

United Nations International Emergency

Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Background Guide



LFMUNC I

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Introduction:

UNICEF, or the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, has been a commission of the UN General Assembly and Economic and Social Council for decades, established with the primary objective of helping children around the world to achieve development, education, healthcare, and rights. Among this is their goal also focusing on helping developing countries and areas in poverty as the advocate for children. Working in over 190 countries and territories around the world to secure children's rights and to defend their lives, the organization works alongside private and public sectors both, getting most of its funding from government and individual donations, private companies, and NGOs.

Created in 1946 under the name United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and then to its present name in 1953, UNICEF continues to commit themselves fully to the global youth's protection. Having supported the growth and institution of actions to help children around the world, UNICEF's work today extends over numerous organized efforts by volunteer organizations, task forces, and businesses, helping direct resource allocation and distribution to mostly developing countries and territories in need. As UNICEF partners largely with both its member states and the private, public sectors, the fight to sustain and protect children's rights from disparage has been one still overseen after decades; the direction of the committee still is unknown to be perceived in the future -- and today, much of its influence on the world lies in the cooperation between leaders for proper orchestration to reach their initial goals.

Topic A: Child Labor

Introduction

Amidst the advent of the technological era, a modern form of slavery has manifested in the form of forced labor. Most alarming has this been found coercing millions of children around the world to partake in dangerous or disruptive activities that influence their youth negatively.

Worldwide, nearly 218 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are in employment, with nearly half of these victims aged between 5 and 11.

However, not all work done by children should be classified negatively as child labor. For example, a youth participation in assisting a family business or helping their community is generally positive, and should not be targeted for elimination. Rather, the term of “child labor” should be defined as one impacting children negatively, be that in harming their physical or mental development, or a characterized work that deprives them of their youth and obliging them to leave school prematurely.

Today, the worst forms of child labor include slavery, forced labor, child soldiering, sexual exploitation, and drug trafficking. Especially prevalent in areas of low development, poverty, and lack of enforcement, millions of children are used to increase profits in business industries, promoting the utilization of cheap labor in exchange for a better economy. In many countries using child labor as a substantial part of their workforce, previous legislation may have protected children from labor, but such legislations is rarely enforced. Though resources are running low and many provisions have yet to be implemented, these actions are encouraging nations to take a stand against child labor and enforce previous legislation protecting children; in the past decade, 90 million children were taken out of labor, as reported by UNICEF.

Current Situation

Although child labor has decreased significantly over the past decade, still one in ten children worldwide are still involved in child labor, as recorded by the UN Labour Agency in a 2019 report. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to push millions more into labor as job losses and declines in sources of income hit vulnerable families, pushing more children in labor. The crisis becomes aggravated especially in low and middle income countries; with school out and remote learning impossible, putting children to work becomes a priority, eclipsing their childhood along with their right to a promising future.

Keeping in mind that with the rise of global poverty, so too will the prevalence of child labor, discussions of the pandemic will likely turn to the attention of the new ruse sparked by millions of children into labor, including work that harms the health and safety of children. As recently announced by UNICEF, “We expect millions of children to become child laborers due to a rise in global poverty alone.” One model by the World Bank forecasts a rise of 40 to 60 million people living in extreme poverty this year alone; a similar UNU-WIDER study estimates a 5 percent contraction in per capita incomes, leading to an 80 million people pushed into the realm of extreme poverty.

However, the alarming new statistics have indeed seen 133 countries actively working on social protection programs, aiming to offset the worst impacts of the COVID crisis on child labor, by lowering child labor outside the household and helping households offset economic shocks. For example, in Columbia, cash transfers helped mitigate effects of loss of income on potential pushes into child labor. In Zambia, cash transfers helped households find solace after similar economic shocks.

Past UN Action

The ILO Convention No. 82 requires governments to seek action in giving priority to eliminating forms of child labor especially undertaken by children under 18 years of age, as stated by its Article I, “Each Member which ratifies this Convention shall take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor as a matter of urgency.¹” The ILO Convention also works in hand with recent UNICEF actions; UNICEF’s latest report, *Child Labour and UNICEF in Action: Children at the Centre*, illustrates this with the presentation of UNICEF’s stance and approach to child labor: addressing the root causes of child labor in a holistic manner.

Above all else, UNICEF and its partners continue to work today in upholding the core concepts of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, hereby strengthening policy frameworks and partnering with government and community organizations to promote social change in eradicating the harmful network of child labor today. As stated by Susan Bissell, UNICEF’s global head of Child Protection, “We cannot tackle child labor in isolation and expect dramatic results. This conference is an opportunity to emphasize the urgent need to combine our efforts to combat child labor, end violence against children, and strengthen national systems for the protection of children.”

Possible Solutions

In addressing the multiple approaches that may be taken by delegates in considering the path beyond, delegates must look at the entire range of children’s vulnerabilities and protection challenges; the best, and possibly most swift resolution may be in directly tackling the root causes itself. As UNICEF proposes, cash transfers have previously been shown to alleviate the stress on households coping with backlash from economic shock. Improving access to credit and offering

¹ “Convention C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182)”, *International Labor Organization*, International Labor Organization, 1999, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182

unemployment benefits to affected families may also be effective. Such measures have already been implemented in many countries.

We can distill a possible solution into three areas addressing the following: labor, poverty, and education. Consider the following with respect to these three areas.

The first risk factor, being the lack of enforcement of previous labour legislation, could possibly be addressed with the support of labor unions. To better working conditions, hours, and pay, worker unions serve as integral parts of society to stand up for the basic needs and rights as citizens in the workforce. Governments should also take certain measures: what legislation is needed to highlight a new standard of labor for children?

The second risk factor is poverty. By reaching out to poverty stricken areas, the need for child labor in these parts may be diminished if basic needs are addressed, such as a development of policy in the area, enforcement, and more. Resources may also be allocated, businesses supported, families be provided necessary care.

However, most important will be addressing the biggest risk factor of the lack of education, and kids being out of school. A reopening of schools or a development of strategies, be that through a distribution of tech supplies or educational system reform, may help children restart their education and nourish their youth skills.

As UNICEF states, “Global progress on child labor has come from improving living standards, expanding social protection and support, and paying greater attention to adolescent welfare. All of these gains are under threat. Finding alternative, inexpensive ways to reinforce the advances made will be a priority in the coming years.”

Bloc Positions

Countries such as Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, among other African states see continuous acts of underage citizens working in the military, oil industries, mines, and more, despite governmental actions attempting to combat such behaviors.

In countries such as Afghanistan, the United Kingdom, and Nepal, national constitutions, bills, and legislation ensures the rights of the child and forbids child labor and forms of labor exploitation.

Economic development and restructuring, as well as the Chinese government's nationwide poverty alleviation campaign has seen progress in the People's Republic of China's push towards eradicating child labor and countries such as the State of Japan are most notably recognized for actively working in hand with organizations to combat child labor and trafficking.

Questions to Consider

1. Does your country actively use child labor? What is your government doing about child labor?
2. What strategies may be used to reach out to children out of education in poverty stricken and/or areas of development?
3. What are some standards that should be implemented globally in regards to child labor?
4. What supplies, resources, or basic needs are necessary to provide impoverished areas in order to initiate change?
5. What measures can be taken by governments to uphold conventions and enforce laws passed against child labor?

Topic B: Providing for Children in Developing Countries

Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ensures children's rights to survival, protection, and development. Yet, the maintenance of these rights varies from country to country, with those in developing countries suffering the greatest disparities, with nearly one-quarter of young children in developing countries at risk. These factors, whether political, economic, social, cultural, ethnic, or religious, all have a different impact on children, though all are significant all the same. Most notably, however, is the varying maintenance of rights in developing countries, where more than 2.2 billion children on Earth currently reside in.

With the alarming fact that not only does the child mortality rate increase dramatically in areas of development and impoverished areas (according to a study by UNICEF, this estimates to about 10.6 million), but child poverty also denies children their fundamental human rights, it has risen to a significant point of importance that resources should be immediately allocated to satisfy children's needs. Severe or extreme poverty often causes children permanent damage -- physically, emotionally, and mentally -- distorting their development and often leading to losses of hope in future.

Current Situation

Most recently, this world has come to be acquainted with the COVID-19 pandemic -- and with that, has also brought notable impact on areas of low development and its children. As families lose their sources of income due to COVID-19, numerous households are falling deeper into monetary poverty. As data from UNICEF states, an additional 140 million children in developing countries are projected to be living below the poverty line, thus aggravating the prevalence of the

crisis once more.² With losses of health services and basic resources worldwide, the coronavirus pandemic is a devastating blow to children in developing countries.

Many children around the world, including those displaced by conflict, already live in vulnerable conditions; families with lost jobs, few savings, and often new debts often push children from a lack of hygiene measures, health care, and testing and medical assessments, let alone treatments. In the poorest parts of the world, developing nations often fall short of being able to provide their children of basic yet essential services -- including vaccines to protect against diseases such as pneumonia, malaria, and of course, the coronavirus.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council reports 130 countries have already implemented national procedures following the pandemic, be that through providing free school meals or basic necessities to children in need, but sadly, this does not fix the financial stress put on families.

Past UN Action

As UNICEF's core mission lies in achieving a better, more sustainable future for all children, they continue to play a key role in improving the aspects of children's health and well-being across the world, and most notably has this focus of UNICEF shifted to aiding developing and impoverished areas. UNICEF's work both in past decades and of current in helping children in developing countries rests on the core concept of equity.

The World Declaration and Plan of Action by the World Summit for Children, adopted in 1990, had set the initial goal and vision of a 'first call' for children. UNICEF has adamantly pursued this, endorsing organizations sharing its goals, and participating in numerous resource distributions and governmental actions in helping developing countries find their paths.

² UNICEF data hub. "COVID-19 and children", *UNICEF*, UNICEF, March 2020, <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/>

With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations system through its global network of regional, sub-regional, and country offices are all actively supporting all governments and partners through the response and recovery of this crisis. There have been three main funds and appeals launched by the UN:

1. Solidarity Response Fund: To address immediate health needs, WHO, UN Foundation and partners have launched a first-of-its-kind COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund to raise money to address immediate health needs. The Fund supports the work of WHO and partners to help countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, raising over \$150 million so far, as part of over \$800 million WHO has raised in total. (UN)
2. Humanitarian Appeal: To support the world's most vulnerable countries, the UN launched a \$2 billion coordinated global Humanitarian Response Plan to fight the impact of COVID in some of the world's most vulnerable countries. It aims to protect millions of people and stop the virus from circling back around the globe. It brings together appeals and requirements from WHO, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, UN-Habitat and NGOs, and identifies new needs. It is coordinated by UNOCHA and complements plans developed by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. (UN)
3. Response and Recovery Trust Fund: To deliver rapid recovery, the UN Secretary-General established a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Trust Fund to support efforts in low and middle-income countries. It will enable the UN to provide a coordinated multi-agency, multi-sectoral response to national and local actions that address the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 crisis and enable rapid recovery. (UN)

Possible Solutions

Early childhood is a critical point in development for children, as they grow physical, cognitive, and socioemotional domains -- “building blocks” of later growth. The protection of such domains for children lies in not only reforming policy to protect their rights but also in providing social services in alleviating childhood poverty. As both research and administrative data actively demonstrates, investment in basic social services for children is a key element to ensure success in alleviating their poverty. This comes especially significant in an agenda to address the most vulnerable children from the harsh blow of the coronavirus pandemic.

As 130 countries already are stepping up to take the chance to protect their childrens’ rights, and with numerous governmental organizations teaming together to find an equitable solution to safety, health, and wellbeing for all children, it should remain a hearty pursuit in all nations to bolster the need for system reforms and social protection bills to reach affected communities. Governments should look to sustaining areas of great need with resources that may mitigate the effects of COVID-19 from the vulnerable. This means continuing to meet the needs of citizens posed by COVID-19, with the orchestrated movement of actions such as funding for immunization programmes, strengthening health systems, guarranting universal and quality care for all, and bolstering the resources of health systems by ensuring supplies and protective equipment.

Bloc Positions

Countries all share their distinct approaches to the impacts of COVID-19, with some in struggle and others working to spread their influence for the betterment of those in dire need.

In March 2020, Lebanon issued a government action plan, supporting citizens in areas of need and outlining mental health promotion. Similar plans were released in South Africa, India, Kenya, and Uganda.

LLDCs (Landlocked Developing Countries) have seen rises in the number of cases and deaths from the COVID-19 virus. The health systems of these countries are among the weakest in the world, and are currently being largely impacted by the distributions of sponsored organizations by the United Nations.

The G7, consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, recently recognized that “no one is safe until everyone is safe”, thus announcing additional steps to facilitate globally more “affordable and equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics”.

The Russia Federation has been a prime donor of vaccines, offering 300m doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine to the African Union, along with funding for countries in need.

Canada is an exceptional member of the COVAX vaccine alliance, providing the most support for the international movement to provide equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines to all.

Questions to consider:

1. What specific resources can be allocated to developing nations to combat poverty and support the wellbeing of children there?
2. What policies should be encouraged to be put in place to push for further development and protection of children’s rights in impoverished areas?
3. How can countries come together to organize a unified force to protect these children’s rights in the age of COVID?
4. How can respective nations reform child development systems to protect the childhood growth of their youth?

Background Guide written by Megan Zhang

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