

BACKGROUND GUIDE OF THE UNICEF

Composed by Aashni Jain



WMIDMUN-XXII

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Delegates,

My name is Aashni Jain, and I would like to formally welcome you to WMIDMUN XXII. I am honored to be your director for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Committee. I'm a senior at the College of William & Mary this year and I am an International Relations major and a Data Science minor. Outside of the International Relations Club on campus, I am part of the South Asian Student Association, a Bollywood fusion dance team, a social sorority, and a few honor societies. As for my hobbies, I love to play the violin, dance, and bake nothing else but banana bread!

Neither of the high schools I went to really had Model UN, so I was not introduced to the activity until my freshman year here at William & Mary. Since then, I have competed in 7 collegiate level Model UN conferences and served as Undersecretary General of the WMHSMUN Secretariat in 2022 and 2023. I was also a director at WMIDMUN XIX, a media staffer at WMIDMUN XX, and a chair at WMIDMUN XXI. With these experiences, I still sometimes feel as though I'm new to MUN. However, I have gotten so much out of this wonderful activity in the past four years and I sincerely hope this conference is the beginning of a similar journey for all of you.

For some of you, this may be your first experience with Model United Nations. If I had to offer any advice, it would be to put your best foot forward. This activity is a door to a whole new world. You are getting to experience what it is like to negotiate really important international issues and come up with creative solutions that benefit everyone. Throw yourself into that role, and have fun with it. Your voice matters, so try your best to have it be heard. Most of all, be as kind as possible to your fellow delegates.

Overall, I want this to be an enjoyable and educational weekend where each delegate gets as much out of it as possible. If you have any questions, or anything you're nervous about, or just want to talk, send me an email. See you soon!

Sincerely,

Aashni Jain

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HISTORY



The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was established after the end of World War II in December 1946 to provide humanitarian aid and basic needs to children and families in need. UNICEF works in 190 countries worldwide to support its mission of ensuring all children can reach their full potential to adulthood. As a humanitarian organization, UNICEF remains neutral as it carries out its work to protect children's rights everywhere, regardless of who they are, what they believe in, or where they come from.

Alongside its focus on basic needs such as nutritious food, clean water, and shelter, UNICEF has a broad focus on equity in areas such as health, education, climate change, early childhood development, and immunization, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since its inception, the organization has expanded its goals to include mitigation of the pandemic's impact on communities worldwide, emphasizing the interconnectedness of health, education, and overall well-being. UNICEF continues to play a vital role in navigating the complexities of the contemporary world to ensure that children, regardless of their circumstances or identity, have the support they need to thrive and contribute to a better future. This comprehensive approach reflects UNICEF's commitment to solving global challenges and upholding both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.



BACKGROUND 1.0



Topic 1: Eliminating Child Labor

The United Nations defines child labor as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.” In the worst cases, children suffer from abuse, separation from their families, and hazardous conditions. The International Labor Organization threshold for child labor in terms of economic work varies by age with 43 hours per week being the minimum for children aged 15 through 17. For unpaid household chores, the minimum is considered 21 hours per week

According to UNICEF, approximately one in ten children worldwide is subjected to child labor. Further, across the African continent, more than 25% of children have experience with child labor. These statistics are alarming. This means one-tenth of all children are denied the opportunity to go to school, interact with their peers, or lead healthy, well-rounded lives. Eliminating child labor should be a UNICEF priority so that all children everywhere can reach their full potential and thrive through childhood and beyond. Although UNICEF was initially established to protect children’s rights in emergencies, the organization is dedicated to “special protection for the most disadvantaged children” and their rights as global citizens, which has led to a specific focus on eliminating child labor in recent years.

Two main circumstances that lead to more children being subjected to child labor are severe economic hardship and human trafficking. More often than not, when families are experiencing severe financial difficulty and poverty or the primary caregiver/breadwinner of the family has passed away, children in many places are forced to work to support their families. Further, migrant and refugee children are especially susceptible to many of the circumstances mentioned, along with human trafficking. Both boys and girls are likely to be subjected to child labor, with girls being forced into more traditional gender-based work in homes and boys being recruited by arms groups in some places. Many of these children work in unimaginable conditions that risk their physical and mental health. This leads to more social inequality, especially in regions and countries in which child labor is most prevalent. Since children are not able to grow mentally and physically at normal rates, their quality of life declines, especially as they approach adulthood.

UNICEF has partnered with organizations across the world to establish initiatives to help reduce the number of children who are trafficked and exploited for child labor.

Responding to existing child labor is an important first step in eliminating it. UNICEF has been working to expand the workforce of social service workers who are trained to identify and manage the indicators that might lead to child labor. In addition, collecting accurate data is critical to raising awareness of child labor and the hardships that lead to it around the world. UNICEF has worked with the International Labor Organization to ensure that child labor policies both on national and international scales are aligning with the reality on the ground. With more data, UNICEF can help families get the correct documentation showing when children are under the legal age to work. Although these policies help mitigate child labor, they do not address the financial circumstances and violence that force families to turn to child labor for survival.

BACKGROUND 1.0



One of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is decent work and economic growth, part of which the UN aims to eliminate child labor of all kinds in 2025. In 2021, the International Labor Organization and UNICEF pushed to refocus the global agenda on child labor as progress in some places like sub-Saharan Africa stagnated between 2016 and 2020. Although child labor rates are declining, are current UNICEF programs enough to meet this goal?





RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What existing initiatives/partnerships does UNICEF have within your country?

How can UNICEF expand its existing initiatives to more directly address the root causes of child labor?

Is eliminating child labor a realistic goal for the next five years? How soon can it be achieved, if at all?



Topic 2: Improving Immunization and Disease Prevention Protocols

To ensure that children worldwide grow into healthy adults with a good quality of life, access to vaccines is of utmost importance. However, child vaccination rates worldwide have been declining steadily. According to UNICEF, 25 million children across the globe are being denied access to lifesaving care each year. This leaves them defenseless against diseases like measles and polio which are completely preventable but can lead to death or severe disability.

However, ensuring that children have access to routine vaccinations globally requires more than just delivering and administering them each year. UNICEF works to ensure that overall, health systems, especially in regions where children are most disadvantaged in this area, have a sustainable supply of vaccines as well as the budget to maintain them.

In recent years, many countries with vaccination rates ranging from 0% to 59% have faced challenges such as conflict, misinformation, or insufficient budget to support widespread access to vaccinations. However, it is important to note that even in countries with very high immunization rates over 90% might have millions of unvaccinated children, due to their sheer size. India is one example of this.

Many of the children are missing out on vaccinations because of displacement or other hardship due to conflict and misinformation surrounding the benefits of vaccines. UNICEF states that approximately 40% of zero-dose children or those who have not received all their routine vaccinations are from countries experiencing conflict. Healthcare facilities and the amount of healthcare workers readily available fluctuate in unpredictable ways in times of conflict due to both destruction and displacement. Further, those who are displaced are generally living in unsanitary conditions in overcrowded areas which allow for a faster rate of infection than usual.

On the other hand, misinformation can compound the difficulties that come with the reasons people are not receiving vaccinations for preventable diseases. For example, with polio, digital misinformation, whether in the form of videos of children getting sick after vaccination or more general misinformation about the risks of the vaccine, is a significant barrier to eliminating cases of infection.

One example of UNICEF's work to improve vaccination rates is Burundi. As part of sub-Saharan Africa, it is part of the lowest regional count of immunization rates. Although misinformation is not as big of an issue in Burundi, data collection and follow up were the key to increasing the number of vaccinated children there. For many families, women not having the opportunity to go to school led to missed appointments and health issues. UNICEF conducted surveys to gather data on children and communities that had not been vaccinated. Next, it launched its Expanded Programme on Immunization as a collaborative effort with the local government which was successful in vaccinating more than 400,000 children in 2018 alone.

BACKGROUND 2.0



In this way, UNICEF has taken a holistic approach to improving immunization rates worldwide through its 'vaccination catch-up campaigns' targeting underserved populations. In addition, they have partnered with local healthcare facilities to ensure the demand for vaccinations is being met and with governments to ensure there are sufficient and transparent budgets dedicated to improving immunization rates country by country. While these steps are indeed helpful, will they be sufficient to prevent immunization rates from regressing to this level again?





RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can UNICEF incentivize higher-income countries to commit to a plan to distribute vaccine doses equitably?

What factors allow certain countries to have easier access to vaccine doses? How much does purchasing power matter?

How do domestic/international politics affect the distribution of vaccines?

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