NHSMUN
National High School Model United Nations
2023

BACKGROUND GUIDE: UNICEF

Topic A: Housing Insecurity for Children

Topic B: Literacy Education for Children

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2023! My name is Sam Kim, and I am beyond excited to serve as a director for UNICEF alongside Nicole Pilliod. As chairs, Nicole and I have worked these past few months to deliver a thorough and complete Background Guide. We are all very excited to see the ideas you will bring to committees, the speeches you will make, and the resolutions you will write!

Before I dive into the topic, I would like to introduce myself briefly. I am a sophomore at the University of California, Berkeley, studying Applied Mathematics and Computer Science. My current research interests are studying principles to improve educational outcomes among children (imagine reading books in the metaverse!). While I am originally from Winchester, MA, I have had the opportunity to explore and live in a lot of countries outside the United States: New Zealand, Japan, Australia, China, and South Korea. I am also a big foodie and a movie buff, with a bizarre passion for blueberry marshmallow ice cream and Pixar's magnum opus, *Ratatouille*.

When it comes to Model UN, it is not an exaggeration for me to say that NHSMUN and IMUNA have reshaped my attitude towards it. IMUNA is an amazing organization staffed by even more amazing people whose mission is to remind delegates that Model UN is about more than the awards. Instead, it is about growing through cooperation, exchanging ideas collaboratively, and, most importantly, practicing diplomacy. Now returning as a director, I am dedicated to replicating the same collaborative, educational environment for you all to thrive in—both as a delegate and a student.

In essence, the mission of UNICEF is to create strategies that will protect children's rights, meet their most pressing needs, and allow them to meet their full potential. However, ineffective literacy education and homelessness are two realities that interfere with UNICEF's core values. You must not fail to understand the gravity of these issues when exploring the background guides. It is in all of our interests to recognize the underlying causes of these crises, draw intelligent connections, and strategize to mitigate their effects, if not eradicate them completely.

As you begin to conduct your research, do so with joy, passion, and conviction! More importantly, strive to understand how you can foster peace—in the committee room and in your daily lives.

Finally, please reach out to Nicole or me without hesitation should you require further guidance. We will be more than happy to help! I look forward to seeing you in New York.

Until then,

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Amy Zeng

Dear Delegates,

Hello and welcome to NHSMUN 2023! We are very excited to have you here and be a part of one of the world's greatest MUN conferences, especially in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). My name is Nicole Pilliod, and this will be my fifth year in NHSMUN but my first year on staff. Throughout my high school journey and first college years, this conference has shown me so many valuable things like public speaking, diplomacy, respecting other people's points of view, amazing friendships, and connections, and most importantly: learning through experience. I am delighted to have joined the staff and to be creating what I am sure will be an amazing experience and journey for you all. Sam and I are very happy to share some opinions and perspectives, which is why the topics that we chose for this year reflect that. Hopefully, you can share that passion for them with us as well.

I am a college student at Universidad Anáhuac Norte in Mexico City, which is home for me. I am in my second year of majoring in nutrition sciences, and one of the things I like the most is sports nutrition, specifically athletic performance for motorsport drivers. My hobbies include listening to all kinds of music, reading romance books, and drinking a lot of coffee, but you'll also find me watching and constantly quoting Brooklyn 99 and The OC. I'm also an enthusiast for what I believe is the best food combo out there: McDonald's fries dipped in vanilla ice cream. Even though I'm Mexican, you can say that I have many nationalities or personalities as well: I'm half-American, "Canadian" by heart, and I consider myself to be a New Yorker thanks to NHSMUN, fingers crossed that my dream of living in New York will someday come true.

As for the committee, we, the directors, share an interest in helping the world's future leaders reach their full potential and be able to thrive in their lives. The topics chosen represent an important contributor to stopping UNICEF from reaching its goal and mission, which is "leave no child behind." Within these pages, you'll find valuable information that will help you during debate in committee, but hopefully, you will take on these challenges in your daily lives. Many of the statistics show the urgency to tackle these issues, and many of them are also heartbreaking. This is why we are really looking forward to seeing the solutions you will come up with—remember that the change we want to see in the world comes from our own actions.

Without further ado, please remember that Sam and I are available to answer any questions you may develop during this process, don't be afraid to reach out. I cannot wait to meet you all and make the NHSMUN experience for you as special as it has been for me. I leave you with a quote that you may want to take as a reminder for both your life and the conference "Treat People With Kindness."

See you in New York!

Nicole Pilliod
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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2023! We are Ming-May Hu and Ana Margarita Gil, and we are this year's Secretary-General and Director-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse Model United Nations conference for secondary school students. We are thrilled to welcome you to New York City in March!

As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers into tomorrow's leaders. Our organization provides a uniquely tailored experience for all in attendance through innovative and accessible programming. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience, and this idea permeates throughout NHSMUN.

Realism and accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. Each NHSMUN committee is a simulation of a real deliberative body so that delegates can research what their country has said in the committee. Our topics are chosen from the issues currently on the agenda of that committee (except historical committees, which take topics from the appropriate time period). This creates incredible opportunities for our delegates to conduct first-hand research by reading the actual statements their country has made and the resolutions they have supported. We also strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational emphasis, even for awards: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN so special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN as an activity. NHSMUN seeks to reward students who excel in the arts of compromise and diplomacy. More importantly, we seek to develop an environment in which delegates can employ their critical thought processes and share ideas with their counterparts from around the world. Given our delegates' plurality of perspectives and experiences, we center our programming around the values of diplomacy and teamwork. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership that strives towards consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Debate founded on strong knowledge and accessibility: With knowledgeable staff members and delegates from over 70 countries, NHSMUN can facilitate an enriching experience reliant on substantively rigorous debate. To ensure this high quality of debate, our staff members produce detailed, accessible, and comprehensive topic guides (like the one below) to prepare delegates for the nuances inherent in each global issue. This process takes over six months, during which the Directors who lead our committees develop their topics with the valuable input of expert contributors. Because these topics are always changing and evolving, NHSMUN also produces update papers intended to bridge the gap of time between when the background guides are published and when committee starts in March. As such, this guide is designed to be a launching point from which delegates should delve further into their topics. The detailed knowledge that our Directors provide in this background guide through diligent research aims to increase critical thinking within delegates at NHSMUN.

Extremely engaged staff: At NHSMUN, our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Before the conference, our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained rigorously through hours of workshops and exercises both virtual and in-person to provide the best conference experience possible. At the conference, delegates will have the opportunity to meet their dais members prior to the first committee session, where they may engage

one-on-one to discuss their committees and topics. Our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained and empowered to be experts on their topics and they are always available to rapidly answer any questions delegates may have prior to the conference. Our Directors and Assistant Directors read every position paper submitted to NHSMUN and provide thoughtful comments on those submitted by the feedback deadline. Our staff aims not only to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions most likely to make a meaningful impact on the world. That is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. We believe that to properly delve into an issue and produce fruitful debate, it is crucial to focus the entire energy and attention of the room on the topic at hand. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of each delegate's country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. MUN delegates are well researched and aware of the UN's priorities, and they can serve as the vanguard for action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, we are proud to connect students with other action-oriented organizations to encourage further work on the topics.

Focused committee time: We feel strongly that face-to-face interpersonal connections during debate are critical to producing superior committee experiences and allow for the free flow of ideas. Ensuring policies based on equality and inclusion is one way in which NHSMUN guarantees that every delegate has an equal opportunity to succeed in committee. In order to allow communication and collaboration to be maximized during committee, we have a very dedicated administrative team who work throughout the conference to type up, format, and print draft resolutions and working papers.

As always, we welcome any questions or concerns about the substantive program at NHSMUN 2023 and would be happy to discuss NHSMUN pedagogy with faculty or delegates.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Ming-May Hu   Ana Margarita Gil
Secretary-General   Director-General

A Note on Research and Preparation

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to NHSMUN in March.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our **Beginner Delegate Guide** and **Advanced Delegate Guide**. In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are prepared to debate no matter which topic is selected first. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the NHSMUN Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections:

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and font size. **We recommend 3–5 pages per topic as a suitable length**. The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for sending a copy of its papers to their committee Directors via myDais on or before **February 24, 2023**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **February 3, 2023**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at info@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be <u>ineligible</u> for awards.

Committee History

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was established on December 11, 1946, by the United Nations General Assembly to mitigate the consequences of World War II. Originally named the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the agency was created to help children in Europe most impacted by the war.[1] In the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UNICEF established its mandate to uphold the rights of all children everywhere.[2] This mandate has not been altered since. UNICEF strives to ensure the protection, health, and education of children and women.[3] In 2015, UNICEF adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for this purpose.[4] Currently, UNICEF works in over 190 countries to save children's lives, protect their rights, and help them fulfill their potential.[5]

In 1953, UNICEF transitioned from a relief program to a permanent member of the United Nations, which means the General Assembly extended its mandate indefinitely.[6] As a result, UNICEF was recognized worldwide as the essential driving force to guarantee the fulfillment of children's rights around the world.[7] UNICEF provides guidance for decision-makers around the world to promote human rights advocacy, specifically for children. What makes UNICEF truly unique is its membership, which consists of representatives from individual countries; member states can share their opinions and have their perspectives reflected on resolutions. The governing body of UNICEF is the Executive Board, which provides intergovernmental support and oversight to the organization. It consists of 36 member states who are elected to three-year terms by the Economic and Social Council according to the following regional allocation: Africa (eight seats), Asia (seven seats), Eastern Europe (four seats), Latin America and Caribbean (five seats) and Western Europe and Others (12 seats). The members meet three times a year in the United Nations headquarters located in New York, New York.[8] UNICEF works with a wide range of like-minded partners to deliver their Strategic Plan, a guideline with the strategy to fulfill their mandate. While UNICEF mainly collaborates with governments, strategic alliances with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are essential to its success. UNICEF also works with intergovernmental organizations, academic scholars, think tanks, other UN agencies, international financial institutions, and institutions within the private sector that are motivated by the same purpose of protecting children's rights.[9]

For more than 75 years, UNICEF has made significant advances in maintaining the safety and wellbeing of children around the world.[10] In 1950, UNICEF provided over 6 million children worldwide with access to daily meals and over one million with clothing.[11] By 1973, UNICEF had helped more than 70 countries to reduce deaths caused by drinking unsanitary water.[12] UNICEF launched the Child Survival and Development Revolution in 1982, which helped increase life expectancy by over 33 percent of what it was when the organization was established. UNICEF spurred HIV prevention movements, provided treatments for babies and mothers, and protected children and adolescents from exploitation and domestic violence. Furthermore, UNICEF has taken strides against polio in collaboration with the World Health Organization and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, making significant impacts in our daily lives. Since 1988, cases of this life-threatening disease have plummeted to one percent, on track to achieving the following SDGs: No poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, and clean

1 "UNICEF history," *United Nations Children's Fund*, accessed September 17, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/history.
2 "Our mandate: no child left behind," *United Nations Children's Fund*, accessed September 17, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/eca/our-mandate-no-child-left-behind.
3 "Our mandate: no child left behind."
4 "Our mandate: no child left behind."
5 "UNICEF's work," *United Nations Children's Fund*, accessed September 17, 2022, https://www.unicef.org.
6 "Our history," *United Nations Children's Fund*, Accessed September 26, 2022, https://sites.unicef.org/about/who/index_history.html.
7 "UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund," *United Nations*, accessed September 17, 2022, https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/09/unicef-the-united-nations-childrens-fund.
8 "About: The UNICEF Executive Board," *United Nations Children's Fund*, accessed September 17, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/about.
9 "Our Partners," *United Nations Children's Fund*, accessed September 17, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/our-partners.
10 "For Every Child, Results," 2022, *United Nations Children's Fund*, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/results.
11 "UNICEF's Greatest Achievements," 2015*, Origami for Hope. Origami for Hope*, August 18, 2015, https://origamiforhope.wordpress.com/2015/08/18/unicefs-greatest-achievements/.
12 "UNICEF's Greatest Achievements."

water and sanitation.[13] Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a global crisis regarding children's lives around the world, mainly affecting those in the most vulnerable conditions and highlighting inequalities. During this ongoing crisis, UNICEF delivered more than 500 million vaccines, becoming one of the world's largest inoculation providers and the largest single vaccine buyer.[14] Overall, UNICEF has played a critical role in leadership, formalizing the humanitarian work in the United Nations that targets education, nutrition, and sanitation.[15] Furthermore, UNICEF has significantly lowered infant mortality rates, increased school attendance, improved living conditions, and facilitated access to purified water.[16] However, UNICEF's work remains unfinished; it strives to advance children's rights in the international community every day.[17] UNICEF invites everyone, even students, to contribute to their mission and help children in need. By participating in the volunteer program the organization offers for a hands-on experience, donating to any specific cause, and even presenting public support to their goals and course of action, anyone can make a difference.[18]

13 "Make the SDGs a Reality," *United Nations,* accessed September 26, 2022, https://sdgs.un.org
14 "For Every Child, Results," 2022, *United Nations Children's Fund*, 2022https://www.unicef.org/results.
15 "75th Anniversary of UNICEF - United States Department of State," 2022, *United States Department of State*, April 13, 2022, https://www.state.gov/75th-anniversary-of-unicef.
16 "UNICEF's Greatest Achievements."
17 "Frequently Asked Questions," 2019, *United Nations Children's Fund*, 2019, https://www.unicef.org/about-unicef/frequently-asked-questions.
18 "Volunteers at UNICEF," *United Nations Children's Fund*, Accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/careers/volunteers-unicef; "Take Action." *United Nations Children's Fund*, Accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/take-action.

TOPIC A:
HOUSING INSECURITY FOR CHILDREN

Introduction

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 addressed the niche issue of children's special housing rights. Article 27 of the latter document states that governments should take measures to assist parents and people responsible for children in implementing the right to an adequate standard of living. This includes providing materials and programs regarding nutrition, clothing, and housing.[1] Children facing housing insecurity lack the opportunity to fulfill this right to develop fully in a safe and caring environment. Each day, an increasing number of families face this issue, and more young children are left homeless.

People facing housing insecurity and instability face challenges, including difficulty paying rent, living in overcrowded spaces, frequently moving, staying with relatives or friends, or spending a significant amount of income on housing.[2] Households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing are defined as "cost burdened," and those that spend more than half are known as "severely cost burdened." Housing insecurity is related to overcrowding and homelessness, with other definitions referencing high housing costs in proportion to income, poor housing quality, and unstable neighborhoods.[3]

In recent years, housing insecurity has become more relevant in many countries, especially after the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic since 2020.[4] Over 110 million people lost jobs due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdown, with an estimated USD 3.7 trillion lost in labor income.[5] As a result, many people struggled to make housing payments.[6] Additionally, around 10.5 million children lost a parent or caregiver during the pandemic, leaving them in unstable living conditions and seeking shelter or a place to reside.[7] Studies show that moving more than three times a year is associated with negative health outcomes for children, exposing them to different physical health threats such as respiratory problems, food deprivation, anemia, and malnutrition. It also exposes them to mental health issues like stress, trauma, anxiety, and depression.[8] The impacts of housing security on children are significant and can persist throughout their lives.

Homelessness, defined as the lack of a residence, is a significant issue for children. This includes living in shared spaces such as shelters or constantly moving between the houses of friends or relatives.[9] Homeless children often must learn to navigate living on the streets and are responsible for their care, even at a young age. They face many barriers to obtaining an education or healthcare services, affecting their overall health and development.[10]

Housing insecurity is directly linked to children's education since moving frequently makes children change schools and hinders their development. In other cases, many children have their education interrupted if their parents cannot pay for school and housing. Children experiencing housing insecurity may also be absent from school numerous times, making them fall behind on basic knowledge and special skills. The relationship between children's education and housing is

1 OHCHR, Fact Sheet No. 21, The Human Right to Adequate Housing, (November 2009), https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/FactSheet21en.pdf.
2 "Housing Instability," Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, accessed August 12, 2022, https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/housing-instability.
3 Diana Becker Cutts et al., "US Housing Insecurity and the Health of Very Young Children," *American Journal of Public Health* 101 (October 2011): 1508-1514, https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300139.
4 "COVID-19: Number of children living in household poverty to soar up by up to 86 million by the end of year," UNICEF, May 27 2020, https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/.
5 Felix Richter, "COVID-19 has caused a huge amount of lost working hours," World Economic Forum, February 4, 2021, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/02/covid-employment-global-job-loss/.
6 Amy McKeever, "COVID-19's hidden, heartbreaking toll: millions of orphaned children," *National Geographic,* May 6, 2022, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/.
7 McKeever, "COVID-19's hidden, heartbreaking toll: millions of orphaned children."
8 *How does housing affect children's education? (*Americus: Habitat for Humanity, 2021), https://www.durhamhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Evidence-Brief-6_How_does_housing_affect_childrens_education.pdf.
9 "Types of Homelessness," Crisis UK, accessed August 30, 2022, https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/.
10 Crisis UK, "Types of Homelessness."

significant to their well-being and quality of life.[11]

Housing insecurity may prevent children from growing up in a supportive family environment, with many moving into alternative care. Globally, approximately 2.7 million children live in long-term care facilities, or residential care, without their parents.[12] Orphaned children and those who enter the Foster Care System (FCS) often lack the opportunity to develop in a loving and caring environment. Children living in orphanages face disconnection from relatives and their loved ones, as they may be placed far from their original place of residence.[13] These children endure constant school changes or lack access to any type of education. Additionally, the FCS only looks after children under the age of 18, leaving many children homeless and without support as they transition into adulthood.[14]

Refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers experience significant housing insecurity, as these children have been displaced due to natural disasters, discrimination, violence, or other conflicts. Many of these children are separated from their families in their journey to find a new place to live, further affecting their growth and development.[15]

The UN utilizes its Sustainable Development Goals when addressing this issue, including the Goals focused on hunger, poverty, education, and equality.[16] Additionally, UNICEF has taken action to tackle many of the severe issues surrounding children's housing insecurity. Various programs have helped refugee children receive protection from different countries, created partnerships with governments to protect those who do not have adequate shelters and aided orphans by helping

improve and train related institutions that deal with children's housing rights.[17] UNICEF also encourages governments to work alongside schools to protect children who have had their education interrupted, establishing methods for reintegration.[18] However, many more solutions and actions are needed to ensure that children have a safe place to grow up, both in schools and caring homes.[19] Governments should prioritize helping children reach their full potential by implementing new actions and programs to address housing insecurity and provide them with necessary opportunities.

History and Description of the Issue

Physical Health Effects

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes children's rights to enjoy the highest health standard and access to healthcare services.[20] Children require different needs and special care to grow and develop through the stages of life; a positive childhood can impact their lives in adulthood and beyond. Protecting children's health and ensuring access to healthcare is essential, alongside having a safe place to live.

Infants born in a period of unstable housing can have low birthweight, respiratory problems, fever, and other health issues that result in extended stays in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and multiple hospital visits.[21] Unstable housing has these direct effects on children's health as well as indirect ones by exposing them to abuse or neglect from the parents or family. Many of these health impacts are caused by

11   Amy Clair, "Housing: an Under-Explored Influence on Children's Well-Being and Becoming," *Child Ind Res* 12, 609-626 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-018-9550-7.
12   "Children in alternative care," UNICEF, last updated June 14, 2021, https://www.unicef.org/protection/children-in-alternative-care.
13   Melissa Ford Shah, Chris Albrecht, and Barbara Felver, "The Housing Status and Well-Being of Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Washington State," *Washington State Department of Social and Health Services* 11, 195 (September 2013): 1-8, https://aisp.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/research-11-195.pdf.
14   Ford Shah, "The Housing Status and Well-Being of Youth," 1-8. https://aisp.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/research-11-195.pdf.
15   "Migrant and displaced children," UNICEF, accessed August 30, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/migrant-refugee-internally-displaced-children.
16   "What are the Sustainable Development Goals?" UNDP, accessed August 24, 2022, https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals.
17   "Small group homes, are not just a place to live, they give children a sense of love and belonging," UNICEF, August 8, 2018, https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/stories/small-group-homes-are-not-just-place-live-they-give-children-sense-love-and-belonging.
18   Thomas Hammarber, "A School for Children with Rights: The significance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child for modern education policy," *Innocenti Lectures* no. 2 (1998), https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/19-a-school-for-children-with-rights-the-significance-of-the-united-nations-convention.html.
19   Hammarber, "A School for Children with Rights."
20   "Children and Health," OHCHR, accessed August 17 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/children/children-and-health.
21   Robin Clark, et al., "Infants Exposed to Homelessness: Health, Health Care Use, And Health Spending From Birth To Age Six," *Health Affairs* 38, no. 5 (May 2019): 721-728, https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.00090.

A child receiving a health check.
Credit: Save the Children

exposure to contaminated water or polluted streets through poor living standards. Exposure significantly impacts children's development and can increase the risk of various diseases, respiratory issues, and malnutrition.[22] Health conditions often diagnosed in children who face housing insecurity or homelessness include respiratory infections, fever, allergic reactions, nutritional disorders, hormone imbalances, and metabolic issues. They may also develop asthma.[23] If these issues are not cared for, they can impact children for the rest of their lives.

Housing conditions refer to the safety and quality of a house's physical characteristics that can affect or benefit the health of its occupants. Moving homes multiple times is the most common indicator associated with negative health effects.[24] Important housing factors such as quality, location, affordability, and appropriateness must be considered when analyzing the effects on health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the living conditions of children are a central determinant of their health. In addition, the WHO

places childhood as a critical period in the human life cycle and suggests that environmental exposure during this stage is likely to be carried into adulthood.[25] A study in Australia showed that children's health was directly related to the number of housing moves they experienced. Researchers found that higher residential instability was associated significantly with negative health impacts on young children.[26] The study also interpreted that children with low initial health were more vulnerable to insecurity and uncertainty in their place of residence. The inability to adequately address health needs resulted in displacement from residential facilities, further affecting both physical and mental well-being.[27]

It is imperative to establish that children's vulnerability is tied to their lack of autonomy regarding housing, education, and health. Parents are responsible for providing the best for their children since their choices directly affect the child's future. Children may become neglected when parents must spend significant amounts of time working to earn enough income to cover various household and living costs.[28] Parents

22 Clark, "Infants Exposed to Homelessness," 721-728.
23 Clark, "Infants Exposed to Homelessness," 721-728.
24 Kiana D Bess, Alison L Miller, and Roshanak Mehdipanah, "The effects of housing insecurity on children's health: a scoping review," *Health Promotion International,* daac006 (February 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daac006.
25 Emma Baker, et al., "How Does Household Residential Instability Influence Child Health Outcomes? A Quantile Analysis," *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 16, no. 21 (October 2019), https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16214189.
26 Baker, "How Does Household Residential Instability Influence Child Health Outcomes?"
27 Baker, "How Does Household Residential Instability Influence Child Health Outcomes?"
28 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, "Parenting Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices," in *Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8*, (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, November 2016), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/

may struggle with spending quality time with their children, neglecting their children's needs and impairing their trust and understanding. Although this may not be a deliberate decision made by the parents, the overall health of their children may be negatively impacted.[29]

Housing instability is also commonly associated with food insecurity, defined as difficulty accessing enough food for a healthy lifestyle.[30] Many studies have shown a link between food insecurity and teen anxiety and depression. The US organization Feeding America notes that over half of its clients must decide between paying for housing or food, revealing the struggle many families face in caring for their children.[31] Although these are two basic needs for life, people worldwide face this difficult decision daily. In the US, Household Food Insecurity (HFI) was found in families with overcrowding and multiple moves.[32] Child Food Insecurity (CFI) had a rate of 7 percent in secure housing families but doubled for children living in crowded residents and experiencing multiple moves. Additionally, caregivers of these children reported poor health and low weight for the children's age. Children facing HFI experience increased hospitalization risks, poor health, developmental delays, anemia, and depression symptoms.[33]

In Europe, over 50 million people face the burden of housing costs, and roughly 700,000 people sleep in the streets at night. Members of the European Parliament advocated for the creation of a Child Guarantee that would consider access to decent housing as a basis for a better future.[34] This program has different areas of strategy, such as giving children participation in political and democratic life, socio-economic inclusion, health, and education, combating violence, and ensuring child protection and justice.[35] Child Guarantee believes in breaking

the cycle that children face with poverty and social exclusion, which affects their school performance and health. Many of these children risk of dropping out of school, followed by long-term unemployment and poverty.[36] The Child Guarantee believes that member states of the European Union should guarantee free and effective access to early education, after-school activities, healthy meals in schools, healthcare, healthy nutrition, and housing.[37] This effort hopes to promote and protect a better future for all children across Europe.

All socio-economic groups are affected by housing insecurity, but low-income households are the most significantly impacted. Low-income households often use a larger percentage of their income to pay for housing, which reduces their access to other necessary resources such as food, medical care, and transportation.[38] However, most of these issues can be addressed through public policies. Governments and community investment can help expand the supply of affordable housing and increase funds for assistance programs.[39] Policies that promote young children's health should be a priority worldwide. Nevertheless, since housing insecurity is a multi-factor issue, it should be considered that healthcare alone will not solve all of the health problems that infants and children face. Therefore, public policies should cover more than this fundamental human right and focus on housing insecurity's root cause.

Children's Mental Health

The WHO considers childhood and adolescence "critical stages of life for mental health" because these are times when growth and development occur in the brain.[40] Different factors impact youth's risk of mental illness, such as negative

books/NBK402020/.
29   National Academies of Sciences, "Parenting Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices."
30   Cherine Hatem, et al., "Food insecurity and housing instability during early childhood as predictors of adolescent mental health," *Journal of Family Psychology* 34, no. 6 (September 2020): 721-730, https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000651.
31   Hatem, "Food insecurity and housing instability," 721-730.
32   Becker Cutts, "US Housing Insecurity and the Health of Very Young Children," 1508-1514.
33   Becker Cutts, "US Housing Insecurity and the Health of Very Young Children," 1508-1514.
34   Manuel Pizarro, "Affordable and Sustainable Housing must become a priority of Europe's Recovery Plan," Manuel Pizarro, October 14, 2020, https://manuelpizarro.pt/2020/10/14/affordable-and-sustainable-housing-recovery-plan/.
35   "The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee," European Commission, accessed August 24, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en.
36   European Commission, "The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee."
37   European Commission, "The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee."
38   Becker Cutts, "US Housing Insecurity and the Health of Very Young Children," 1508-1514.
39   Becker Cutts, "US Housing Insecurity and the Health of Very Young Children," 1508-1514.
40   "Improving the mental and brain health of children and adolescents," WHO, accessed August 30, 2022, https://www.who.int/activities/improving-the-mental-and-brain-health-of-children-and-adolescents.

home experiences, exposure to violence, parent's or caregiver's mental health, bullying, and poverty. WHO also states that if mental health and psychosocial development for children and teens are not addressed, there could be an extension to adulthood that will limit their opportunities to lead fulfilling lives.[41]

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, one in five Canadian children is affected by poor mental health. This equates to over 1.2 million children across the country; however, less than 20 percent of these children receive adequate treatment.[42] Many of these children face housing insecurity, with 40–70 percent of homeless youth struggling with mental health issues. These children experience a range of emotional impacts that may go unnoticed or untreated, which is exacerbated by the displacement caused by homelessness.[43] Their mental illness may worsen as they struggle to find places to live, and programs may overlook this significant effect of housing insecurity.

Negative experiences during times of housing insecurity can increase the likelihood of developing mental illness. Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health disorders that manifest during childhood and adolescence.[44] The earlier children are exposed to risk factors, the higher the chance of having long-term health consequences. Facing adverse experiences before age five shows a prediction of anxiety disorders in adolescence at age 15, as well as depression. Early exposure to housing insecurity may be a mental health contributor to teens' risk of dropping out of school and substance use.[45] Other manifestations of mental health struggles include disregard for authority or instructions, socially disruptive behaviors, difficulty sleeping or bed-wetting, and mood swings.[46] These events may lead children

to be labeled as "deviant" and isolated as "different" from their peers, impacting their self-esteem and further worsening their mental health.[47]

The Life Course Health Development (LCHD) theory explains how early experiences affect future health patterns and the increased risk of developing diseases later in life. This focus shows the need to see and treat health development as a long-term investment.[48] Highlighting the investment opportunity of early childhood, this framework offers evidence of how the elderly's health is connected to their health during youth. Promoting positive health from the beginning of life improves well-being throughout one's life and reduces the cost of treatment by addressing the struggles earlier in life.[49]

In 2021, a UNICEF report in Europe found that every day, three adolescent lives are lost due to mental health struggles. Almost 20 percent of boys and 16 percent of girls between 15–19 suffer from mental illness, with depression and anxiety accounting for over half of these cases.[50] These numbers are much higher in other areas of the world where housing insecurity and related issues occur with increased frequency. Funding for these issues is essential to protecting the mental well-being of children. The creation of prevention programs is imperative for treating this issue by spreading awareness and creating resources for children struggling with mental illness.[51] Additionally, governments should prioritize programs for mental health and psychological support for children to address these issues earlier in life. For example, schools serve as possible locations for implementing programs such as counseling services, teacher training, and other resources for supporting children's mental health.[52] Policies should keep in mind accessibility when considering mental health resources for children, especially those living in housing insecurity.

41 WHO, "Improving the mental and brain health of children and adolescents."
42 Tanya Gulliver Garcia, *Child & Family Homelessness: A Determinant of Children's Mental Health* (Toronto: Raising the Roof, 2016), 1-58, https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/CMH%20Supplement.pdf.
43 Gulliver Garcia, *Child & Family Homelessness.*
44 Hatem, "Food insecurity and housing instability," 721-730.
45 Hatem, "Food insecurity and housing instability," 721-730.
46 Gulliver Garcia, *Child & Family Homelessness.*
47 Gulliver Garcia, *Child & Family Homelessness.*
48 Neal Halfon and Miles Hochstein, "Life Course Health Development: An integrated framework for developing Health, Policy and Research," *Milbank Q* 80, no. 3 (June 2002): 433-479, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.00019.
49 Halfon, "Life Course Health Development," 433-479.
50 Geert Cappelaere, "The Mental Health Burden Affecting Europe's Children," UNICEF, October 4, 2021, https://www.unicef.org/eu/stories/mental-health-burden-affecting-europes-children.
51 Cappelaere, "The Mental Health Burden."
52 Cappelaere, "The Mental Health Burden."

Access to Education

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that every child has a right to education. Education plays a key role in a child's development and teaches valuable personal and life skills.[53] Unfortunately, many children across the world cannot access education, especially those living in economic hardship, infrastructure instability, and conflict zones experiencing housing insecurity.[54] This directly impacts literacy levels and children's availability to pursue educational opportunities and achievements, as families may have to make certain adjustments to income spending that do not include school. These children sacrifice educational and enrichment opportunities for places to live but lose the benefits of school learning.[55] Housing stability is important for providing a safe environment and adequate study space and can improve academic outcomes where education is prioritized.[56]

Housing insecurity undermines children's education and can lead to increased absences. Due to multiple moves or homelessness, children may be designated as "chronically absent" if their absence rate exceeds 10 percent of the school year.[57] Chronic absences can negatively affect children's test scores and learning retention. Additionally, these children have higher rates of repeating a grade and dropping out of school. Ultimately, these can cause many challenges for their futures and directly impact their self-esteem.[58] Children facing homelessness are twice as likely to be chronically absent than the rest of the overall student population. Data suggests that completion rates among housing-insecure children are remarkably low. This inhibits their cognitive development and results in poor academic performance, which could be negated through affordable housing and easier access to education.[59]

Parental income is one of the strongest factors affecting children's school performance and higher education completion. Children from low-income families often test lower in math and reading grades compared to their wealthier peers.[60] The socioeconomic status of the school also directly

53   Hammarber, "A School for Children with Rights."
54   "Education," UNICEF, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/education.
55   "The role of housing in educational opportunities," Habitat for Humanity, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.habitat.org/our-work/impact/role-of-housing-educational-opportunities.
56   "The role of housing in educational opportunities."
57   Jonathan Todres and Lauren Meeren, "Confronting Housing Insecurity-A Key to Getting Kids Back to School," *JAMA Pediatrics* 175, no. 9 (June 2021): 889-890, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.1085.
58   Todres "Confronting Housing Insecurity," 889-890.
59   Meredith Fergus, et al, *The Impact of Housing Insecurity on Educational Outcomes* (Minnesota: Office for Higher Education, December 2019), 1-6, https://www.ohe.state.mn.us/pdf/Impact_Housing_Insecurity_&_Educational_Outcomes.pdf.
60   *The Impact of Housing Insecurity on Educational Outcomes.*

A child receiving education.
Credit: UNICEF

impacts a child's ability to perform well academically. In addition to housing insecurity, children enrolled in schools with limited resources may not receive the necessary accommodations for their education.[61] Low-performing school districts often do not receive the funding for these programs, negatively impacting their students and communities.

Even though housing is not typically within a school's authority, schools should not ignore the issue for the sake of their students. Partnership between education officials and agencies to lower the impact of children facing housing insecurity should be a priority. The relationship between stable, affordable housing and high academic achievement should be recognized, and efforts should be made to improve trajectories for students from low-income families.[62] It is imperative to understand that the best way to support children's education performance is not the same for all households and children, and programs should reflect the needs of their communities.

Housing safety and affordability play a huge role in children's education and academic performance. It helps increase their opportunities for success, as the housing environment can complement educators' efforts and contribute to students' achievement. Affordable housing helps promote academic success for children by offering stability for families and better learning environments for children.[63]

Homelessness

While "homelessness" has no general definition, it encompasses problems involving a lack of education, difficulty accessing healthcare, and unemployment. It also represents inequality and significant social exclusion.[64] Homelessness is a problem that affects people globally, regardless of economic, social, or cultural backgrounds. However, in the case of developing countries, poverty is the main driver of this issue. Approximately 150 million children live on the street globally due to urbanization, abuse, poverty, and addiction.[65]

Homeless children fall into two categories: children and youth in homeless families and unaccompanied youth. Although these categories are distinguished by whether the child lives alone or with families, all homeless children in these groups lack a fixed and adequate nighttime residence and living space.[66] Another related issue is hidden homelessness, where children may switch between staying with family, friends, unstable housing, or other alternative residencies.[67] These children may live in "slums," which Habitat for Humanity defines as unsafe or unhealthy residences with limited access to basic services such as water, electricity, and transportation.[68] Although these children are not living on the street, they are still in vulnerable conditions.[69] The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)'s data shows that around 1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing conditions. Although there has been significant progress in addressing homelessness, statistics show that its prevalence has increased in the past decade.[70]

Measuring the homeless population, especially the number of homeless children, is a real challenge. There is no global data on the number of homeless children, as shelter data usually estimate homeless persons with no differentiation by age.[71] In the US, a 2018 study estimated 501,100 people in families with children using an emergency shelter or a transitional housing program and 23,624,351 families with children facing housing insecurity.[72] Many of these families were single parents with

61 *The Impact of Housing Insecurity on Educational Outcomes.*
62 Maya Brennan, Patrick Reed, and Lisa A. Sturtevant, *The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Education: A Research Summary* (Washington: Center for Housing Policy, November 2014), https://nhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Impacts-of-Affordable-Housing-on-Education-1.pdf.
63 Brennan, *The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Education: A Research Summary.*
64 UN General Assembly, "Affordable Housing, Inclusive Economic Policies Key to Ending Homelessness, Speakers Say as Social Development Commission Begins Annual Session," SOC/4884, February 10, 2020, https://press.un.org/en/2020/soc4884.doc.htm.
65 "Street Children Worldwide," Compass Children's Charity, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.compasschildrenscharity.org.uk/about-us/street-children-worldwide/.
66 Yumiko Aratani, *Homeless Children and Youth: Causes and Consequences* (New York City: National Center for Children in Poverty, September 2009), https://www.nccp.org/publication/homeless-children-and-youth-causes-and-consequences/.
67 Crisis UK, "Types of Homelessness."
68 "What is a slum?" Habitat for Humanity Great Britain, accessed August 16, 2022, https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/what-we-do/slum-rehabilitation/what-is-a-slum/.
69 Crisis UK, "Types of Homelessness."
70 SOC/4884.
71 Melissa Briggs, et al., "Providing Care for Children and Adolescents Facing Homelessness and Housing Insecurity," *American Academy of Pediatrics* 131, no. 6 (June 2013): 1206-1210, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-0645.
72 Meghan Henry, Anna Mahathey, and Meghan Takashima, *The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress* (Washington,

one or two children. Additionally, over 113,000 youth lived unaccompanied in these emergency shelters.[73] Even though the global number cannot be measured accurately, it is evident that the number of homeless children has increased in recent years.[74] The most recent data in Europe shows that countries underreport the actual number of homeless people. In 2020, Russia claimed to have 64,000 homeless people when the actual number was around 5 million.[75] Countries such as Germany and Slovakia have the largest population of homeless per 10,000 people, possibly due to the increase of refugees and migrants entering the countries.[76] These are examples of why measuring the number of homeless children is difficult.

In 2013, European countries discussed ways to prevent youth homelessness, including a practical model supporting access to permanent housing. The model is called Housing First. This model works in three different methods: Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Individual Case Management (ICM), and Critical Time Intervention (CTI).[77] The ACT focuses on supporting needs such as treatment for severe addiction and mental health problems. The ICM gives practical and social support to clients, and the CTI gives support for nine months which is considered a critical time for action.[78] In September 2021, the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) published a study examining the healthcare needs of homeless children. Their data showed that in some cases, homeless youth might be urged to overcome practical issues, personal perceptions of healthcare, institutional barriers, perceived stigma, and judgment when trying to access this service.[79] EPIC works alongside the European Child Guarantee to ensure that children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe have access to basic rights such as

healthcare, education, nutrition, and housing.[80]

Homelessness among young people is on the rise and can often go unnoticed. Accessible housing should be a significant priority for governments worldwide since it can help prevent homelessness and the social and economic issues that stem from it. Promotion and awareness of the situation can also show benefits to help children and youth receive support. This will help them build better opportunities for their future and get back the fundamental right of a house and roof over their heads to be within a safe space to develop and live their lives in the best way possible and humanly appropriate.

Orphanages and Foster Care

UNICEF believes every child has the right to grow up in a supportive family environment. However, an estimated 2.7 million children live in residential care, a transitional program where a child progresses from foster care to reunification with their family of origin or independent living. It is often based on locations where trained employees can care for children.[81] Children may have to face separation from their parents and be placed in alternative care for different reasons, such as armed conflict, natural disasters, migration, discrimination, government policies, or the loss of a parent.[82]

An orphan, according to UNICEF, is a child who has lost either one or both parents. As of 2005, there were 132 million children left orphaned in Asia, Latin America, and the sub-Saharan region of Africa.[83] This number includes those left with a single parent. In the same year, 13 million youths lost both parents. Due to this, the need for a further definition of "single orphan" and "double orphan" was established. The

D.C.:The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, September 2020): 55-74, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2018-AHAR-Part-2.pdf.
73 Henry, *The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report,* 55-74.
74 Briggs, "Providing Care for Children and Adolescents."
75 "Homelessness in Europe," Landgeist, August 24, 2021, https://landgeist.com/2021/08/24/homelessness-in-europe/.
76 Landgeist, "Homelessness in Europe."
77 "Peer Review in Denmark: Sustainable ways of preventing homelessness," European Commission, November 22, 2013, https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=1884&furtherNews=yes.
78 "European Commission, Peer Review in Denmark."
79 "EPIC publishes research note exploring access to healthcare services for homeless children and young people," European Commission, September 14 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&newsId=10071.
80 "European Child Guarantee," European Commission, accessed August 16, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en.
81 "Supporting young people to participate in community," Uniting Care, accessed August 17, 2022, https://www.unitingcareqld.com.au/services-and-support/counselling-and-wellbeing/youth-support/residential-care.
82 "Children in alternative care."
83 "Orphan Statistics Explained," The Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, last modified February 23, 2011, https://www.brandeis.edu/investigate/adoption/orphan-statistics.html.

slight difference in terminology may have further implications for children's policies and support conditions.[84] With no parents or guardians, double orphans become the head of their households. Often, this means that double orphans, particularly those with siblings, are forced to end their educational careers and enter the workforce prematurely.[85] Orphanages or other institutions of alternative care can be harmful to children since they may experience forced cohabitation and routines that are not tailored to their personal and individual needs. They are also deprived of making choices, isolated from their families and communities, and are more likely to be exposed to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. [86]

Other than the reasons previously stated for orphaned children, the global HIV epidemic has taken a toll on children worldwide. Until a few years ago, the report of orphaned children due to the loss of one or both parents was an estimated 17 million, many of which are inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa.[87] Additionally, around 3.4 million youth under 15 are struggling with HIV themselves. Programs and policies, such as the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) of 2003, have provided school funding and technical support to protect and care for orphaned affected children.[88] However, these efforts are not enough to raise the standard of living for these children.

Foster care or out-of-home care is a temporary service provided for children unable to live with their own families due to different reasons such as unsafe conditions, abuse, neglect, or parents' inability to care for them.[89] There is often an agency involved that has been made aware of the children's situation, and they take care of placing them in the system to connect them to a new family.[90] Alternatively, residential care is a common solution for orphans in Eastern Europe. The estimated number in this area is 7.3 million children and youth, while there is a smaller challenge with residential care in Western Europe. Nevertheless, the number of children in foster care or at risk of going into the system is quite significant in Western Europe. Overall, Europe is the continent that has the highest number of children living away from their families

84   The Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, "Orphan Statistics Explained."
85   The Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, "Orphan Statistics Explained."
86   The Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, "Children in alternative care."
87   USAID, *Orphans and Vulnerable Children Affected by HIV and AIDS* (New York: UNICEF Global Development Commons, May 2020), https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/orphans-and-vulnerable-children-affected-hiv-and-aids.
88   USAID, *Orphans and Vulnerable Children Affected by HIV and AIDS*.
89   "Foster Care," Child Welfare Information Gateway, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/foster-care/.
90   "Foster Care Explained: What It Is, How It Works and How It Can Be Improved," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, last modified May 20, 2022, https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-foster-care.

Children looking through a box of donated supplies and activities.

Credit: UNICEF Ukraine

globally.[91] In 2008, Belarus had about 25,000 orphans due to the global economic crisis during that same year. Romania has around 100,000 orphans living in child protective services, which is increasing daily. Exacerbated by the recent conflict, Ukraine has made great efforts to move towards foster care and adoption. In 2014, the United Kingdom launched the "Home for Good" charity which placed 9,000 foster carers in urgent need and 6,000 children waiting for adoption.[92]

Studies show that children and youth in alternative care have significant developmental, behavioral, and emotional issues. These issues can later become emotional and behavioral disorders due to the lack of mental health screening for children entering out-of-home care. Usually, youth in foster care may have traumatic family histories and life experiences, concerns that, if not addressed and reviewed on time, may turn into more significant problems that may affect their mental and social well-being.[93]

The foster care system in the US was established to provide children with a permanent situation for some time with their own family or an adoptive one. In countries with similar systems, children without housing receive immediate benefits.[94] While most foster care children end up permanently placed, around 7 percent exit the system to get emancipated. Although it may seem like a small percentage, it refers to over 2.7 million children in the foster care system worldwide.[95] Emancipation ends the legal authority a parent has over a child under 18, leaving many youths transitioning to an early adulthood without a home or support system. These individuals often struggle to integrate into society due to a lack of support and traumatic experiences, which they often navigate alone.[96]

While entering the foster care system can benefit some, the problem with this alternative care is that youth "age out" of the system at age 18. This often leaves them homeless again and continually looking for places to stay.[97] In the US state of Washington, approximately 35 percent of children in foster care experienced homelessness or housing instability the first year they aged the system out.[98] The number of children aging out of the system and at-risk youth becoming homeless is around 25,000–30,000 yearly in the US.[99]

Although efforts have been made to make alternative care a great solution for orphaned children or those living in a street situation, it is evident that there is no single action to address all individual cases. Each child faces individual needs that, if not addressed correctly, will create issues that will remain with them for a very long time.[100] Foster youth can benefit from information and support in finding stable housing during their transition to independence or adulthood. Effective solutions should raise awareness and ensure institutions follow certain guidelines to raise the standards for children's care.[101] UNICEF has investigated the development of quality foster parenthood for several years now. They use expert training in the social welfare system to help repair deficiencies and challenges while providing quality foster care. There have been national campaigns with "Every Child Needs a Family" to raise awareness of how important it is to grow up in a family, encourage families to enter the system and give children without adequate parental care a place to stay.[102]

Foster care helps families become a support system that is dynamic and beneficial for children waiting to be reunited with their birth parents. It also gives children somewhere safe and caring to grow up in. In addition, foster care makes adoption affordable for many families, helping build a sustainable system that will be useful for both children and foster families in general, creating better opportunities and

91   "Europe," World Without Orphans, accessed August 20, 2022, https://worldwithoutorphans.org/about/regional-teams/europe.
92   World Without Orphans, "Europe."
93   Peter J. Pecora, et al., "Mental Health Services for Children Placed in Foster Care: An Overview of Current Challenges," *Child Welfare* 88, no. 1 (March 2009): 5-26, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3061347/.
94   Allan Broslawsky, *Foster Youth and Homelessness* (Los Angeles: Homelessness Policy Research Institute, 2021), https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Foster-Youth-and-Homelessness-final-1.pdf.
95   "What Is Emancipation?" Government of Canada, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/cab3233.pdf.
96   Government of Canada, "What Is Emancipation?"
97   Ford Shah, "The Housing Status and Well-Being of Youth," 1-8.
98   Ford Shah, "The Housing Status and Well-Being of Youth," 1-8.
99   Amy Dworsky, Laura Napolitano, and Mark Courtney, "Homelessness During the Transition From Foster Care to Adulthood," *Am J Public Health* 103, no. 2 (December 2013): 318-323, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3969135/.
100   Dworsky, "Homelessness During the Transition From Foster Care to Adulthood."
101   "Foster Parenting," UNICEF, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/croatia/en/foster-parenting.
102   UNICEF, "Foster Parenting."

chances for children to grow up in better environments and combat housing insecurity as a whole. [103]

Moving Frequently and Overcrowding

For families with children, residential mobility is widespread. Residential mobility, also known as intra-urban migration, is mainly understood as a household's or individual's means to adjust housing circumstances and is related to advancement during a housing career.[104] This process affects not only people's lives but neighborhoods as well. If done excessively, it can become a challenge for community-change initiatives.[105] On the other hand, it can represent instability in low-income households and problems with landlords.[106] This leads to an association alongside social disadvantage, which may include poverty, employment instability, and family separation. Many studies show that moving frequently may be related to children's behavior and can cause aggression, anxiety, and other issues. [107]

Young children in the age between birth and preschool who have to move three or more times before preschool face the most severe negative consequences to their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development. Those in elementary school score lower on reading and math tests than children from families with stable homes. This often worsens as these children advance through upper levels of education. Teens may develop social and behavioral challenges that impact academic achievement and educational attainment.[108]

Frequently moving is linked with poor behavioral adjustment and emotional and social adaptation. This action disrupts relationships and gives greater exposure to adverse environments, many of which can be hard to adapt to due to air pollution, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene, chemicals and waste, radiation, and climate change.[109] These factors can make living conditions harder and riskier, in addition to difficulty adapting to new friend groups and social rules. Relocating to other accommodations, in some cases, implies moving away from family members, peers, friends, neighbors, and individuals who have close bonds with the children. In some cases, youth, especially teens, "couch-surf," which is the act of staying for a short period in different people's homes to use improvised sleeping arrangements.[110] A study conducted in the United States showed that children facing housing instability and frequent mobility, especially those who moved more than twice in 12 months, have cognitive deficits. However, cognitive performance can also rebound since families can stabilize and adapt to new environments. This evidence suggests that housing mobility and stability depend on moving timings. The study also showed that Black Americans, low-income families, child welfare services receivers, and unstable families were the populations most at risk of moving. [111]

According to a French study of 15-year-old teenagers, sharing a living space can cause problems due to excessive interactions, stimulations, and demands from people living in that same space and the lack of intimacy or chance of being alone in this situation.[112] People living in overcrowded houses face different living conditions that may negatively affect their overall development, health, and well-being. Sociological studies have shown a correlation between the number of people living in a room/space and the individual's health. Medical evidence has shown that people living in these conditions are often

103 "5 Incredible Benefits of Foster Care," TFI Family Services, August 24, 2021, https://tfifamily.org/5-incredible-benefits-of-foster-care/.
104 Si-Ming Li, *Residential Mobility*, (Loughborough: International Encyclopedia of Geography, March 2017), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0089.
105 Claudia Coulton, Brett Theodos, and Margery A. Turner, "Residential Mobility and Neighborhood Change: Real Neighborhoods Under the Microscope," *Cityscape* 14, no. 3 (November 2012), https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/cityscpe/vol14num3/Cityscape_Nov2012_res_mobility_neigh.pdf.
106 Coulton, "Residential Mobility and Neighborhood Change."
107 Alice Rumbold, et al., "The effects of house moves during early childhood on child mental health at age 9 years," *BMC Public Health* 12, no. 583 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-583.
108 *How does housing affect children's education?*
109 Leslie Edwards, et al., "Health effects in people relocating between environments of differing ambient air pollution concentrations: A literature review," *Environmental Pollution* 292, no. A (January 2022), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2021.118314.
110 "Children's environmental health," WHO, accessed August 21, 2022, https://www.who.int/health-topics/children-environmental-health#tab=tab_1.
111 Patrick Fowler, et al., "Housing Mobility and Cognitive Development: Change in Verbal and Nonverbal Abilities," *Child Abuse Neglect* 48, (October 2015): 104-118, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4593721/.
112 Dominique Goux and Eric Maurin, "The Effect of Overcrowded Housing on Children's Performance at School," *Journal of Public Economics* 89, no. 5-6 (June 2005): 797-819, http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/fichiers/enseig/ecoineg/articl/GouxMaurin2001.pdf.

sicker than others, especially from respiratory insufficiency and pulmonary diseases. In addition, people growing up in overcrowded spaces have a shorter lifespan.[113]

Living in an overcrowded space is often a stress inducer that can lead to anxiety. This is because the spaces tend to feel small with more individuals present, which affects quiet time and breaks that individuals need for their general development.[114] In particular, children need a space to rest while they grow up, which becomes complicated in a crowded space with much noise. Children are often exposed to poor housing quality because they live in overcrowded spaces. The number of children in low-income households is double that of high-income ones.[115] This is also directly linked to their education since children with low education levels are more than three times more likely to face overcrowding than those with a high education level. Children growing up in a home with at least two other children in a bedroom are more likely to be held back and drop out of school before finishing or getting a diploma than other students.[116] Overall, overcrowding is associated with higher levels of toxic stress, leading to poor academic performance and higher absence rates.

It is evident that overcrowding and frequent moving significantly affect children experiencing housing insecurity. There is an urgent need to help these vulnerable people since it is one aspect of the multifaceted topic of children's housing insecurity. Countries are responsible for working alongside schools to ensure that these children can access health and education while having a safe environment to live in.

Current Status

Consequences of COVID-19

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 is the disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which first emerged on December 31, 2019.[117] This first outbreak later turned into a pandemic that hit the whole world and froze many activities for an indefinite amount of time. It is essential to mention that due to economies being struck and people receiving a hit on their jobs, COVID-19 created a lot of homelessness and poverty for families and children.

As of May 2020, UNICEF and Save the Children predicted that up to 86 million children could face household poverty by that year's end. With that, the number of children living below the national poverty line in low and middle-income countries would rise to 672 million. Almost two-thirds of these children are habitants in the Sub-Saharan desert in Africa and South Asia. As for Europe and Central Asia countries, the most significant increase was predicted to be up to 44 percent across those regions. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, these countries were expected to have a 22 percent increase in child poverty.[118] Researchers at Columbia University measured poverty in recent years and found that as of January 2022, an additional 3.7 million children were facing poverty. This indicated an increase of 4.9 percent from December 2021 to January 2022.[119]

Loss of income in families implies less ability to afford basic needs such as food or water, as well as less access to healthcare or education. This places more children at risk of early marriage, violence, exploitation, and abuse. Even before the pandemic, two-thirds of children worldwide lacked access to any social protection. Because some families could not deal with financial shocks, this empowered the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty, where poverty is passed onto younger generations.[120] Social protection for children should be considered since, according to UNICEF, children face a higher risk of poverty and vulnerability; this robs children of basic needs such as nutrition, health, water, education, and most importantly, shelter.[121] Before the epidemic struck, there

113   Goux, "The Effect of Overcrowded Housing," 797-819.
114   Goux, "The Effect of Overcrowded Housing," 797-819.
115   Goux, "The Effect of Overcrowded Housing," 797-819.
116   Goux, "The Effect of Overcrowded Housing," 797-819.
117   "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)," WHO, May 13, 2021, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/.
118   "COVID-19: Number of children living in household poverty."
119   "3.7 million more children in poverty in Jan 2022 without monthly Child Tax Credit," Center on Poverty & Social Policy, February 17, 2022, https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-january-2022.
120   "COVID-19: Number of children living in household poverty."
121   "Five things you should know about social protection for children," UNICEF, September 13, 2019, https://www.unicef.org/stories/five-things-you-should-know-about-social-protection-children.

Many children have become orphans due to the death
of both parents during the pandemic.
Credit: LightFieldStudios

were 100 million girls at risk of marriage within the next decade. Since COVID-19, there are an estimated 10 million additional girls at risk of marrying young[122]

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have scaled their social protection programs. Countries such as Mongolia, Indonesia, Argentina, and South Africa increased their reach to provide families with monthly cash assistance and expanded their availability to benefit a larger number of families. It is worth noting that Georgia, Armenia, Colombia, and Peru, are countries that either created social programs or improved them. Increasing social protection and giving economic support helped families remain stable during the pandemic and gave them better opportunities to provide for their children.[123]

In 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic outbreak caused the number of children living in poverty to soar to approximately 1.2 billion in September, according to a UNICEF and Save the Children analysis. This number represents a 15 percent increase in the number of children living in poverty in low and middle-income countries, indicating more than 150 million children since the pandemic started earlier that year.[124]

This analysis also showed data on multidimensional poverty in areas such as healthcare, housing, nutrition, hygiene, and water in more than 70 countries around the globe. The results show that nearly 45 percent of children were severely deprived of at least one of these basic needs. With this available data, UNICEF recognizes that addressing child poverty goes a long way and needs to implement policies that address health, education, nutrition, water, hygiene, and housing insecurity to end this multidimensional poverty. In addition, social protection and inclusion, investing in social services, and intervention to support families are critical to lifting children out of poverty, including housing, an essential indicator of poverty.[125]

COVID-19 impacted educational inequities for families facing housing insecurity and homelessness, which also impacted children in orphanages or the foster care system. Apart from parents losing jobs and, therefore, inability to afford education, schools closing and turning into virtual spaces was not sustainable for many families. Not having a roof over their heads made acquiring Wi-Fi or new technology to sustain online schooling impossible for many families going through

122 "10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19," UNICEF, March 7, 2021, https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19.
123 "COVID-19: Number of children living in household poverty."
124 "150 million additional children plunged into poverty due to COVID-19, UNICEF, Save the Children say," UNICEF, September 16, 2020, https://www.unicef.org/press-releases.
125 UNICEF, "150 million additional children plunged into poverty."

economic hardship. This resulted in the suspension of many children's education.[126] UNICEF- alongside the World Bank, FCDO, USAID, and UNESCO- created a simulation report showing the effects COVID-19 has had on learning. The report shows that schools in middle and low-income countries like South Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean have been closed for the longest time, so learning poverty has surged to around 70 percent. The report also reiterates a call to action on governments to take RAPID action: *Reach* every child and keep them in school, *Assess* learning levels regularly, *Prioritize* teaching fundamentals, *Increase* the efficiency of instruction, and *Develop* psychosocial well-being for children.[127]

A 2021 analysis by the World Bank and UNICEF studied the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in 35 developing countries (mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa) and different households: those with many children (3 or more), those with few (1 or 2), and those with none. Initially, households with many children were more likely than those with none to suffer from income loss, food insecurity, and a lack of technology for education.[128] This analysis highlights the fact that children are affected by poverty, measured either by monetary or other multidimensional terms. Before the pandemic struck, 1 in 6 children (356 million total) lived in extreme poverty. In addition, almost 1 billion children were in multidimensional poverty in developing countries and suffering from deprivation of education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water.[129]

Initially, COVID-19 also had an impact on food insecurity, as was monitored by the High Frequency Phone Survey (HFPS) questionnaire by the World Bank and using Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s Food Insecurity Experience Scale survey. This survey showed that households with children were more likely to suffer from food insecurity. Approximately 14 percent of households without children reported an adult that went without eating for a whole day

due to a lack of money and resources. In comparison, the result was 18 percent of households with 1-2 children and 24 percent of households with many children.[130] The report shows graphs where it is evident that households with many children are more likely to be poor and report food insecurity. During the onset of the pandemic, these households were hit the hardest by food insecurity specifically.

In the analysis of the previously mentioned study, many households with multiple children received some assistance. The households that suffered most from food insecurity were the ones who received a higher percentage of social support. These assistance programs reduced the adverse impact of the crisis on households with many children. This clearly shows UNICEF and World Bank's emphasis on sustaining government programs that help children and their families recover from a crisis and return to their "normal lives."[131]

In the case of homeless children and people living on the streets, COVID-19 created a huge challenge. Firstly, they were at an increased risk of infection due to severe respiratory issues exacerbated by the lack of appropriate housing, which caused them to be exposed to the virus. In addition, it was hard for youth to access and adhere to public health regulations such as social distancing, quarantine, or isolation while in a shelter or shared space. Periodic closure of health and other necessary services puts homeless people at risk of other health conditions or substance use. In some cases, they were even at risk of intimate partner or family member violence or abuse.[132] It is important to highlight that those living in a shelter or shared space were highly exposed to the virus since its spread was exponential in these places. Detecting the illness usually took longer since they had limited access to healthcare and social services overall. [133]

According to National Geographic, an estimated 10.4 million children lost a parent or caregiver during the COVID-19

126   Megan Gallagher, Anne Griffith, and Alexa Rosenberg, "Housing Insecurity Caused by COVID-19 Doesn't Have to Exacerbate Educational Inequities," Housing Matters, September 2, 2020, https://housingmatters.urban.org/.
127   *State of Learning Poverty 2022 Update* (New York: UNICEF Media, 2022), https://www.unicef.org/media/122921/file/State%20of%20 Learning%20Poverty%202022.pdf.
128   *The Impact of COVID-19 on the welfare of households with children* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2021), https://www.unicef.org/ media/117301/file/.
129   *The Impact of COVID-19 on the welfare of households with children.*
130   *The Impact of COVID-19 on the welfare of households with children.*
131   *The Impact of COVID-19 on the welfare of households with children.*
132   Melissa Perri, Naheed Dosani, and Stephen W. Hwang, "COVID-19 and people experiencing homelessness: challenges and mitigation strategies," *CMAJ* 192, no. 26 (June 2020): 716-719, https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.200834.
133   Perri, "COVID-19 and people experiencing homelessness," 716-719.

pandemic, leaving them at higher risk of poverty, housing insecurity, death, abuse, mental health issues, and neglect. As a response, the WHO and the University of Oxford made a partnership called the "Global Reference Group on Children Affected by COVID-19," collecting relevant data on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the youth. Susan Hillis, the co-chair of the organization, believes that without adequate support, the stress children face can change their brain architecture and development, leaving them even more vulnerable to major death causes.[134]

Refugee Children

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. The 1951 Refugee Convention, defines them as individuals unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group, or political opinion.[135] UNHCR defines displaced people as a person who, as a result of authorities' actions, have been deported from or been obliged to leave their country of nationality or residence.[136]

In recent years, the Refugee Crisis has expanded across the globe, causing millions of children to be on the move. Many are driven away from home by conflict, poverty, climate change, or finding a better life. They may encounter danger, detention, or discrimination in their path. UNICEF believes that the suffering and exclusion that migrant and displaced children face are unacceptable and preventable. Children deserve protection, care, and support services to thrive.[137] In May 2022, UNICEF worked alongside Eurochild and Child Circle to create a discussion paper on guardianship, care arrangements, and custodial responsibility for unaccompanied and separated children fleeing from Ukraine. This is just an example of UNICEF's actions to provide help for children in need of a new place to live in.[138]

Refugees face an increased risk of housing insecurity and homelessness due to a combination of factors such as lacking documents, low and unstable incomes, and discrimination. They often have limited knowledge about the housing market

134 McKeever, "COVID-19's hidden, heartbreaking toll: millions of orphaned children."
135 "What is a refugee?" UNHCR, accessed August 25, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html.
136 UN General Assembly, Resolution 62(I), Refugees and Displaced Persons, A/RES/62(I)I-II, (December 15, 1046), https://www.unhcr.org/excom/bgares/.
137 "Migrant and displaced children."
138 "Protection and care of unaccompanied and separated children fleeing Ukraine," UNICEF, July 13, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/protection-and-care-unaccompanied-and-separated-children-fleeing-ukraine.

Forcibly displaced children in need of support.

Credit: UNICEF

and their rights and responsibilities, worsened by a lack of contacts, separation from social supports, and poor language skills.[139] Youth who experience homelessness may struggle even more than adults since they lack the experience of living alone and have insufficient resources to get secure housing while navigating developmental changes. Moreover, living through an experience like this in their youth may be more challenging than older refugees since family separation, trauma exposure, and adversity in developmental periods all happen while assuming adult responsibilities at an early age.[140]

By 2021, 36.5 million children were displaced from their homes worldwide. This number includes 13.7 million child refugees, asylum-seekers, and nearly 22.8 million internally displaced by conflict or violence. However, this number does not include children displaced by climate or environmental disasters. According to UNICEF, children's displaced numbers are a result of cascading crises. These crises include severe and extended conflicts like Afghanistan and country fragility in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or Yemen. In addition, all of this is exacerbated by the destructive impacts of climate change. As a consequence of natural disasters, there were 7.3 million new child displacements in 2021.[141]

The global refugee population has more than doubled in the last couple of years, and children make up almost half of the total number. More than a third of displaced children are inhabitants in Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Central Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with 3.9 million, 2.6 million, and 1.4 million, respectively. While the number of refugee children continues to grow, access to healthcare, education, and protection is falling. Half of all refugee children are enrolled in elementary school, and less than a quarter of refugee teens are in high school.[142] The fact that children make up half of the total refugee population is worrying. At an early age, children will be deprived of their needs and responsibilities, mainly regarding education,

sociability, and learning. Instead, children will focus on stress factors like finding a place to live and moving around, which as described before, can impact their health and well-being during adulthood.

At the end of 2020, the Greek government created a new law that ended the detention of unaccompanied refugee children due to the fact that they are homeless. This was made possible with the advocacy of the UNHCR. In addition, in January 2021, the Emergency Response Mechanism was introduced to offer support and a safety net for children. The majority of them are currently staying in official shelters. Greece and other countries may use "voluntary relocation" to cope with the arrival of a large number of asylum seekers and transfer them to other states. The European Union's fund supports this program through collaboration with UNHCR, different NGOs, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), IOM, and UNICEF. By the end of November 2021, more than 4480 people were relocated from Greece to 14 other European countries.[143]

UNICEF encourages member states to stick to the commitments established in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). In addition, it calls governments to take these six actions to help refugee, migrant, and displaced children: provide them with equal support, recognize them as children with rights, increase collective action to ensure effective access to essential services, protect them from discrimination and xenophobia, end harmful border management practices and immigration detention, and empower youth to unleash their talents and potential.[144]

Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations created the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve the 2030 agenda of increasing sustainability in different areas. These were adopted in

139   Bushra M. Khan, Jordan Waserman, and Mitesh Patel, "Perspectives of Refugee Youth Experiencing Homelessness: A Qualitative Study of Factors Impacting Mental Health and Resilience," *Front. Psychiatry* (June 6, 2022), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2022.917200.
140   Bushra, "Perspectives of Refugee Youth."
141   "A record 37 million children displaced worldwide: UNICEF," UN News, June 17, 2022, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120642.
142   UN News, "A record 37 million children displaced."
143   Lousie Donovan, "Lone refugee children go from homelessness in Greece to new lives across Europe," UNHCR, December 14, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2021/12/61b875a94/lone-refugee-children-homelessness-greece-new-lives-across-europe.html.
144   UN News, "A record 37 million children displaced."

Children displaying the Sustainable Development Goals.
Credit: UNDP

2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the environment and allow people to enjoy peace and prosperity so they can complete their general development and live in healthy conditions. There are 17 SDGs, and they each address different needs or areas of conflict, such as poverty, hunger, discrimination, health access, gender equality, innovation, sustainability, and institutions.[145]

One of the SDGs directly related to this issue is SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for everyone of all ages.[146] Within this goal, targets being addressed include reducing maternal mortality, preventing mortality rate for children under the age of 5, promoting mental health, substance abuse prevention, and treatment, achieving universal health coverage, reducing pollution-related illnesses and deaths, and vaccine and medical coverage. These issues are either a consequence of or part of the housing insecurity that many children and families face worldwide. This goal specifically impacts those living under unsafe housing conditions that lack basic needs due to the fact that they have few access to them.[147]

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities focuses on making cities and communities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable spaces to live in. The UN's definition of this goal is to "ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums." Living in slum households is linked directly to housing insecurity. These households are defined as people living under the same roof and lacking one or more factors, such as access to improved water, sanitation, sufficient living space, and housing durability. Another target this goal has is to provide cities with safe and inclusive green and public spaces for people to carry out daily activities. SDG 11 also tries to cover urban and regional planning to distribute living space areas proportionately and ensure that more people have a place to reside in. Finally, this goal supports least-developed countries through financial and technical assistance to build sustainable and resilient buildings.[148] This goal is being implemented in Liberia through a comprehensive urban housing program called the Cities Alliance Liberia Country Program, launched in 2016.[149]

According to Habitat for Humanity, housing is essential to

145 "What are the Sustainable Development Goals?"
146 "Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being," UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 30, 2022, https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3.
147 "Sustainable Development Goal 3," SDG Tracker, accessed August 30, 2022, https://sdg-tracker.org/good-health.
148 "Sustainable Development Goal 11," SDG Tracker, accessed August 30, 2022, https://sdg-tracker.org/cities.
149 *Housing and the Sustainable Development Goals* (Atlanta: Habitat for Humanity, 2021), https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Solid-Ground-SDG_booklet-update-2021.pdf.

Homeless children in the UK living in temporary housing.

Credit: Steve Franck

achieving many SDGs since adequate and affordable housing leads to health benefits and educational and economic opportunities. Improving housing is also a ladder out of poverty for many families. Housing is part of some goals, as mentioned before, and has a direct contribution to Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals, which focuses on promoting working between countries towards the same goal. Finally, it is indirectly linked to SDG 2: Zero Hunger and SDG 4: Quality Education. So, in general, housing directly relates to building sustainable communities and achieving better development.[150]

Bloc Analysis

Point of Division

The number of homeless people in each country or region is the main factor in determining blocs within this committee. Around the globe, every country has a portion of homeless people. During recent years, many countries have had an increase in their homeless population due to different reasons, while on the other hand, some countries have experienced a decrease. In some countries, the number of homeless people has stayed the same or shown a slight increase or decrease. These blocs are based on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s data analyzed in 2020.[151] This report was chosen since it is the most recent available resource that covers a big part of the world's population. It covers the homeless population in general, but in most countries, the number of homeless children is proportional to the number in the total population; in many countries where there is a large number of homeless people, the number of homeless children is also significant.

Large Countries with Large Homeless Populations

According to the OECD's data, as of 2020, large territories such as Germany, France, Canada, Australia, and Brazil have more than 100,000 homeless people. In the case of the United States, the number is even higher, with 565,000 people living on the streets. In 2016, 33 percent of Australia's total homeless population was in their youth, with about 38,277 young people living in homeless conditions. In Canada, between 2011 and 2016, the youth homeless rate dropped by 17 percent, even though the overall population still had more than 100,000 homeless people. In addition to homeless populations, the United States has an increased number of unsheltered families with children, which increased by 13 percent in 2020. It is worth noting that the number of households and

150   *Housing and the Sustainable Development Goals.*
151   "HC3.1. Homeless Population," OECD Affordable Housing Database, 2017, https://www.oecd.org/els/family/.

families with children in the United Kingdom remained stable from 2018 through 2020. However, homeless families with children comprised almost half of the households considered homeless in the country.[152] In this bloc, large-scale programs and improving shelters within these countries should be a priority. Children should be considered in efforts to improve the countries' status. The countries of this bloc also maintain a certain level of economic and social stability and thus have infrastructure and resources to allocate to children and families. These countries have large housing-insecure populations because of migrants and refugees settling within new borders, so this bloc should also consider caring for the specific needs of displaced peoples.

Countries with a Growing Homeless Population

In 2020, Iceland showed the biggest increase in homelessness around the world. However, moderate increases were also noted in Latvia, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Countries like Australia, Chile, and New Zealand had a slight increase in their homeless population. It is worth noting that between 2018 and 2020, Israel's homeless population almost doubled. In discussing youth homelessness specifically, in Australia, youth accounted for 33 percent of all homeless people in 2016. In 2020, there were almost 1100 homeless youth in Costa Rica. In previous years the Netherlands had reported 12,600 homeless youth. This number doubled between 2010–2018. Finally, in New Zealand, the homeless youth population increased by 44 percent (21800 individuals in total) between 2006 and 2013.[153] Actions that can help mitigate the increase in homelessness might include federal housing assistance, such as providing permanent and supportive housing. Many of these countries owe their increase to different reasons. In Iceland, for example, it is due to people losing their jobs and housing becoming too expensive to afford. In other cases, gender may also be an indicator since many women seek help in shelters when experiencing domestic abuse or sexual violence. Substance usage and addiction, especially in the

youth population, leads people to the streets and to separate from their families. Finally, mental health is a risk factor for homelessness in countries with insufficient mental healthcare systems.[154] Overall, countries of this bloc are a varied group experiencing multiple root causes of increasing homelessness. The persistent issue of housing-insecure children unites this bloc. It should consider various methods of identifying the sources of the problem as well as how to prioritize children in making solutions.

Countries with a Shrinking Homeless Population

Norway and Finland are countries that had a 40 and 39 percent decrease in 2020 in their homeless rates, respectively. Countries with a moderate decrease in their homeless population include Sweden and Slovenia. Finally, Denmark, Austria, and Poland were countries that had a slight decrease in 2020. In the same year, Japan was the country with the smallest share of homeless people around the world. In 2019, homeless youth represented 30 percent of the total population in Denmark. Between 2010 and 2018, the youth population dropped by 25 percent, and family homelessness has generally declined in Denmark and Finland. Ireland also had a decline in homeless families with children, notable because it first had a four-fold increase between 2014 and 2018.[155] In the case of these countries, many of them have adopted the Housing First model. It is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing for people and ending this cycle by pursuing personal goals and improving their quality of life.[156] In addition, national programs and organizations have helped homeless people with housing and reformed services.[157] These countries still have work to do but can unite over sharing successful solutions that have mitigated issues in their respective communities.

Committee Mission

UNICEF believes childhood is vital for children's development,

152 OECD Affordable Housing Database, "HC3.1. Homeless Population."
153 OECD Affordable Housing Database, "HC3.1. Homeless Population."
154 "Housing to Reduce Homelessness in Iceland," The Borgen Project, accessed August 30, 2022, https://borgenproject.org/homelessness-in-iceland/.
155 OECD Affordable Housing Database, "HC3.1. Homeless Population."
156 "Housing First," National Alliance to End Homelessness, March 20, 2020, https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/.
157 "Housing First in Finland," Y-SÄÄTIÖ, 2017, https://ysaatio.fi/en/housing-first-finland.

where they should be in school, playing with friends, and discovering hobbies. Therefore, children must reach their full potential during this time. When children face housing insecurity and homelessness, their childhood is jeopardized, and their deserved development is not reached.[158]

UNICEF's mandate safeguards all children's rights everywhere. It is rooted in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. It sets out universal and indivisible rights that apply to all children and the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015, which apply to every country. Around the world, UNICEF focuses on children who are either overlooked or left behind by economic and social progress. The UN General Assembly added optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including protection from involvement in armed conflicts and sexual exploitation and reporting children's rights violations directly to a Committee on the Rights of the Child. To protect children in orphanages from exploitation, abuse, violence, and other dangers, UNICEF promotes working alongside governments and organizations to keep families together by making education more accessible. It also supports legal monitoring of care institutions to prevent unnecessary child placement.[159] As for COVID-19, UNICEF delivers health supplies to children and their families and also builds water and hygiene facilities. All these efforts prevent the virus from spreading further and protect children's education along the way.[160]

Given the various impacts this issue has on children's well-being and education, and following UNICEF's mandate, it is imperative to keep working alongside governments to promote aid for children living by themselves or facing difficulties due to housing insecurity. In addition, solutions with schools and development programs should be a target to prevent children from having an interruption in basic knowledge and abilities. As housing insecurity becomes an emerging issue, there is little data available on how many people worldwide face this problem, and data on children is even more limited. However, since UNICEF believes shelter is part of fundamental human rights and needs, children should be very much considered

when tackling this issue.

158 "A right to a home is one of the most fundamental rights for a child," UNICEF, accessed August 30, 2022, https://www.unicef.ie/our-work/schools/global-issues/end-homelessness/.
159 "Volunteering in Orphanages," UNICEF, accessed August 30, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/child-protection/volunteering-orphanages.
160 "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) information centre," UNICEF, accessed August 30, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19#how-UNICEF-helping.

TOPIC B:
LITERACY EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

Introduction

Communicating is an essential part of the human experience. It allows people to express themselves and be in touch with others. To do this, literacy is key. Literacy is the ability to read and write. It can help people access information, learn new skills, and find job opportunities. This goes hand in hand with human development, making literacy a necessity. Specifically, children need to be taught how to read and write.[1]

There are many worldwide literacy education campaigns to develop advanced readers. However, a downside to these campaigns is that they focus on if a child can read or not. They do not give enough attention to how well a child can read and write. A student's literacy level is just as important as whether they are literate. Therefore it can be damaging to look at literacy as something people have or do not have. If statistics show a country's high literacy rate, governments and organizations might assume their work is done. Thus communities that need more help or financial support might not receive it.[2]

Campaigns and governments must prioritize ensuring advanced literacy in children. Basic literacy skills are incredibly beneficial, but it is only the first step. Functional literacy, when someone has the literacy skills needed for day-to-day life, is necessary to have a modern society.[3] In fact, the ability to read and understand words can be a matter of life or death. For example, literate individuals can read medical labels and follow prescribed instructions, reducing the risk of overdose and death. They can also avoid foods that they are allergic to.[4]

Literacy plays an interesting role in the modern world. Technologies like YouTube and podcasts have made information accessible to illiterate people. However, most content is still created in written form first. Creators on YouTube often read from a pre-written script. Podcast interviews are usually scripted. Therefore, finding information online is still dependent on someone's literacy level.

Literacy is also being affected by automation. Nowadays, people are constantly innovating. This has caused a rise in automation, the automatic operation of a device, which has unfortunately replaced many jobs. There needs to be a more comprehensive framework for understanding and using technological innovations. These generally require critical thinking and analysis—skills that are developed through advanced literacy. In this day and age, it is of utmost importance that literacy is taught in schools. Delegates must understand how literacy can be achieved and how it can help future generations thrive in a world of technological and written words.

History and Description of the Issue

History of Literacy

The cuneiform script was the first writing system in the world. It was created by the Sumerian civilization of Mesopotamia in 3500 BC, found in present-day Iraq.[5] Originally, cuneiform was only used to write down how many goods were bought and sold. After 500 years, it evolved into phonetic signs, which are visual representations of sounds in a spoken language. This was invented out of necessity because a new Sumerian law stated that merchants needed to write their names when they bought or sold something. This allowed the Sumerian government to collect taxes more efficiently and allowed the Sumerian civilization to prosper for more than 2,000 years.[6]

1   Jill Anderson, "Harvard EdCast: Beyond the Literacy Debate," *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, February 26, 2020, https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/20/02/harvard-edcast-beyond-the-literacy-debate.
2   Christopher Cocchiarella, "What is Functional Literacy, and Why Does Our High-Tech Society Need It?" Mindful Technics, December 30, 2018, https://mindfultechnics.com/what-is-functional-literacy/
3   Cocchiarella, "What is Functional Literacy, and Why Does Our High-Tech Society Need It?"
4   Olivia Giovetti, "6 Benefits of Literacy in the Fight Against Poverty," *Concern Worldwide*, August 27, 2020, https://www.concernusa.org/story/benefits-of-literacy-against-poverty/.
5   James Wright, "The Evolution of Writing," *Denise Schmandt-Besserat*, February 6, 2021, https://sites.utexas.edu/dsb/tokens/the-evolution-of-writing/.
6   Wright, "The Evolution of Writing."
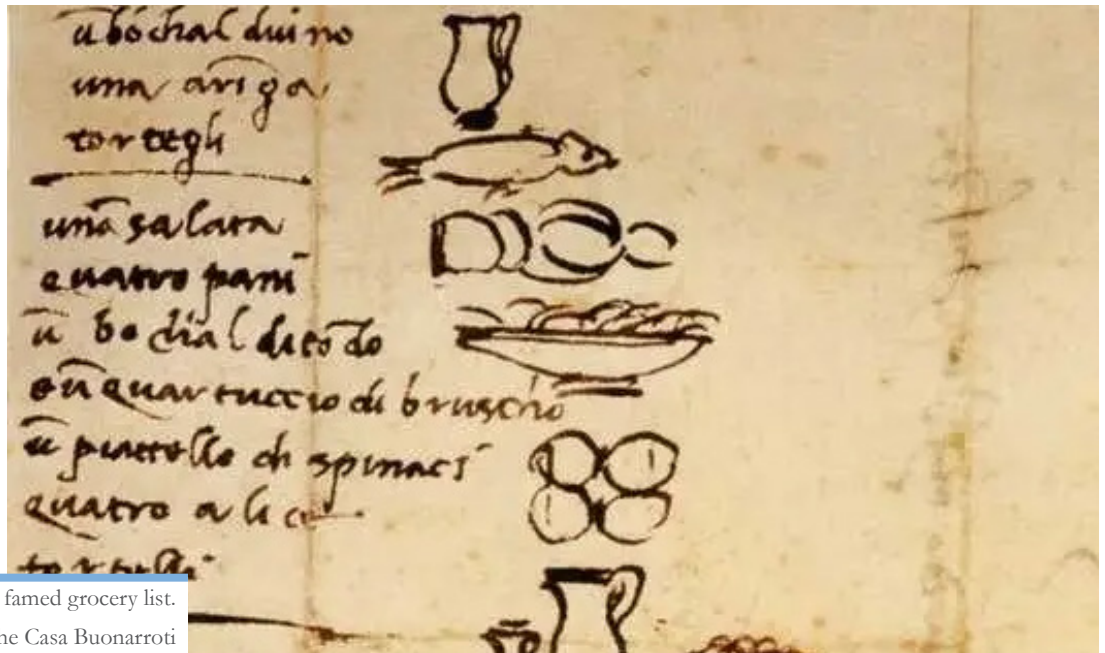
Michelangelo's famed grocery list.
Credit: The Casa Buonarroti

Writing continued to be an uncommon skill around the world for thousands of years. During the Renaissance in the 1500s, a very small percentage of people could read or write in Europe. Literacy rates across the region were below 20 percent due to a scarcity of accessible reading material.[7] The Netherlands and England experienced a literacy increase after the 1500s. By the 1650s, over 50 percent of their population were literate. The Netherlands and England experienced a divergence from the rest of Europe during the late 1500s. These two countries experienced growth in social, political, and economic development.[8] This led to literacy rates improving faster than in other European countries. There are two hypotheses for why this divergence happened. One theory states that after the invention of the printing press, book production increased and prices decreased, which made books more affordable. This inspired people to become more literate. The second hypothesis is based on the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Some people converted from Catholics to Protestants and Calvinists. These religions encouraged people to read the bible for themselves, which could have facilitated the urge to learn to read.[9]

The invention of the printing press completely changed the European publishing industry. This invention was extremely flexible, creating a multitude of new reading materials, both religious and non-religious. More than 150 million books were printed by the year 1600.[10] Before the printing press, less than 30,000 books existed in Europe.[11] This shows how impactful this invention was. By 1750, literacy rates in England were 54 percent and 85 percent in the Netherlands.[12] This is a significant improvement from 1550 when both countries had rates below 20 percent.

Throughout history, the global trend of higher literacy rates has been related to access to education. These two variables are highly related because public education teaches literacy. In school, students are taught how to read and write. They also have access to more literary works because of schools and libraries. Historically, literacy education was only given to scholars and the aristocracy before the printing press. Books

7   Wright, "The Evolution of Writing."
8   Tyrel Eskelson, "States, Institutions, and Literacy Rates in Early-Modern Western Europe," *Journal of Education and Learning* 10, no. 2 (March 3, 2021): 109-123, https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v10n2p109.
9   Eskelson, "States, Institutions, and Literacy Rates in Early-Modern Western Europe."
10   Mark Cartwright, "The Printing Revolution in Renaissance Europe," *World History Encyclopedia*, November 2, 2020, https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1632/the-printing-revolution-in-renaissance-europe/.
11   *Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication,* (University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2016), Chap. 3.1, https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_understanding-media-and-culture-an-introduction-to-mass-communication/s06-01-history-of-books.html.
12   "Literacy," Our World in Data, accessed September 26, 2022, https://ourworldindata.org/literacy.

were too expensive, so the working class could not afford or have access to them. Even today, school is still not mandatory in certain parts of the world. Because of this, many children only receive basic education.[13]

Education and literacy have historically been affected by gender, social class, and geography, which continues today. Literacy, especially in times with high educational barriers, was a gift bestowed to only a select few members of society. For instance, virtually no woman in the Middle Ages was literate, while about 10 percent of her contemporary males were.[14] Leaders of early societies, almost always male, refused to educate the non-elite because they feared doing so would threaten their wealth, status, and vested interests. While international efforts have significantly reduced the literacy gap between sexes, many women are still excluded from literacy in many regions today.

An individual's social class and geographical location—two variables often correlated—also affect literacy rates. Often the epicenters of commerce and academic activity, large towns and cities boast high literacy rates.[15] In contrast, people living in rural areas generally do not receive literacy education due to the lack of instructors and literary material available. However, exceptions to this trend must be noted. Countries in the Scandinavian and Alpine regions achieved high literacy levels through autodidactic, or self-taught, practices, despite their weak economies and rural locations. In particular, the Swedish literacy campaign was implemented through the Church at the height of the Lutheran Reformation to reinforce biblical teachings.[16] Many early educational movements were motivated by similar evangelical demands.

In addition, there exists a correlation between literacy and social contexts. With print materials being more accessible, literacy rates simultaneously increased, heightening society's level of consciousness. Collective consciousness led to periods of rational thought, like the Age of Enlightenment, and inspired religious, political, and industrial revolutions. However, while increased literacy rates have played a large role in shaping the world into what it is today, the converse is also true.

The most curious example of this was the literacy campaigns of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s. Before Mao Zedong rose to power in 1949, the literacy rate in China was around 10–15 percent.[17] The same factors that prevented higher literacy rates in earlier societies—patriarchy, poverty, elitism, and lack of resources—had limited the literacy rates of pre-1949 China. Ten years later, literacy rates rose to 57 percent, with government initiatives pushing for primary education in rural China. Yet seven years later, in 1966, the Cultural Revolution began under Mao's command. In an attempt to sanctify the ideals of Chinese communism, students, otherwise known as the Red Guards, were mobilized to eradicate remnants of traditionalism and capitalism from China. The cemetery of Confucius was destroyed, academic and political leaders were exiled or hanged, and millions of books were burned. The same government that had led one of history's greatest educational efforts had also annihilated its books, academic culture, and appreciation for literacy and tradition. The collective literacy of society, as well as its quality of it, largely depends on social contexts.[18]

Another point of contention relates to how literacy can be used in society. Despite the apparent benefits of literacy and education, imperialistic regimes have also used institutionalized education systems to oppress and indoctrinate their subjects. For example, Koreans during the Japanese colonial period were forced to complete their education in Japanese and prohibited from speaking their mother tongue. Other oppressive education systems include the American Indian boarding schools, which are similar attempts at cultural erasure. To maximize the benefits of achieving literacy for the global youth population, modern perspectives and social

13 Our World in Data, "Literacy."
14 John Simkin, "Women and Literacy," *Spartacus Educational*, September 1997, https://spartacus-educational.com/Women_and_Literacy.html.
15 Alan Rogers. *Urban Literacy: Communication, Identity and Learning in Development Contexts,* (Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education, 2005), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000139875.
16 Robert Houston, "The Growth of Literacy in Western Europe from 1500 to 1800," *Brewminate*, November 28, 2011, https://brewminate.com/the-growth-of-literacy-in-western-europe-from-1500-to-1800/.
17 Judy Heflin, "The Single Greatest Educational Effort in Human History," *Language Magazine*, https://www.languagemagazine.com/the-single-greatest-educational-effort-in-human-history/.
18 Heflin, "The Single Greatest Educational Effort in Human History."

contexts which oppose the expansion of literacy must be identified and evaluated.

As of 2020, more than 87 percent of people ages 15 and above are literate.[19] It is apparent that efforts to increase literacy throughout history have reaped benefits. Despite this, many countries still lack the right foundations to provide education, and many populations go unnoticed in literacy efforts. It is vital that the successes and failures of the past guide delegates in their own literacy solutions.

The Importance of Literacy

Studies have consistently revealed a direct correlation between literacy and lower infant mortality rates.[20] A 1999 study in Bolivia reported that parents who participated in literacy programs hosted by Save the Children, a humanitarian organization based in the United Kingdom, significantly reduced the risk of their children being malnourished or unvaccinated.[21] Literacy programs in Nepal have yielded similarly positive results. Nepalese citizens began to recognize the importance of health systems and advocated for their installment in local communities.[22] Furthermore, literacy becomes paramount during health crises like the West African Ebola outbreak and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Literate patients, able to follow the instructions of medical professionals more accurately, are more likely to survive than their illiterate counterparts. Education prevents the spread of misinformation, and educational efforts are delivered through written forms of communication. In other words, these efforts are meaningless without literacy.

Literacy also benefits the economy. According to the International Literacy Association, illiteracy costs the world USD 1.19 trillion annually.[23] This figure includes amounts lost to crime, issues regarding health and welfare, and reduced productivity and earning potential of individuals— the earning potential of individuals impacts both macro and microeconomics.

At the macroeconomic level, literacy increases government revenue. Simply put, high earners pay more taxes than low

19   "Literacy Rate, Adult Total (% of People Ages 15 and Above)," *The World Bank*, June, 2022, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS.
20   Giovetti, "6 Benefits of Literacy in the Fight Against Poverty."
21   F Gonzales, K Dearden, and W Jimenez, "Do Multi-Sectoral Development Programmes Affect Health? A Bolivian Case Study," *Health Policy Plan* 13, no. 4, December 14, 1999, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10787656/.
22   Shyam Budhathoki, et al., "The Potential of Health Literacy to Address the Health Related UN Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) in Nepal: a Rapid Review," *BMC Health Serv Res* 17, no. 1 (March 2017), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5369219/.
23   "The Cost of Illiteracy," *Literacy Worldwide*, https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/resource-documents/ila-take-action-costs.pdf.

Nusrat, a girl belonging to a homeless family, studies on a pavement in Mumbai.

Credit: Arko Datta

earners. Also, more than 190 million workers worldwide remain unemployed, with a large portion of these people being structurally unemployed—they lack the skills and qualifications demanded in the labor market. In developing countries, these skills refer to basic literacy and numeracy. By providing training, countries can tap into the available human capital and increase gross domestic product. These earnings could be reinvested into better infrastructure and education systems, creating larger pools of talented, specialized workers in future generations. However, it is important for these investments to benefit the whole population and not just a small subset of it. Otherwise, social issues like income and educational inequality will be exacerbated.[24]

At the microeconomic level, achieving basic literacy will elevate working conditions, allowing even the most unskilled manual laborers to transition into clerical work. In other words, literacy allows for social mobility. Manual labor, from housekeeping to working in mines, does not require many literacy skills. These jobs, especially in developing countries with per capita gross national income of less than USD 1,035, cannot provide decent livelihoods.[25] Candidates are immediately disqualified from better positions without basic literacy and numeracy skills. Furthermore, these skills are the gateway to advanced literacy and numeracy skills and the thousands of jobs they entail. Many jobs in growing economies require moderate to high-level literacy.

Literacy brings positive social change, like democracy, gender equality, and peace. Democracy, like other political ideologies, has had many critics throughout its history. In fact, Socrates was one of democracy's harshest critics, believing that the political system was uniquely vulnerable to a poorly-educated populace. In his view, allowing uneducated citizens to vote was the equivalent of allowing someone who knows nothing about seafaring to command a warship—the ship is likely to sink.[26] While democracy seems here to stay, its advocates should still pay heed to the fears of Socrates as they seek to implement stable, democratic governments within developing and post-colonial countries. If poorly-educated citizens pose a risk to the integrity of democracy, citizens must be educated.

Literate citizens can monitor local politics and stay informed of the issues that affect their communities. They are also more likely to participate in democratic processes, whether it is by organizing voting campaigns or reading up on the latest political article. In a world with perhaps too much, often conflicting information, critical thinking and decision-making are skills that are more important than ever. Effective education develops the ability to think critically, and literacy allows an individual to take ownership of this developmental process. Without such insights, an individual is unable to recognize, let alone confront, the issues that plague their reality: totalitarian regimes, racism, or gender inequality. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon notes: "Illiteracy weakens communities and undermines democratic processes through marginalization and exclusion. These and other impacts can combine to destabilize societies."[27]

Literacy is a non-negotiable human right. With all the personal, economic, and social benefits it entails, it is impossible to argue against the importance of achieving universal literacy. Most importantly, literacy breeds empathy—a trait that proves ever so important in today's conflict-ridden world. In this regard, it is notable that literacy could be the key to world peace.

Measuring Literacy

It is important to define clear and specific standards to measure literacy rates. Originally, literacy rates were based on a person's ability to sign their name, such as on marriage certificates. Lord Hardwick's Marriage Act in 1754 stated that married couples in England could register their marriage by checking a box or signing their names. This allowed historians to estimate the literacy rates of a population. People who checked the box were considered illiterate, while people who signed were considered literate.[28]

This method of measuring literacy was imperfect. It gave a

24 Giovetti, "6 Benefits of Literacy."
25 "Country Classification," *United Nations*, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wesp/wesp_current/2014wesp_country_classification.pdf.
26 Mike Booth, "Why Socrates Hated Democracy," *The School of Life*, November 28, 2016, https://www.theschooloflife.com/article/why-socrates-hated-democracy/.
27 Giovetti, "6 Benefits of Literacy."
28 Gretna Green, "Lord Hardwicke 1754 Marriage Act," accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.gretnagreen.com/lord-hardwicke-

general idea of literacy rates in the UK, but it was unreliable. First, literacy rates were only based on married couples. They did not account for anyone single at the time. Also, being able to sign their name did not mean they were literate. Plus, it did not measure literacy levels. A writer and a clerk would be put on the same level if they could both sign their names, which is inaccurate because the writer would have likely had a more advanced literacy level. Additionally, someone literate could have chosen to check the box, further discrediting this measurement method. Understanding the disadvantages of this method helped improve literacy surveys and their data.

New methods of measuring literacy rates were invented after the 18th century. Methods varied across countries and had different standards. For example, someone is considered literate in North Korea if they can write "Kim Jong Un" in Korean.[29] After Mao rose to power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) started a literacy campaign. This campaign defined literacy as the ability to read and write 1,500 characters for rural residents and 2,000 characters for urban residents.[30] This literacy measurement was a significant improvement from previous ones. It uses clear quantitative metrics and useful, objective measures. The CCP's literacy definition also considers the difference between the two living areas. Urban areas have more access to libraries and schools, which makes it easier to achieve literacy. On the other hand, rural areas might not have the infrastructure required to improve literacy. This means rural areas have a more challenging time achieving similar literacy levels to urban areas. Rural residents are at a disadvantage, which is why it is essential to consider these disadvantages when measuring literacy. They also impact the effectiveness of government programs.[31]

UNICEF uses a similar definition for child literacy and youth literacy. Youth literacy is the percentage of people aged 15–24

who can read and write a simple statement about their life.[32] However, this definition does not account for literacy rates of children under 15, which means this definition is inadequate. Many children's rights groups advocate for the importance of the first three years of primary education. These years give students the fundamental skills to pursue more advanced curriculums later.[33] Moreover, a child's education is significantly impacted and determined by how literate they are at the age of ten. [34]

UNICEF coined the term "learning poverty." This is when children cannot read or understand a simple text by the age of ten.[35] This still does not measure literacy correctly. Children between 10–15 are still not taken into consideration. Youth literacy and learning poverty rates do not include these five years. UNICEF's definitions also lack a clear difference between literacy and illiteracy. Testing agencies still struggle to determine how literate an individual is. UNICEF does not measure differences in literacy levels, which is why this definition of literacy must be improved.

An accurate definition of child literacy needs to include the five stages of literacy development. It also needs a quantitative metric that can measure a child's progress. The five stages are: emergent, alphabetic, word and pattern recognition, intermediate, and advanced.[36] Emergent readers are between six months to six years of age. They try to imitate the behaviors of established readers. They also pretend to read books, sing the ABCs, and scribble letters they invented. A child is considered pre-literate when they are interested in literate culture.[37]

Between six to seven, many children are novice readers. They are in the second phase of literacy development, alphabetic fluency. They can recognize individual letters and can match sounds with each letter. They can also pronounce simple words. Novice readers can trace letters but make mistakes

1754-marriage-act-a746.
29 Lee Myungchul, "North Korea Surveys Population for Illiterates, Orders Reading Classes," *Radio Free Asia*, November 25, 2020, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/illiteracy-11252020000636.html.
30 Heflin, "The Single Greatest Educational Effort in Human History."
31 Heflin, "The Single Greatest Educational Effort in Human History."
32 "Learning and Skills," *UNICEF*, June, 2022, https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/learning-and-skills/.
33 "Literacy Facts & Stats," *Reading Is Fundamental*, August 10, 2021, https://www.rif.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021/08/17/Literacy-Stats-16Aug2021.pdf.
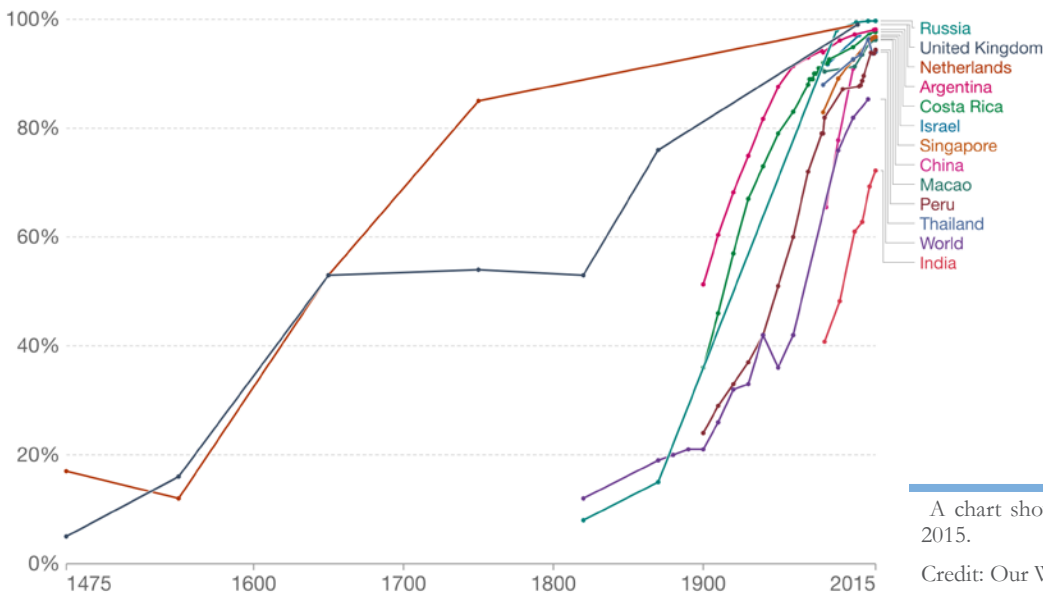34 "Learning and Skills."
35 "Learning and Skills."
36 "Literacy Development in Children," *Maryville University*, https://online.maryville.edu/blog/literacy-development-in-children/.
37 "Literacy Development in Children."

Literacy rate, 1475 to 2015

Estimates correspond to the share of the population older than 14 years that is able to read and write.

A chart showing the spread of literacy from 1475 to 2015.

Credit: Our World in Dats

without guidance. To be alphabetically fluent, a child needs to recognize most of the letters of their native language. They also need to be able to identify their sounds.[38] Countries with logographic language systems have a lot more characters than alphabet systems, which is why novice readers in those countries have different expectations.

Transitional readers are typically between the ages of seven and nine. They are in the word and pattern recognition state. They are between mechanical and conscious literacy. This means they can recognize and read a lot more words than novice readers but cannot get ideas from what they read. Transitional readers might be able to repeat the information they read, but they cannot answer questions about the text that require analysis. For example, a child might read that whales do not lay eggs and tell this to family or friends. However, they might not understand why. This is normal for their developmental stage. These readers need repetition and a lot of reading material to improve. They can break down words by syllables and can understand around 3,000 words.[39]

The next stage is intermediate readers, between nine and 15 years old. Their literacy is more advanced. They read faster and can appreciate aspects like character development. They can also write understandable paragraphs with few mistakes. Readers are considered intermediate if they can understand the written text as well as they can understand spoken words. They also internalize what they read. They might not be able to read critically.[40]

The final stage is advanced readers. They can understand how what they are reading influences their minds. Advanced readers can analyze the arguments of a text. They have more ownership over what they read. These readers can understand metaphors and symbolism.[41]

Professor Maryanne Wolf proposed the five stages of literacy development. They describe clear, age-based objectives for literacy. Wolf's literacy framework can help improve literacy rate measurement since literacy development is gradual and needs to be fostered. Progress must be tracked so children can receive the necessary support to move on to the next stage. Something to take into consideration is that every child develops differently. They might also have a developmental or physical disability that prevents them from advancing. A lack of access to resources, abusive households, or living in a conflict zone can prevent literacy improvement. Children often drop out of school because of situations like these.

38 "Literacy Development in Children."
39 "Literacy Development in Children."
40 "Literacy Development in Children."
41 "Literacy Development in Children."

Literacy rates need to be measured and controlled to help more children reach advanced literacy.

Case Study: Literacy Statistics in the United States

86 percent of all adults in the world today are literate.[42] Only 33 countries, most of which are in Africa, have literacy rates below 70 percent. However, the quality of literacy worldwide is questionable. Advanced readers are different from low-level readers because they have comprehension abilities. Instead, low-level readers are able to recognize, understand, and pronounce certain words, but they are unable to interact with written material. Some longitudinal studies in the United States of America (USA) have analyzed school literacy levels. Almost all students in the USA achieve low-level literacy by third grade. However, only a third of middle school students in the USA are advanced readers. Furthermore, 10 percent of high school seniors were less literate than the average nine-year-old.[43]

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ELCS) was done by the USA's Institute of Education Sciences. This study was conducted between 1998 and 2007. Although it is not an international study, its findings can help understand literacy development worldwide. Additionally, specific large-scale literacy assessments measure literacy levels worldwide. These include the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. Students in the USA are only slightly above the world average in these assessments.[44]

The ELCS program studies four different cohorts of students from an early to late stage of education. The birth cohort studies children born in 2001 up to kindergarten. The kindergarten cohort studies children who entered kindergarten in 1998–1999 up through their eighth-grade year. The second kindergarten cohort studies children who entered kindergarten in 2010-2011 up through fifth grade. The fourth study will follow children from the kindergarten class of 2023-2024 through their fifth-grade year.[45]

The ELCS considers a variety of indicators to measure someone's literacy level. These skills are divided into two groups: word-reading and knowledge-based competencies. Low-level readers only have word-reading skills. This includes the recognition of letters and sight words and phonetic association. These literacy skills also include reading words in context and literal inference. On the other hand, advanced readers have knowledge-based skills. Advanced readers are usually 16 years or older. They can make inferences based on context. They can also evaluate fiction, nonfiction, and complex syntax. These knowledge-based competencies take more time to develop.[46]

Studies from the birth cohort found that children who were put into regular early care and education before kindergarten scored higher on the fine motor skills and literacy assessment than those who did not have access to these resources.[47] The kindergarten class of 2010-2011 showed the important implications of teaching the English language from an early age. The kindergarten class of 1998–1999 was offered an online Algebra I class in their eighth-grade year if their school did not provide it. The promising math results proved the importance of providing accessible resources to students.[48]

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is also used in the USA. It provides data that explains how difficult it can be to develop knowledge-based competencies. The NAEP has two assessment types: the Main NAEP and the Long-Term Trend NAEP (NAEP-LTT). They focus on evaluating knowledge-based skills. The Main NAEP is a study

42   "Literacy."
43   Stephen Provasnik, Patrick Gonzales, and David Miller, "U.S. Performance across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to the Condition of Education," *National Center for Education Statistics*, August, 2009, https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009083.pdf.
44   Provasnik, Gonzales, and Miller, "U.S. Performance across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to the Condition of Education."
45   "Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies (ECLS) Program," National Center for Education Statistics, accessed September 26, 2022, https://nces.ed.gov/ecls/.
46   Provasnik, Gonzales, and Miller, "U.S. Performance across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to the Condition of Education."
47   National Center for Education Statistics, "Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies (ECLS) Program."
48   "Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies," Advancing Evidence. Improving Lives, accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.air.org/project/early-childhood-longitudinal-studies-ecls.

that evaluates someone's literacy level at a given time, while the NAEP-LTT estimates trends in literacy development.[49]

NAEP-LTT shows concerning results about literacy development trends. Between 1971 and 2008, nine-year-old assessment scores improved by twelve points. On the other hand, the scores of 13-year-olds only improved by five points, while the scores of 17-year-olds only improved by one point. This shows a significant lack of improvement in older ages. This assessment proved that low-level literacy instruction became more effective over time, while advanced literacy instruction showed no significant improvement. In fact, advanced literacy rates are similar to 50 years ago.[50]

The NAEP-LTT also measures numeracy which can be interesting when compared to literacy results. Between 1978–2008, math scores for 9, 13, and 17-year-olds improved by 24, 18, and 7 points, respectively. This means math scores improved two to seven times more than literacy scores. It appears that the US needs to focus on fostering literacy

improvement, but math and literacy are very different subject areas. Solving math problems is mechanical in nature, while literary assessments are open-ended and based on interpretation. A way to improve scores is by teaching literacy procedurally. To do this, teachers need to give students explicit and standard instruction on reading, writing, and analyzing text. A danger of this is that it can prevent creativity.[51]

The NAEP and ECLS also reiterate the impact a person's demographic has on their literacy skills. Race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic standing can cause literacy gaps. Regarding race, black students in the 1970s had scores of 1.0 to 1.2 standard deviations lower than white students. During these 50 years, the gap has gone down almost in half.[52] However, it is essential to understand that these gaps often widen over the school years. In kindergarten, a black student might only be half a standard deviation from white peers. By eighth grade, they might be one entire standard deviation below.[53] The Hispanic-white reading gap follows similar

49 B. D. Rampey, G. S. Dion, and P. L. Donahue, NAEP 2008: Trends in Academic Progress, NCES 2009-479 (National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2009).
50 B. D. Rampey, G. S. Dion, and P. L. Donahue, NAEP 2008: Trends in Academic Progress.
51 B. D. Rampey, G. S. Dion, and P. L. Donahue, NAEP 2008: Trends in Academic Progress.
52 L. V. Hedges and A. Nowell, "Changes in the Black-White Gap in Achievement Test Scores," *Sociology of Education* 72, no. 2 (1999): 111–35, https://doi.org/10.2307/2673179.
53 Roland Fryer and Steven Levitt, "The Black-White Test Score Gap Through Third Grade," *Harvard University*, September, 2004. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/the_black-white_test_score_gap_through_third_grade.pdf.; Sean Reardon, et al, "Patterns and Trends in Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Academic Achievement Gaps," *Stanford University*, August, 2013, https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/reardon%20et%20al%20state%20achievement%20gaps%20aug2013.pdf.

Young children practice their ABC's at a UNICEF-supported school in Dibrugarh, Assam, India.

Credit: UNICF USA

patterns.[54] Also, Hispanic students often speak in their native language at home. The NAEP-LTT is an English exam, and these students may be considered illiterate despite being fluent and literate in another language.

There are also literacy gaps due to gender. In the USA, women get better grades than men in reading assessments.[55] Nevertheless, this is not true in many parts of the world. Globally, girls often do not have access to education, especially in rural areas. They also suffer from gender-based violence and unwanted teen pregnancies. Being pregnant can even get them expelled from some schools.[56] Also, girls from low-income families are sometimes denied education in preference to their male siblings. These factors significantly affect a girl's future, which is why government leaders and households need to see the benefits of educating young girls. A key part of achieving this is by fighting against social norms. This can be done through institutional and individual efforts.

Socioeconomic status also affects literacy levels. ECLS data reveals that eighth graders who live in poverty have lower literacy levels than third graders from high-income families.[57] These gaps have only widened recently. Income inequality worsens literacy gaps. This is because high-income families are able to invest in their children's education. In fact, in 2005, high-income families spent 6.8 times more money than those from the lowest 20 percent. This is almost 70 percent more than the gap in the 1970s. Data shows that the more educated and wealthy a parent is, the more likely their child will go to university. In fact, only 26 percent of first-generation children in the USA attend college. This is directly associated with advanced literacy levels.[58]

Studies such as ECLS and NAEP in the US indicate areas where education is lacking. Its results can be applied to similar issues worldwide. Countries should focus on the effect socioeconomic status, race, gender, and ethnicity can have on a child's access to literacy education, as illustrated in these studies.

Causes of Child Illiteracy

Literacy is a skill that must be taught. One of the main places children can learn literacy is in the classroom. The teacher and the students determine the learning outcomes of a classroom, but many factors can affect them and get in the way of learning. First, the teacher must be ready to teach. The most effective approach to literacy education is in an innovative, fun, and engaging way. Teachers can help children become alphabetically fluent, develop vocabulary and grammar skills, and also teach students how to relate what they are reading to personal experiences.[59]

Students also benefit from safe learning environments in the classroom. This can be accomplished by giving students extra attention and resources and setting rules that prevent classroom bullying. It is also important to keep in contact with parents about their children's learning process. Alongside this, schools should recognize that children learn differently and have diverse learning needs. This can include learning disabilities and physical or psychological impairments.[60] Because of this, traditional classroom learning styles might not fit all students.

Many other factors can affect a student's reading level. This can include a lack of interest and physical and mental impairments. Not being interested in reading can be caused by negative past experiences or being intimidated by reading. Children might also be discouraged from reading because it is seen as an "uncool" activity by their classmates. In order to fight this, literacy must be proposed as something that allows

54   F. C. Hemphill, Alan Vanneman, "Achievement Gaps: How Hispanic and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress," *National Center for Education Statistics*, June 23, 2011, https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011459.
55   Beverly Klecker, "The Gender Gap in NAEP Fourth-, Eighth-, and Twelfth-Grade Reading Scores across Years," *Reading Improvement* 43, no. 1 (2006): 45–52, https://reproductiverights.org/expulsion-of-pregnant-and-married-girls-from-school-must-stop/.
56   Katja Roemer, "US $14 Billion Needed to Achieve Universal Literacy in Countries with Lowest Literacy Rates and E-9 Countries," *UNESCO*, September 10, 2019, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/us-14-billion-needed-achieve-universal-literacy-countries-lowest-literacy-rates-and-e-9.
57   Provasnik, Gonzales, and Miller, "U.S. Performance across International Assessments of Student Achievement: Special Supplement to the Condition of Education."
58   Roemer, "US $14 Billion Needed to Achieve Universal Literacy in Countries with Lowest Literacy Rates and E-9 Countries."
59   G. Reid-Lyon, "Why Some Children Have Difficulties Learning to Read," *Reading Rockets,* 2015, www.readingrockets.org/whysome_children_have_difficulties_learning_to_read.
60   Reid-Lyon, "Why Some Children Have Difficulties Learning to Read."

Urkundamma (12), who has never been to school, cradles her baby brother in a peanut farm in India.

Credit: UNICEF

students to explore and discover their interests. Children from low-income families also face discouragement from reading from their families, especially those in the agricultural sector or who specialize in manual labor. Parents might ask their children to learn a trade skill that can earn them money instead of focusing on school. In fact, 70 percent of all child laborers work on farms., which is why it is essential to develop literacy among adolescent farmers.[61]

Developing literacy worldwide is not easy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates it would cost around USD 14 billion to achieve universal literacy. This becomes even more expensive in countries with the lowest literacy rates. This estimation is based on how many hours of schooling a person needs to become literate. A person requires 200–250 hours of instruction to achieve word-level literacy. They then need an extra 250–300 hours to develop knowledge-based competencies.[62] This means a child needs over 500 hours of literacy education to reach an advanced level. This amount of hours is often not met.

Physical and mental disabilities can also impact someone's literacy development, such as blindness. Blind people are unable to see written texts visually. They need braille scripts to read. Braille is a tactile writing system, but braille literacy rates are extremely low. In the United Kingdom, the braille literacy rate is only 4 percent.[63] India has over 40 percent of the world's blind population, but its braille literacy rate is about 1 percent.[64] That is incredibly low, especially compared to India's current literacy rate of 74.04 percent.[65] Literacy is very beneficial and necessary in our world, so braille education must be fostered. It needs to become more accessible to the world's blind population. Strategies to improve braille teaching need to take into consideration a country's political climate, human capital, and educational infrastructure.

Learning disabilities like dyslexia can also prevent individuals from having high literacy levels. Severely dyslexic individuals are sometimes unable to read because of their condition. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) defines dyslexia as a learning disability where people struggle with "word recognition, poor spelling and decoding abilities."[66] Dyslexic

61 International Labor Organization, "2021: International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour," press release, January 15, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_766351/lang--en/index.htm.
62 Roemer, "US $14 Billion Needed to Achieve Universal Literacy in Countries with Lowest Literacy Rates and E-9 Countries."
63 Brooklyn Quallen, "The Need for Braille Education in India for the Visually Impaired," *Borgen Magazine*, November 27, 2020, https://www.borgenmagazine.com/braille-education/.
64 Avinash Kothari, "Innovation in Braille Self-Learning Could Empower Blind People in India," *Disability Insider*, October 1, 2020, https://disabilityinsider.com/story/innovation-in-braille-self-learning-could-empower-blind-people-in-india/.
65 "Literacy," KnowIndia, accessed September 26, 2022, https://knowindia.india.gov.in/profile/literacy.php.
66 "Definition of Dyslexia," International Dyslexia Association, accessed July 15, 2022, https://dyslexiaida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/.

people have a difficult time understanding the phonological component of a language. They are unable to link written words to spoken words. Although dyslexia affects the learning process, it can still be worked around. Primary reading epilepsy is another medical condition that can affect literacy - when a person experiences seizures because they are reading, especially out loud.[67] This condition is rare but very damaging to everyone who has it. It is important to consider how these types of causes of illiteracy can be dealt with, especially in countries that lack medical and financial resources.

Children struggling with mental health and managing emotions have difficulty learning. Frustration, anxiety, and self-deprecation can prevent learning. Sadly, mental health awareness is still ignored in many parts of the world. This is mainly due to the fact that mental conditions are not always visible. Developmental disabilities also get in the way of learning literacy, and they go undiagnosed, which means children cannot receive the support they need to learn. In fact, less than 20 percent of adults with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder are diagnosed.[68] Children and teens need to be treated for any mental health condition to encourage them to read. Once they have better mental health, their quality of literacy education will improve.

Government targets and policies must be realigned to help these people. There are many reasons behind low literacy rates, and governments must consider them to provide adequate responses to increase these rates. Also, universal literacy cannot be achieved with one policy. Many policies and frameworks need to be created to fight illiteracy. These policies need to be logical and have checkpoints that measure their progress and effectiveness.

Possible Strategies

Global literacy development was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Bank estimates that in the future, children will now earn USD 10 trillion less because of the pandemic.[69] COVID-19 prevented in-person classes for an extended period of time. Schools that could afford it began online school. This affected education worldwide, especially for younger students in elementary, as younger children often rely on visual cues like posture, body movement, and hand gestures in the classroom. They would use that to communicate with one another and their teacher. However, this was all lost online, which meant these children had much more difficulty communicating. If students have a hard time communicating, they will struggle to learn. Online school also prevented forming relationships between teachers and students. Teachers must form relationships with their students to learn about their students and how they work. This helps them adapt and improve instruction, and these relationships also encourage students to engage with class content.

Learning outcomes significantly decreased during the pandemic, so bringing children back to in-person school is essential. Schools need to be reopened and stay open, while re-enrollment programs can help students transition back to school. Incentives like meals or cash transfers can also be offered in order to increase school enrollment.

To address these issues, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank created RAPID, a learning recovery framework. RAPID outlines five key actions that will accelerate literacy development. First, reach every child and keep them in school. Then, assess learning levels constantly. Third, prioritize teaching fundamentals. Fourth, increase effective instruction. Finally, develop psychosocial health and well-being.[70] The three groups have been at work to reopen schools, start back-to-school campaigns, provide cash transfers to families to get their kids to school, and provide teachers with school resources. They hope to adjust the curriculum so that schools are not only going back to "business as usual" but instead accelerating these students' track so they can still reach their full potential. They also provide resources to increase school

67   C Panayiotopoulos, "Primary Reading Epilepsy," *MedLink*, April 26, 2001, https://www.medlink.com/articles/primary-reading-epilepsy.
68   Ylva Ginsberg et al, "Underdiagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Adult Patients: A Review of the Literature," *National Library of Medicine*, June 12, 2014, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4195639/.
69   "Simulating the Potential Impacts of the COVID-19 School Closures on Schooling and Learning Outcomes: A set of Global Estimates," *The World Bank*, June 18, 2020, https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/simulating-potential-impacts-of-covid-19-school-closures-learning-outcomes-a-set-of-global-estimates.
70   "Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration," *The World Bank*, June, 2022, https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e52f55322528903b27f1b7e61238e416-0200022022/related/Guide-for-Learning-Recovery-and-Acceleration-06-23.pdf.

safety, such as food, water, and sanitation access. Lastly, RAPID also shows teachers how to best deal with well-being issues in their students.[71]

Many countries have adopted recommendations from UN bodies to improve learning standards. Ghana's back-to-school campaign was very successful and achieved almost a 100 percent re-enrollment rate. It was called the Back to School for Safe Learning Campaign. This campaign was carried out at the district level and relied on help from community leaders and non-governmental organizations.[72] As of March 2021, almost all Ghanaian students were back in school.

Guatemala is another country that implemented a system to improve learning standards. They developed an effective early warning system reducing the dropout rates of rising high school students by 4 percent. It was called the ENTRE (*Estrategia Nacional para la Transición Exitosa*) program. It trained sixth-grade teachers on strategies to prevent dropouts. This included providing information on available scholarships and helping families with administrative forms.[73] This system is also incredibly cost-efficient, costing about USD three per student. These programs were successful because they focused on at-risk students such as girls, disabled children, and victims of domestic violence.

Putting children back in schools is only the first step. After they return, various steps must be taken to ensure quality education. Regular literacy assessments can provide data about the classroom and national levels. There are three types of classroom assessments: diagnostic, formative, and summative tests. Diagnostic assessments happen at the beginning of the school year. Teachers use them to assess the level of their students when they join a course. The results allow teachers to adapt the learning goals. Formative assessments are checkpoints to measure progress, and as such, these are low-stake assessments. Summative are the final assessments of a class. They are used to measure whether students meet the learning goals. Outside of a class, there are certain national literacy assessments.[74] Looking at the USA, there is the NAEP and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). These assessments are different from the previously mentioned classroom evaluations. The NAEP is a large-scale assessment used to inform policymakers and educators about current teaching standards. The results of this test do not affect the student. On the other hand, the SAT is a high-stake assessment for students. The SAT largely determines what university students can get into.[75]

The results of national assessments can be used to improve literacy curriculums across the country. Several countries have already changed and improved their curriculums. This can include removing duplicate content and rearranging the order of the topics. Other ways to improve curriculums are targeted instruction and self-guided learning programs. In addition, structured pedagogy also helps improve the curriculum. Extending learning time and tutoring can also help.[76] An example of this improvement can be seen in Jordan. Jordan created take-home learning packages for fourth to ninth-graders. This allowed students to learn and practice key concepts at their own pace during the pandemic.[77] Mozambique also distributed similar early literary programs. They accomplished this with a 299 million USD grant from the World Bank.[78]

Throughout this entire process, teachers need to be supported. They need to be given adequate technological equipment. They also need to receive training and workshops on literacy education. Teachers must prioritize their students' psychosocial

71 "Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration."
72 "COVID-Back to School Campaign," Africa Education Watch, accessed September 26, 2022, https://africaeducationwatch.org/covid-back-to-school-campaign.
73 Francisco Haimovich, Emmanuel Vazquez, Melissa Adelman, "Scalable Early Warning Systems for School Dropout Prevention," World Bank Group, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35722/Scalable-Early-Warning-Systems-for-School-Dropout-Prevention-Evidence-from-a-4-000-School-Randomized-Controlled-Trial.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
74 "Formative and Summative Assessment," Northern Illinois University, accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.niu.edu/citl/resources/guides/instructional-guide/formative-and-summative-assessment.shtml.
75 Northern Illinois University, "Formative and Summative Assessment."
76 "Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration."
77 "Education Case Study: Jordan," *UNICEF*, March, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/media/117551/file/Learning%20Bridges%20accelerates%20learning%20for%20almost%20half%20a%20million%20students%20(Jordan).pdf.
78 Rafael Saute, "World Bank Support to Improve Learning and Empower Girls in Mozambique," *The World Bank*, March 26, 2021, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/03/26/world-bank-support-to-improve-learning-and-empower-girls-in-mozambique.

health and well-being in the classroom. Institutions need to provide professional mental health support for their students through counseling. Literacy development does not happen just at school. It needs to be developed at home by parents. Parents need to invest in their children's learning and literacy, and they need to find ways to make reading fun for their children by stimulating a child's curiosity. This can be done by presenting literary material in other forms, such as pop-up books and musicals. Parents can also have children read to them. All of these different presentations of literature excite children, as they are able to experience literature in many different forms throughout their childhood. This will make their first language class more easily approachable.[79]

Design Instruction is an NGO focused on ending child illiteracy. It proposes five ways to improve reading readiness: frequently reading to the child, pointing out letters and words, playing word games, taking words apart and putting them back together, and introducing new words to the child.[80] These five strategies cannot be forced onto a child; they need to feel natural. Otherwise, they might lose interest in reading. Parents can adopt these strategies in their own at-home teaching.

Frequent repetition also helps novice readers. The more experience they have with written texts, the easier it will be. This makes texts approachable, which helps with fluency and comprehension. Also, parents should read expressively to keep the attention of their children. This is very important because children have very short attention spans. If parents make reading fun and interesting, children will want to keep reading. Eventually, they will develop the skills to read by themselves. Engaging children in literary activities at such a young age is vital for their academic development. Parents can help their child's literacy development by focusing on vocabulary and teaching them new words.[81]

Current Status

Case Study: Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau is a country in West Africa with an almost two million population. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world, with a GDP per capita of USD 727.52.[82] Most of its citizens live in small rural villages because most people who lived in cities fled during their war for independence and civil war. As a result, communities in this country are very isolated, which prevents practical intervention efforts.

Guinea-Bissau is a predominantly agricultural economy, as the government spends many resources on agriculture. The country produces enough food to be self-sufficient. Most of their resources go toward agriculture, forestry, and fishing. As a result of the dependence on farming, these villages do not have internet access, making it difficult for organizations to monitor their educational progress. Many children from farming communities drop out of school. Their agricultural sector is the largest employer of child laborers in the country.[83]

In 1987, primary school dropout rates reached 91.6 percent. Luckily, this percentage has decreased because of intervention efforts. In fact, as of 2010, more than 55 percent of children graduated from primary school and went to secondary school.[84] These advances are due to the bundled intervention approach. A bundled intervention is when various interventions are implemented at the same time.

It has been proven that interventions are more effective when combined. A single intervention method might help one area of education, but it is not enough to improve education in the long term. For example, giving free meals in school might encourage attendance, but it will not improve the quality of education. Studies show that successful interventions implemented alone have minimal learning gains. There is only a 0.1–0.3 standard deviation increase in test scores.[85] Bundled

79 "Why it is Important to Involve Parents in Their Children's Literacy Development," *National Literacy Trust*, January 2007, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496346.pdf.
80 "Reading Readiness," *Designed Instruction*, http://www.designedinstruction.com/prekorner/reading-readiness.html.
81 "Why it is Important to Involve Parents in Their Children's Literacy Development."
82 "Guinea-Bissau," Data Commons, accessed July 18, 2022, https://datacommons.org/place/country/GNB?utm_medium=explore&mprop=amount&popt=EconomicActivity&cpv=activitySource%2CGrossDomesticProduction&hl=en.
83 Zoë Nichols, "Challenges in Education in Guinea-Bissau," *The Borgen Project*, January 4, 2021, https://borgenproject.org/education-in-guinea-bissau/.
84 Zoë Nichols, "Challenges in Education in Guinea-Bissau."
85 David Evans and F Yuan, "How Big Are Effect Sizes in International Education Studies?" *Center for Global Development*, 2021, https://

Two Guinean girls return to in-person school.
Credit: UNICEF USA

interventions include teacher training, which is greatly beneficial to students. They prioritize physical materials such as books, pens, and paper from teachers to students. Interventions have been shown to increase income levels for students throughout their careers, helping them escape extreme poverty.[86]

It is important to understand the different aspects of bundled interventions in rural Guinea-Bissau. These interventions were led by the Center for Economic and Policy Research with the objective of children receiving four years of primary school, which is compulsory in Guinea-Bissau. First, they hired teachers to go live and teach children in rural villages. As an incentive, they offered higher salaries in these villages than in the capital. They wanted to maintain a high level of classroom instruction. Secondly, they trained the teachers to deliver a curriculum focused on hard skills. The curriculum focused on reading and writing. Then, they observed each classroom for at least 18 days each year. After each observation, they would give the teachers feedback, allowing them to improve their teaching strategies. Observation also encourages teachers to give their best efforts and stay in rural areas.[87] This focus on monitoring classrooms helped the teacher and students thrive.

These interventions were incredibly successful. After the interventions, every student participated in the Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA).[88] The EGRA is a 15-minute individual oral assessment measuring five reading skills: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.[89] Results showed that students who received the intervention scored 59 percent higher on the EGRA than those who did not.[90] Students in the intervention scored 70.5 percent on average. Meanwhile, the rest of the students scored 11.2 percent on average. This is a considerable improvement gap. This intervention also improved oral reading skills. The students in the intervention read 75 words correctly each minute.[91] This is similar to the oral reading fluency of third-grade students in the Philippines. The Philippines per-capita

www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/how-big-are-effect-sizes-international-education-studies.pdf/

86 Abhijit Banerhee, et al., "A Multifaceted Program Causes Lasting Progress for the Very Poor: Evidence from Six Countries," *Science*, May 15, 2015, https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1260799.

87 Peter Boone et al, "Achieving Child Literacy and Numeracy in the World's Poorest Areas: Evidence from Rural Guinea Bissau," *Centre for Economic Policy Research*, December 16, 2020, https://new.cepr.org/voxeu/columns/achieving-child-literacy-and-numeracy-worlds-poorest-areas-evidence-rural-guinea.

88 Boone et al, "Achieving Child Literacy and Numeracy in the World's Poorest Areas: Evidence from Rural Guinea Bissau."

89 "Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Toolkit," United States Agency for International Development, March, 2016, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00M4TN.pdf.

90 Boone et al, "Achieving Child Literacy and Numeracy in the World's Poorest Areas: Evidence from Rural Guinea Bissau."

91 Boone et al, "Achieving Child Literacy and Numeracy in the World's Poorest Areas: Evidence from Rural Guinea Bissau."

GDP is nearly five times more than in Guinea-Bissau.[92] The students also scored higher in oral reading fluency than in neighboring African countries.

UNICEF offers a variety of resources to improve literacy education outcomes. These resources are meant for developing countries like Guinea-Bissau. They include quality assurance standards, advocacy campaigns, as well as partnerships with both government organizations and NGOs. One of these frameworks is the National Quality Standards (NQS).[93] Another is the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS).[94] These frameworks were created in collaboration with UNICEF and Guinea-Bissau's Ministry of Education. With these resources, institutions are able to assess the quality of education they provide. They also include various steps on how teachers can improve their pedagogy, such as increasing supervision and developing relationships with students' families. This leads to improved retention rates and learning outcomes.[95]

Besides this, UNICEF has also created an advocacy program called Campaign 6/6. The motto of this campaign is "Start at 6, and study for 6 years!" Its main objective is to reduce dropout rates, especially among young girls. This campaign is based on research that shows that students who start school at six years old do better in school from ages seven to 11.[96] The age at which a student enters school significantly affects their educational journey. Age six is the recommended age to start. UNICEF has also partnered with organizations that focus on literacy education in West Africa, such as PLAN International, Fundação Fé e Cooperação (FEC), and Handicap International. Together, they have around 180 school inspectors who monitor more than 1700 schools in the region.[97] Classroom monitoring was key for bundled interventions in Guinea-Bissau. These organizations have also built three regional training centers. Here, 62 new preschool

teachers have been trained, and more than 500 existing teachers are expected to benefit from these workshops. These workshops focus on improving early-grade literacy and aim to increase local learning materials.[98]

The results of all these UNICEF studies, frameworks, and interventions are helpful for policymakers and NGOs, especially those who want to improve literacy levels among regions. The Guinea-Bissau intervention was expensive. The intervention cost more than 400 USD per child, but it was very impactful. EGRA scores prove how transformative these efforts were. Plus, individual learning benefits also help families and communities. This shows that quality literacy instruction can be accomplished anywhere with enough resources and determination. However, hundreds of interventions like this are required to improve learning levels. Without them, education inequality will never decrease.

International Literacy Day 2022

Literacy allows societies to mature. Since 1967, the global community has celebrated International Literacy Day (ILD) in order "to remind the public of the importance of literacy as a matter of dignity and human rights, and to advance the literacy agenda towards a more literate and sustainable society."[99] The event happens annually in early September. The idea for the event was first created in the "World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy" held in Tehran, Iran, in 1965. UNESCO took over this idea the following year and proclaimed it a national event on September 8. The event fosters initiatives to increase literacy globally. Students and employed people give their time to tutor children in local communities. People donate large amounts of books to libraries. Students are given sponsorships for tuition and other learning expenses to increase their literacy education opportunities. Institutions and governments host discussions

92 "Philippines GDP per Capita," Trading Economics, Accessed September 26, 2022, https://tradingeconomics.com/philippines/gdp-per-capita.
93 Venita Kaul, "A Mapping of Early Childhood Development Standards and Good Practices: Lessons for South Asia," *United Nations Children's Fund Regional Office for South Asia*, 2019, https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/12421/file/A%20Mapping%20of%20Early%20Childhood%20Development%20Standards%20and%20Good%20Practices.pdf.
94 *Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and School Readiness* (New York: UNICEF, January 2016), https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?fileID=9571.
95 *Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and School Readiness.*
96 Thomas Dee and Hans Sievertsen, "The Gift of Time? School Starting Age and Mental Health," *National Bureau of Economic Research*, October, 2015, https://www.nber.org/papers/w21610.
97 "Education," UNICEF, accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/guineabissau/education.
98 UNICEF, "Education."
99 "International Literacy Day," UNESCO, accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.unesco.org/en/days/literacy.

about the issue to formulate policies. Fundraisers are also hosted for the cause.[100]

In 2022 celebrations were held in Côte d'Ivoire on September 8 and 9. The event was themed "Transforming Literacy Learning Spaces," a particular response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO officials, hosts of the event, further explained that "rapidly changing global context took on a new meaning over the past years, hampering the progress of global literary efforts. In the aftermath of the pandemic, nearly 24 million learners might never return to formal education, out of which 11 million are projected to be girls and young women."[101] UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell echoed similar sentiments at the event, remarking that two in three children globally cannot read and understand a simple text by age ten. The deficit is even more severe in low-income countries and for children living through humanitarian crises.[102] Russell's message was urgent, further stating that UNICEF is "calling on the international community to close the education resource gap. The consequences of failing to act now will be enormous – measured in untapped potential, slower growth, and wider inequality."[103]

Along with urgent messaging and sobering statistics, the gathering also recognized positive news and promising initiatives. For example, at the past 33 ILD celebrations, educational organizations have been awarded the King Sejong Literacy Prize for promoting literacy in developing countries.[104] This year, the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) from Bhubaneswar, India, was recognized as the award recipient. PRNewswire release considered KISS the world's largest

institute for Indigenous students. It was commended for its outstanding literacy program for these students. The institute is praised for its "innovative pedagogies as learning tools and bringing about a perceptible change in the socio-economic lives of the Indigenous population through education."[105]

Countries are also recognized for exceptional efforts to decrease illiteracy at the event. An example of this is South Korea. In 1945, they had a literacy rate of 22 percent. 25 years later, their literacy rate was 87.6 percent.[106] During this time, South Korea experienced rapid economic growth. They built new infrastructures like highways, public offices, and schools. Infant mortality rates declined. Their middle class expanded. There is a correlation between literacy rates and economic growth. All this progress would have been impossible to achieve without the government's work on literacy education. A country's literacy level is directly related to its productivity rate.[107]

Literacy is important because it helps shape and preserve culture. Culture can be shared and appreciated worldwide because of written text. People are able to exchange ideas, which causes innovation. Overall, it helps bring communities together. It helps people move out of poverty, which is a key goal worldwide. Reading also increases awareness of social issues. Furthermore, individuals can confront these injustices with the information obtained from the readings. Generally, it is essential to understand that literacy empowers children, and children are the future of our world and their societies. Literacy education allows children to contribute to their communities and the world at large. With events like International Literacy Day, efforts to increase literacy can be praised and created

100 "International Literacy Day - September 8, 2022," National Today, accessed September 26, 2022, https://nationaltoday.com/international-literacy-day/.

101 Jude Atemanke, "On International Literacy Day, Salesians Highlight Programs for Vulnerable Youth in Zambia," *Association for Catholic Information in Africa*, September 9, 2022, https://www.aciafrica.org/news/6644/on-international-literacy-day-salesians-highlight-programs-for-vulnerable-youth-in-zambia.

102 UNICEF, "UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell's remarks at the Transforming Education Summit spotlight session: Foundational Learning," press release, September 19, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-executive-director-catherine-russells-remarks-transforming-education-summit-0.

103 UNICEF, "UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell's remarks at the Transforming Education Summit spotlight session: Foundational Learning."

104 Im Eun-byel, "King Sejong Literacy Prize Goes to Organizations in Guatemala, India, South Africa," T*he Korea Herald,* September 10, 2022,

https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210910000645.

105 "India's Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences Wins UNESCO Literacy Prize 2022," *News India Times*, September 22, 2022,

https://www.newsindiatimes.com/indias-kalinga-institute-of-social-sciences-wins-unesco-literacy-prize-2022/.

106 "Diversity and Access to Education," *Sites Dot Miis*, https://sites.miis.edu/southkoreaeducation/diversity-and-access/.

107 "Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births) - Korea, Rep.," *The World Bank*, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN?locations=KR.

to reap these benefits. ILD emphasizes the importance of literacy education and its worldwide effects.

Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations created 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. SDGs are supposed to be achieved by the year 2030, tackling a wide variety of social, political, and economic issues. They take on a global and diplomatic approach to these issues. So far, there has already been significant progress in these areas.

The SDG most relevant to eliminating child illiteracy is SDG 4: Quality Education. The goal is "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all."[108] The United Nations outlined ten targets related to SDG 4. They created these in order to measure progress in this area. These targets include free primary and secondary education and equal access to pre-primary school. Alongside these, they want affordable higher education and want to eliminate discrimination related to education. SDG 4 also focuses on achieving universal literacy and numeracy, which is particularly key to this topic. This goal also wants to build safe schools and have more qualified teachers in developing countries.[109]

SDG 1: No Poverty is also related to literacy.[110] This goal includes initiatives directly related to children. Learning poverty is an integral part of SDG 1.[111] Children without a home or access to food are unable to learn. Because of this, their literacy never develops or develops very poorly. Another SDG related to literacy is Goal 5: Gender Equality. UNICEF aims to provide equal chances for young boys and girls to attend school and receive an education.[112] This goal focuses on helping girls and women around the world attend school. Girls are a very vulnerable group, especially regarding education.

UNICEF's mandate aligns with the SDGs central approach to "leave no one behind."[113] SDGs focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups. Because of this, children are at the top of their agenda.[114] Children's rights must be respected and followed to achieve the 2030 agenda. UNICEF monitors the SDGs based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It is important to understand that children are particularly vulnerable to violence, inequality, and exclusion. Children are in a very delicate development phase, which is why they must be protected.[115]

The SDGs are also used for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The HLPF brings together stakeholders and international bodies to discuss children's rights. They mainly focus on how to overcome the challenges that children face. In 2018, they asked the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide data on how the 2030 Agenda can help children's rights. As of 2022, the HLPF review focused on bringing conditions back to normal after COVID-19 - mainly on how to get children back in school.[116]

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

Blocs within this committee will be largely organized by literacy rate statistics released by the World Bank. The first bloc will consist of countries that have achieved near universal literacy, which means that less than 4 percent of

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108   "Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities For All," United Nations, accessed September 26, 2022. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4.
109   "Sustainable Development Goal 4," SDG Tracker, https://sdg-tracker.org/quality-education.
110   "End Poverty in all its Forms Everywhere," United Nations, accessed September 26, 2022, https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1.
111   "What is Learning Poverty?" *The World Bank*, April 28, 2022. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/what-is-learning-poverty.
112   "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls," United Nations, accessed September 26, 2022, https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5.
113   "Leave No One Behind," United Nations, accessed September 26, 2022, https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind.
114   "Using Data to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Children," UNICEF, accessed September 26, 2022, https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/.
115   "Children's Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," United Nations, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/children/childrens-rights-and-2030-agenda-sustainable-development.
116   United Nations, "Children's Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

its population is illiterate.[117] However, this statistic must be considered in conjunction with another variable: population size. For example, China boasts an adult literacy rate of 96.8 percent. More than 45 million Chinese citizens are illiterate since China's population is 1.4 billion. In other terms, China's illiterate population alone would be the world's 35th largest country.[118] When considering bloc formation, delegates should account for such nuances and consider the impact of large illiterate populations in countries with large populations.

The second bloc consists of countries with high, but not universal, literacy rates, as well as countries that are experiencing rapid growth in literacy rates. This includes countries with literacy rates higher than 85 percent and other countries that experience more than 10 percent literacy rate growth per annum. Essentially, countries in this bloc have found some strategies that work within their local context; minimal outside help is required to make continual progress. Even so, there is still room for further intervention within these countries. The third bloc, characterized by literacy rates below 90 percent, includes countries that require immediate intervention by the international community. These countries also experience minimal growth and even decreases in literacy rates.

Countries with Near-Universal Literacy

According to the World Bank, more than 70 countries have literacy rates above 96 percent, each with a total illiterate population of fewer than 1 million people.[119] The list includes developed countries like Spain and Singapore, as well as smaller countries like Barbados and Jordan. The diversity of the list highlights the idea that economic soundness is not necessarily a prerequisite for achieving universal literacy. In other words, providing effective literacy education to children in countries at any economic level is possible.

Many factors contribute to the soaring literacy rates among countries within this bloc, each factor with a varying level of importance. However, the most notable factor is that most

(if not all) of these countries have compulsory education for students up to age 14. Even in Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe, access to education is a constitutional right for all citizens.[120] However, compulsory education for all children between the ages of 7 to 14 is also mandated in countries like Guinea-Bissau, which does not yet have near-universal literacy rates; only about 55 percent of Bissau-Guinean children complete primary school education. Countries in this bloc must consider the context in which they achieved near-universal literacy within their borders, either through policies or other interventions, and use their insights to advise countries in other blocs.

The priority of this bloc is to identify strategies that achieved near-universal literacy, why they were effective, and how these strategies could be replicated in other contexts. It is also important to consider the tangible and intangible assets that this bloc can offer to other countries to improve their literacy education, such as donating learning supplies or advising teaching personnel.

Countries with Improving Literacy Rates

This bloc consists of countries with literacy rates above the global average of 86.3 percent and those experiencing significant growth in literacy rates. While it is difficult to delineate what "significant growth" entails, the country should be on track to achieving SDG four. Countries like China, the United States of America, Nepal, Ethiopia, and Mozambique belong to this bloc.[121] Each of the countries mentioned above has implemented successful literacy campaigns that substantially increased the percentage of the literate population within their borders; countries in this bloc have already found strategies that work within most of their local context.

Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement. Many countries in this bloc experience some variation of literacy gap, whether it is based on gender, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. For example, most of China's illiterate

117 "Literacy Rate by Country 2022," *World Population Review*, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/literacy-rate-by-country.
118 "Total Population by Country," *World Population Review*, https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/.
119 "Literacy Rate, Adult Total (% of People Ages 15 and Above)."
120 "Higher education in Moldova," Support and Promotion for Higher Education Reform Experts, https://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-moldova.
121 "Literacy Rate by Country 2022."

population resides in rural areas.[122] In the United States, students from coastal states like California and Massachusetts have traditionally performed better on standardized tests than their peers who live inland.[123] In Iran, 90 percent of male students are literate, while only 81 percent of their female counterparts are.[124] These are disparities that rarely exist in countries with near-universal literacy. This bloc must identify strategies that truly improve domestic literacy rates, as well as strategies that do not. Individual countries could also revisit past strategies with the possibility of reimplementation. In this case, countries should identify any necessary adjustments that must be made. Finally, this bloc must also prioritize eliminating any disparities between demographic groups across the country. These insights can then be shared with other blocs for their usage.

Countries that Require Immediate Intervention

The two blocs described above share a common trait: their policies are self-sustaining. However, some countries are not on track to achieve SDG four and could benefit from immediate assistance from the international community. Countries in this bloc are characterized by literacy rates that fall below the global average. These countries also typically experience minimal growth, even decreases, in literacy rates. Such countries include Madagascar, the Central African Republic, Lesotho, Kenya, and Sudan.[125]

Simply put, countries in this bloc are in a literary crisis. To resolve it, this bloc must first identify the areas in which they need the most assistance. This might include building infrastructures like schools and libraries, sourcing teachers and instructors, creating contextualized curriculums, and even administering a meal program through the school. After all, a hungry child is unable to study. Once these areas are identified, countries within this bloc must first determine whether or not

they can satisfy their needs with only their internal resources. Finally, countries within this bloc must identify successful strategies implemented by other countries in the past and seek to understand why they were successful. This would allow the strategy to be similarly successful in the local context and lead to significant gains in literacy education outcomes.

Committee Mission

The United Nations General Assembly mandated UNICEF on December 11, 1946, to protect children's rights.[126] UNICEF is responsible for devising strategies to meet the basic needs of children—survival, safety, and development—and providing opportunities that allow them to reach their full potential. These strategies are primarily guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international treaty signed by 194 countries in 1989. The document lays out all aspects of human rights—civil, political, economic, social, and cultural— and the strategies that will lead to their fruition.[127] UNICEF assists developing countries in pursuing the best interests of children and utilizes the political will of sovereign countries to disburse the necessary programs and services for children and families in need. When administering aid, UNICEF prioritizes children in extreme circumstances like war, disaster, extreme poverty, violence, and exploitation. UNICEF is apolitical, non-discriminatory, and cooperative. It promotes gender equality and believes in the transformative potential of women in all areas of society, including politics, economics, and social interactions. Most importantly, UNICEF strives to attain sustainable development goals and achieve the visions of peace and social progress as inscribed in the Charter of the United Nations.[128]

Child literacy is a concept that fits in with the values of UNICEF. The committee seeks to address literacy deficits

122 "China Questions and Answers," *China.org.cn*, http://www.china.org.cn/english/MATERIAL/161871.htm.
123 Martin Carnoy, Emma García, and Tatiana Khavenson, "Bringing it Back Home," *Economic Policy Institute*, October 30, 2015, https://www.epi.org/publication/bringing-it-back-home-why-state-comparisons-are-more-useful-than-international-comparisons-for-improving-u-s-education-policy/.
124 Zahra Mila Elmi. "Education Attainment in Iran," *Middle East Institute*, January 29, 2009, https://www.mei.edu/publications/educational-attainment-iran.
125 "Literacy Rate by Country 2022."
126 "Frequently Asked Questions," UNICEF, accessed September 26, 2022. https://www.unicefusa.org/about/faq.
127 UN General Assembly, Resolution 44/25, Convention on the Rights of the Child,

E/CN.4/RES/1990/74, (March 7, 1990), https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.
128 "UNICEF," UNICEF, accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/.

through the RAPID framework for learning recovery and acceleration. To appropriately contextualize the RAPID framework in their respective countries, delegates must account for unique challenges and circumstances that deter its implementation. However, the RAPID framework is only the starting point. Delegates must research other frameworks and strategies for improving child literacy, as illiteracy is too detrimental to a society's growth.

Delegates must be reminded that literacy education involves real people: teachers and students. Effective strategies are based on empathy, and delegates must strive to understand the innermost demands of teachers and students. Ideas should derive from genuine motives to better the opportunities of children globally.

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. Adverse circumstances like the current COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affect children and their living conditions. Which challenges have been most harmful to the children in your country? How effective were your country's strategies in addressing these issues?

2. How can governments support parents and caregivers to improve the living conditions of children?

3. The quality of education is one of the many aspects of a child's development that is heavily influenced by their living conditions. What are some other areas that might influence a child's overall development?

4. How does the foster care system in your country compare to those in other countries? What issues must be addressed to improve the well-being of children in foster care?

5. Typically, do children in your country live in worse, equivalent, or better conditions than adults?

6. Has your country experienced an increase or decrease in housing insecurity in recent decades? What factors influenced these trends?

7. How has your country responded to the HIV epidemic? What measures were particularly influential?

Topic B

1. What standardized literacy assessments are administered in your country, if any? How do they define child literacy, and what metrics do they use? Finally, should there be a literacy assessment with international standards?

2. Does the education in your country allow for quality education that promotes high levels of literacy? Compare the size and impact of these investments across urban and rural regions.

3. Children with physical or mental disabilities are often hindered from achieving advanced literacy. How can government policies empower these children to reach their full potential?

4. How has the recent COVID-19 pandemic impacted the education system in your country? What has been done to overcome the challenges presented?

5. Is education mandatory in your country? If so, until what age? How can countries ensure that children in low-income households can access education?

6. How can countries encourage families to invest their time and resources into improving the learning standards of children and piquing their interest in reading?

7. What digital products have been adopted into domestic education systems, and how successful were they in improving the standards and practices of literacy education?

Important Documents

Topic A

1. Adverse circumstances like the current COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affect children and their living conditions. Which challenges have been most harmful to the children in your country? How effective were your country's strategies in addressing these issues?

2. How can governments support parents and caregivers to improve the living conditions of children?

3. The quality of education is one of the many aspects of a child's development that is heavily influenced by their living conditions. What are some other areas that might influence a child's overall development?

4. How does the foster care system in your country compare to those in other countries? What issues must be addressed to improve the well-being of children in foster care?

5. Typically, do children in your country live in worse, equivalent, or better conditions than adults?

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6. How can countries encourage families to invest their time and resources into improving the learning standards of children and piquing their interest in reading?

7. What digital products have been adopted into domestic education systems, and how successful were they in improving the standards and practices of literacy education?

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