tackling the problems of climate change?
2. How can the UN system contribute to the inclusion of youth in the climate agenda?
3. How can the international youth best be harnessed in mitigating and adapting to climate change, and what support should the international and national communities provide to this end?

Past resolutions and discussions

The topic of climate change and global warming has been on the agenda for decades, with varying degrees of success. In tackling climate change, the discussion has resulted in a few notable resolutions and commitments.

In 1992 at the Rio earth summit, the international community came together to sign the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This convention is one of the cornerstones in the international climate change agenda as it sets out the framework in which the issue of climate change is to be solved. The signatories to the convention meet annually at Conferences of the Parties (COP) summits to discuss the current state of progress and consider steps to be taken. At these COP Summits two notable agreements have been reached: the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. The Kyoto Protocol of 1997 established legally binding international targets for the reduction of emissions, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, thereby recognising the importance of developed countries in current emission levels, and therefore placing a heavier burden on these than developed countries. The Paris Agreement of 2015 went further to implement Nationally Determined Contributions, applicable to all countries parties to the convention. In doing so it made a great leap forward in addressing climate change and limiting global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

Since the COP meeting in 2005, International and local youth have been partaking in side events to the different COP meetings around the world. These side events, held under the name of Action for

Climate Empowerment at the COP 22 meeting in Marrakech , included sharing of best practices, provided youth with an opportunity to engage with decision makers, and hosted the award ceremony for the Global Youth Video Competition on Climate Change. These events provided youth an opportunity to engage in events near the discussions of the Conference of the Parties and attract international decision makers to engage in the events alongside their commitments at the COP conference.

While youth have been invited to participate in side events to international summits, there is little to report on official youth summits. One such instance is the ECOSOC Youth Forum, held annually in the UN headquarters in New York, where youth leaders and representatives gather to provide their inputs on the agenda of the High-Level Political Forum of the ECOSOC. The forum's 8th session was held in early April 2019, with one of the themes and SDGs under consideration being SDG 13 on Climate Action. The outcomes of this and previous sessions have been included as official background documents for the HLPF, and therefore provides a valuable inclusion of youth in the work of ECOSOC. However no similar event is held in part of the annual session of the General Assembly.

Bloc positions

The countries of the committee can be considered in several grouping, central to these are the division into developed, developing and least developed countries. These of course have different priorities as relates climate change mitigation and adaptation, as this relates to the countries' continued development trajectories. Many of the developed countries also have the highest GHG emissions and recognises their responsibility in limiting their emissions while maintaining their current living standards. The opposite is true for the developing and least developed countries, which all have low levels of emissions and are looking to increase their economic development while maintaining a focus on sustainability. These least developed countries are, however, often the countries facing the direst circumstances from climate change and global warming and they are therefore looking to mitigate and adapt to these circumstances more than they are looking to limit their growth. While this distinction provides a good introduction, the distinction is not as clear cut with some developed countries favouring further economic development over emissions reductions and climate mitigation. As such all countries have a role to play in bringing all countries to the table in open and honest negotiations and holding each other accountable to their previous commitments.

Sources and further reading

Delegates wishing to engage further in the documentations behind this study guide will find useful reading from the IPCC reports, especially the *IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels* found on at <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

Further reading can include documentation from the website for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, found here: <https://unfccc.int>, especially the topics on Youth and Education

Finally, documentation relating to the ECOSOC Youth Forum here:

<https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/ecosoc-youth-forum>

Finally, for a critical assessment of the current state of the global climate, trajectories, and priorities, it is recommended to look at the work of Bjorn Lomborg, and the Copenhagen Consensus Centre:

<https://www.copenhagenconsensus.com>