

# UNICEF

United Nations Children's Fund



**TORONTO MODEL UNITED NATIONS**  
General Assembly Background Guide

## Table of Contents

Director's Letter	3
Equity Disclaimer/Content Warning	4
Introduction To UNICEF	5
<b><u>Topic 1: Mandating Vaccination for Children:</u></b>	
History	6
Major Issues	8
Benefits/Drawbacks	12
Various Perspectives	14
Questions To Consider	16
<b><u>Topic 2: Child Labour and Exploitation:</u></b>	
Overview	17
History in Western World	18
Root Causes	19
Major Issues	20
Impacts	26
Benefits/Drawbacks	27
Questions to Consider	29
Sources	30

## Directors Letter

Dear Delegates,

We welcome you to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) at TMUN 2025! Your dais eagerly awaits the thrilling debate and cannot wait to meet delegates in March.

My name is Jack Clausen, and I am a grade 12 student at Lorne Park who will be serving as one of your co-directors this year. I have been involved in Model UN since partway through grade 10, and have been lucky enough to compete in numerous conferences in Canada, from Vancouver to Montreal. Outside of Model UN, I may be considered a dilettante in the world of dolphins, and I enjoy playing a range of sports, such as Soccer, Football, or Road Tennis.

Hi everyone! I'm Claire, a grade 12 student at Lorne Park, and the second co-director for UNICEF this year. I have been doing Model UN since I was in grade 9 and have gone to various conferences across Canada over the past few years, one of my favourites being TMUN! Aside from MUN, I like to go shopping, do taekwondo, and scroll on TikTok in my spare time.

As with everything, the topics that we will discuss are multifaceted issues with no simple solutions. As such, we encourage you to use this background guide as a starting point before continuing to research on your own.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to either one of our emails,

*Jackclausen04@gmail.com*

*ClaireL24213@gmail.com*

## Equity Disclaimer/Content Warning

Throughout this simulation, many sensitive issues will be addressed. For the sake of equity and creating a safe and comfortable environment for all, we wish to determine the proper parameters so that delegates have an understanding of what to expect in discussion within our committee sessions, and what to avoid in such discussions. While we encourage delegates to consider aspects of these issues that may be overlooked and not mentioned in the background guide, there are some issues we will not be addressing as a committee to ensure this remains a comfortable environment for all delegates.

In the context of Topic 2: Child Labour and Exploitation, this committee is to refrain from any discussion surrounding sexual abuse, sexual trafficking, and the sexual misconduct of children in regard to child labour. Throughout the weekend, delegates are to focus on relevant issues pertaining to child labour and surrounding effects, but we will not discuss anything surrounding the sexual abuse of these children and refrain from the inclusion of such clauses in resolution writing, even if one's country has taken vast action against it in the past. As aforementioned, we encourage delegates to research issues and various forms of exploitation not mentioned in the background guide to prepare for this conference, however, we ask delegates to keep in mind possible equity concerns, specifically relating to the sexual misconduct perpetuated through child labour. If you have any questions about your research or a potential topic of debate you feel relevant to the committee and wish to discuss, however, are concerned it may raise sensitivity problems, please do not hesitate to reach out to your dais and we will get back to you with the answer.

## Committee Introduction

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, also known as UNICEF, is a United Nations committee that provides humanitarian aid to countless children worldwide. UNICEF was first established in 1946 to provide emergent care to children and mothers devastated by World War II and has continued to make various efforts since then to fight for children's rights, lives, safety, and health. Today, UNICEF provides a better future for disadvantaged children across over 190 countries and symbolizes hope for many globally.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>———. 2022. "UNICEF History." UNICEF. 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/history>.

## Topic A: Mandating Vaccination for Children

### History:

For centuries, vaccines have been used by civilization as a way to combat disease, used to protect themselves, and the bigger society as a whole. According to the World Health Organization, “Vaccines have saved more human lives than any other medical invention in history.”<sup>2</sup> The first vaccine was developed by inoculating cowpox to build immunity and protect individuals from a more deadly smallpox.<sup>3</sup>

In the past, vaccination has typically been up to individual choice, however, in the case of children, there are several important factors to consider. Firstly, they are one of the most susceptible populations to illnesses and viruses, many of which can be cured by vaccination. Even if these infections do not kill these children, many diseases which can be prevented may stunt typical brain/bodily development, hindering these children in their future.

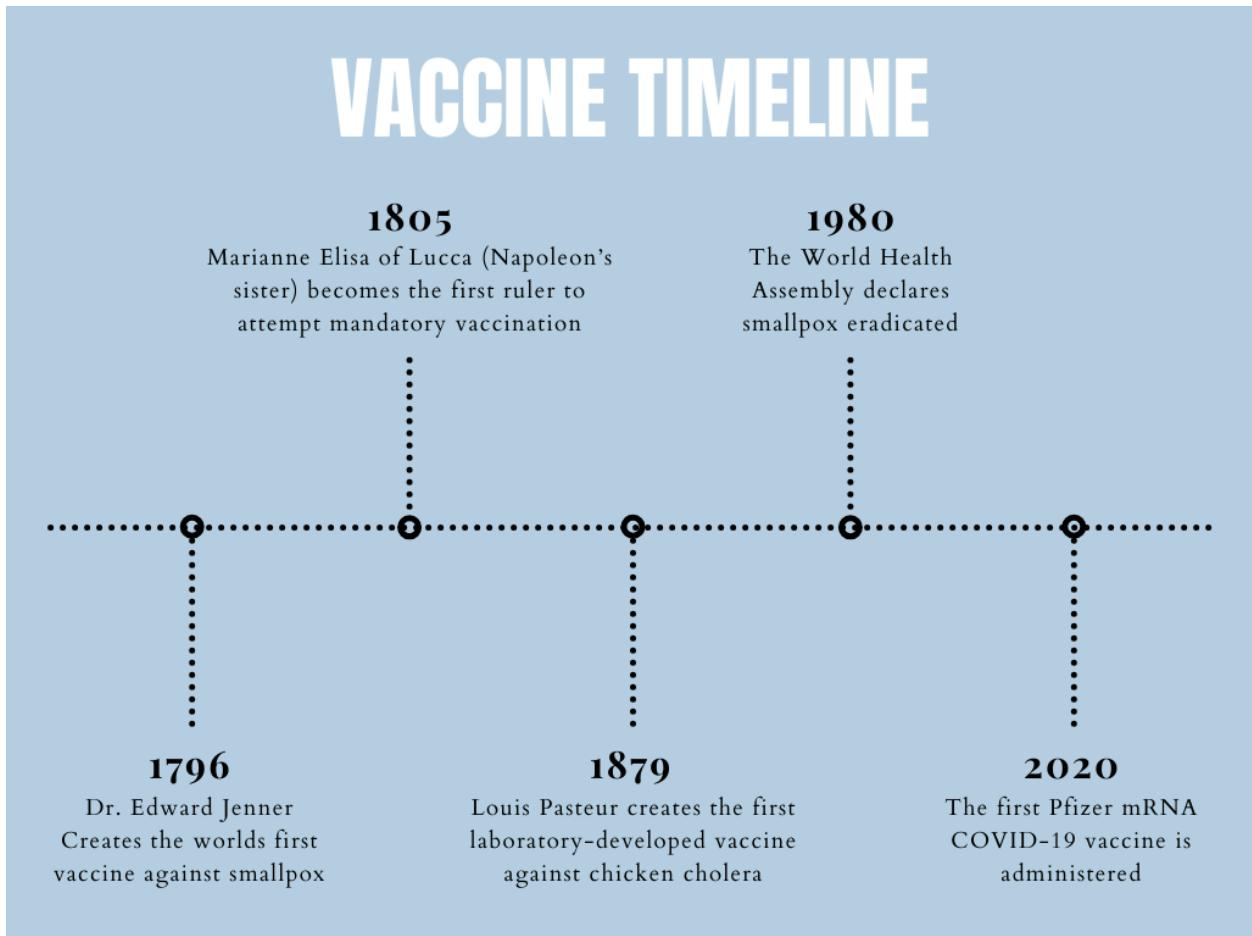
As vaccination for children is currently based on parental choice, those with negative opinions on the matter, based on personal experience or public misinformation may harm their child’s wellbeing and indirectly hinder their surrounding community as well. Due to this, it will be up to the delegates of UNICEF to determine the best course of action concerning the mandate of vaccines in international affairs. The following timeline illustrates a brief vaccination timeline and events of significance to this discovery.

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<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. 2022. “A Brief History of Vaccination.” World Health Organization. World Health Organization. 2022. <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/history-of-vaccination/a-brief-history-of-vaccination>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Figure 1: A timeline of major milestones surrounding the creation and development of vaccines.



## **Major Issues:**

Despite the numerous benefits that are provided with this method of inoculation, there are various potential issues present going forward:

### ***Potential Issue One: Individual Autonomy vs Societal Safety***

By ensuring that the general public is vaccinated, nations and governments can more easily control the spread of infectious diseases, leading to several benefits, such as decreased mortality rates, less economic instability, and an overall safer society.<sup>4</sup> However, arguments may arise that ‘forcing’ citizens to be vaccinated may cross a line for individual rights. Numerous factors may influence a person’s decision (detailed below) for themselves and their children. By mandating vaccinations for member states, UNICEF may be infringing on universally declared rights that humans are entitled to.

In addition, many marginalized communities may feel reluctant to trust public health institutions due to historic injustices that have been dealt to them. A fitting example of this would be in America, 1930’s - 1980’s, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.<sup>5</sup> This example is not directly correlated to vaccination for children, however, it highlights how individuals may distrust public health institutions due to a long history of injustices, and therefore may oppose the idea of mandating vaccines.

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<sup>4</sup> Public. 2024. “Full Report: Realizing the Future of Vaccination for Public Health - Canada.ca.” Canada.ca. 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/state-public-health-canada-2024/report.html>.

<sup>5</sup> McVean, Ada. 2019. “40 Years of Human Experimentation in America: The Tuskegee Study.” Office for Science and Society. McGill University. January 25, 2019. <https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/history/40-years-human-experimentation-america-tuskegee-study>.

### **Case Study - Tuskegee Syphilis Study:**

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study was an unethical medical study hosted in Alabama, United States. It lasted from 1932-1972 and involved 600 black men,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of which had syphilis. Authorities told these men that they were being given free healthcare, to be treated for “bad blood”, however, they were instead observed to see how untreated syphilis would progress. These men were left to fend for themselves so that doctors could observe their worsening condition, followed by death, even up to thirty years after a solution to the illness was created with penicillin.<sup>6</sup> The Tuskegee Syphilis Study is but one of many examples of how historical oppression may influence personal choices in medical-based decisions. Because of the public distrust in medical systems, as a result of a long history of oppression and abuse by those in power, mandating vaccination for children may be a solution that causes societal problems as well. People may be hesitant to trust a system that has exploited them in the past, and this is not something that can be solved with a mere promise.

### ***Potential Issue Two: Inequities in Distribution***

Vaccination has had a historical issue in terms of ensuring equal access, and simply mandating necessary vaccinations for children, will not necessarily mean those who need it will get it. Many communities which currently face problems in the world of healthcare lack the proper infrastructure to properly administer these cures, and therefore mandation would not solve anything. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many communities struggled with accessing the vaccine that first came out in late 2020.<sup>7</sup> Less economically developed countries had little to no access to these vaccines until late 2021 or early 2022, while more economically

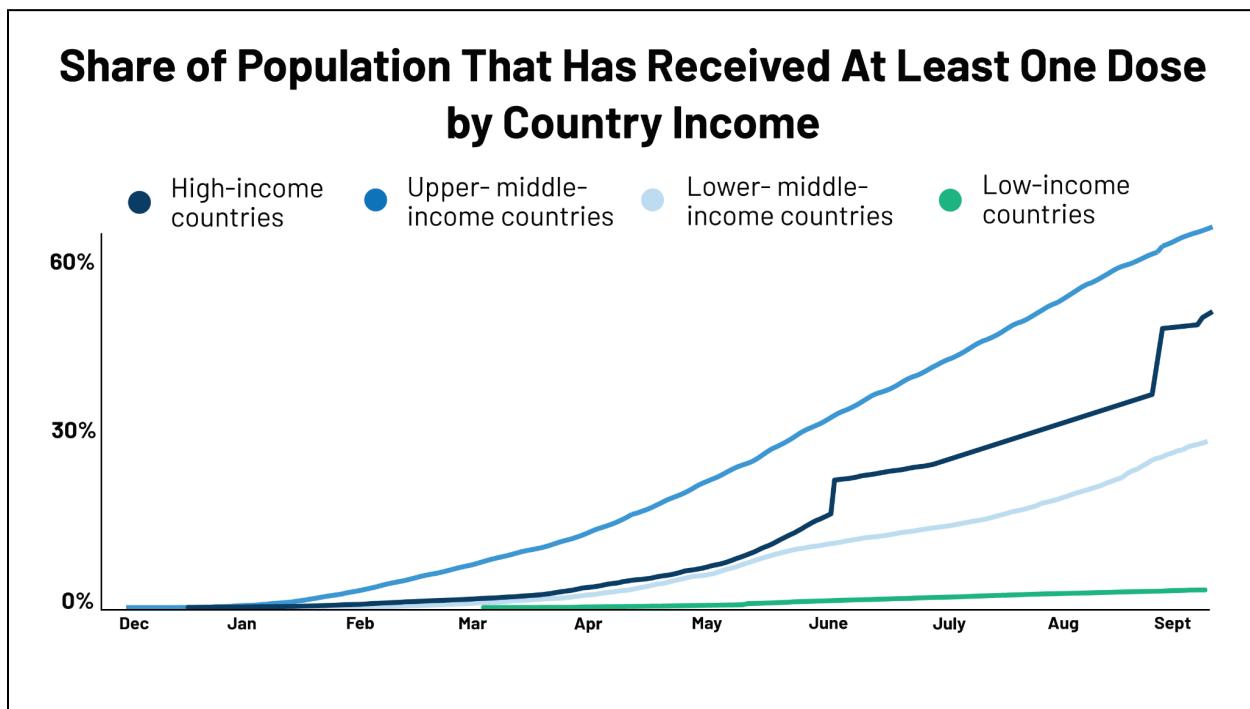
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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Bardosh, Kevin, Alex de Figueiredo, Rachel Gur-Arie, Euzebiusz Jamrozik, James Doidge, Trudo Lemmens, Salmaan Keshavjee, Janice E. Graham, and Stefan Baral. 2022. “The Unintended Consequences of COVID-19 Vaccine Policy: Why Mandates, Passports and Restrictions May Cause More Harm than Good.” *BMJ Global Health* 7 (5): e008684. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmigh-2022-008684>.

developed countries were given access to these vaccines in early 2021.<sup>8</sup> In order to create a sustainable method of vaccine administration and distribution, the accessibility of vaccines amongst different economically situated nations worldwide must be acknowledged. If delegates are on the pro-vaccination mandate side of the debate, this should be taken into consideration when drafting resolutions.

Figure 2: The percentage of COVID-19 vaccinations within populations of countries with different economic statuses in December 2020 - September 2021 (KFF, 2021).



### **Potential Issue Three: Practical Enforcement of Vaccine Mandates**

In terms of enforcing vaccine mandates for children, government bodies may face a few key challenges. Firstly, parental consent and authority play a huge factor in the mandating of vaccines in children. Parents/guardians are typically granted the right to make healthcare

<sup>8</sup> Duroseau, Brenice, Nodar Kipshidze, and Rupali Jayant Limaye. 2023. "The Impact of Delayed Access to COVID-19 Vaccines in Low- and Lower-Middle-Income Countries." *Frontiers in Public Health* 10 (1087138). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.1087138>.

decisions for their children, thus mandating vaccines for children may be seen as an infringement upon these parental rights. In the majority of nations worldwide, children are not able to provide informed consent, causing parents to be the ones to make decisions on their behalf. Imposing vaccine mandates for children may raise ethical and legal concerns regarding healthcare and government systems, especially if parents do not agree with the vaccination mandates.

Additionally, logistical issues may pose a challenge when trying to enforce vaccine mandates in children. The implementation of vaccine mandates amongst children will require a well-organized system for tracking vaccination status and ensuring all children are up to date on vaccinations. The creation of such infrastructure will be time-consuming, expensive, and require a reliable healthcare system to ensure it runs smoothly. Delegates should consider whether or not this is feasible for their nation when approaching this issue.

### **Case Study - Vaccination in the Age of Napoleon:**

In 1805, Marianne Elisa Bonaparte, Princess of Lucca and Piombino - better known as Napoleon's sister, was the first ruler to attempt the introduction of mandatory vaccination.<sup>9</sup> As a part of her ruling, she tried to mitigate the spread of smallpox, a devastating disease during this era. She introduced an initiative to make smallpox vaccines compulsory for newborn babies and adults, however, was met with many challenges. One of the challenges she faced was the inability to ensure widespread compliance with the vaccine mandate. There was no practical way to keep track of vaccinations during this time and she was unable to devise a robust system to do so. Additionally, Lucca and Piombino lacked a well-established and stable healthcare infrastructure, hindering her success in administering compulsory vaccinations. Despite her many efforts to mitigate the disastrous effects of smallpox, her policy was deemed unsuccessful.

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<sup>9</sup> "The OG Vaccine: Smallpox, Cowpox, and the Procedure That Changed the World." 2021. DIG. April 12, 2021. <https://digpodcast.org/2021/04/11/vaccine-smallpox/>.

### **Benefits/Drawbacks:**

Throughout deliberation of this topic, delegates should recognize the many facets that this issue has when considering solutions. Whether you advocate pro or against vaccination mandates, there is no correct solution, so long as delegates back it with evidence and actionable solutions.

#### ***Benefits:***

By mandating the vaccination of children, there are several bonuses to society. Firstly, this would promote herd immunity within the community.<sup>10</sup> When the majority of people within the society are immune, this will, in turn, help those who cannot be immunized, such as the elderly or newborn children, or those with weakened immune systems who cannot properly protect themselves. As children are both susceptible to disease and constantly interact with one another, putting mandated vaccination in the hands of the government could allow for more consistent and predictable resistance to disease.

In addition, by mandating vaccines for children, those who may be living in households of misinformed parents will still be able to receive essential immunizations to prevent damaging viruses. This could potentially break disillusioned views and increase public awareness of vaccination and its upsides.

#### ***Drawbacks:***

One of the most critical things that delegates must consider in the deliberation of a global vaccination mandate for children is the question of its feasibility. Current infrastructure, costly medical technology, and accessible distribution are all challenges that may be faced when nations

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<sup>10</sup> Mayo Clinic Staff. 2024. "Herd Immunity and COVID-19 (Coronavirus): What You Need to Know." Mayo Clinic. Mayo Clinic. June 1, 2024. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/herd-immunity-and-coronavirus/art-20486808>.

may not have the proper framework for such an extensive task. The cost alone may be enough to be determined unfeasible at the current moment in time.

On a personal level, another important thing to consider is the role of parental autonomy in many cases. Informed consent is one of the most fundamental principles in medical procedures, and by mandation of vaccination for children, this would be removing the parents right to refuse medical intervention. This is also valued differently in different cultures. For example, Western culture places a larger emphasis on the role of parental decision-making than many African states.<sup>11</sup> This is but one of many reasons that the large-scale mandation of vaccination may be a difficult task to realistically implement.

Additionally, it is important to note that different nations have different needs that serve their best interest. Many African nations may be opposed to such a mandate as becoming overly reliant on foreign aid, especially from the European Union and Western powers.<sup>12</sup> Reliance can exacerbate pre existing power dynamics between nations, and have long-term repercussions for a nation that is dependent on others for needs such as vaccines.<sup>13</sup>

On paper, it may seem that there are more drawbacks than benefits, but this is not inherently true. A critical aspect of this issue is that it is different for many nations, and that it may be in the best interest for some, and not for others. Delegates are encouraged to recognise this, and based on their countries policies, actions, and needs, determine which side of debate they will find themselves on.

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<sup>11</sup> Lansford, Jennifer E. 2021. "Annual Research Review: Cross-Cultural Similarities and Differences in Parenting." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 63 (4): 466–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13539>.

<sup>12</sup> Kwemo, Angelle. 2017. "Making Africa Great Again: Reducing Aid Dependency." Brookings. April 20, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/making-africa-great-again-reducing-aid-dependency/>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

## Various Perspectives:

It is important to note that the following are generalizations about possible stances a nation may have based on their geographic location and socioeconomic status. The following two perspectives are based on different ideas a nation should consider when discussing the issue:

### **Western Nations**

There are several reasons that Western nations may desire the implementation of such a mandate. As there may already be pre-existing infrastructure to support the transition, the costs required to do such a maneuver will be less than that required for a large overhaul and installation. However, Western nations may not desire to share the resources that they have procured. This can be seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, when nations such as the USA and EU stockpiled vaccines while many African states were unable to procure due to inequities in distribution.<sup>14</sup>

### **African Nations**

Many African nations may want to avoid dependency on the UN and Western allies, especially regarding medical technology.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, implementing trade deals in this relationship can lead to the exploitation of precarious resources these nations may need. Although having these vaccinations can lead to better medical services, there is also the question of suitable infrastructure, as the implementation of a mandate is useless if there is no way to administer it.

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<sup>14</sup> Sidibé, Michel. 2022. "Vaccine Inequity: Ensuring Africa Is Not Left Out." Brookings. January 24, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/vaccine-inequity-ensuring-africa-is-not-left-out/>.

<sup>15</sup> Kwemo, Angelle. 2017. "Making Africa Great Again: Reducing Aid Dependency." Brookings. April 20, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/making-africa-great-again-reducing-aid-dependency/>.

## Case Study – COVID-19 Vaccination in Sub-Saharan Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted some of the major issues that exist in regards to vaccine accessibility and distribution. Wealthy nations such as the USA and UK and pharmaceutical companies acted in their own best interests, stockpiling vaccines, and many African nations were unable to get ahold of the equipment. By the end of 2021, less than 8% of Africa's 1.2 billion population was fully vaccinated.<sup>16</sup> The inequities in the distribution of these vaccines is critical for understanding the role socioeconomic power plays in regards to access to proper resources and treatment. Delegates are encouraged to discuss the inequities that may face certain nations when it comes to accessibility of vaccines correlating to the distribution of vaccines for children.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International. 2022. "Sub-Saharan Africa: Millions Denied Vaccines, Deepening Inequality and Human Suffering from Conflicts Sum up 2021." Amnesty International. March 29, 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/03/sub-saharan-africa-millions-denied-vaccines/>.

<sup>17</sup> Wollburg, Philip, Yannick Markhof, Shelton Kanyanda, and Alberto Zezza. 2023. "Assessing COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy and Barriers to Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Communications Medicine* 3 (1): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43856-023-00330-9>.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Should parents/guardians have the ultimate authority over their children's medical decisions, or do public health considerations justify mandates?
2. How can we ensure that implementing vaccine mandates is feasible for all nations and all healthcare infrastructures?
3. How effective are vaccine mandates in increasing immunization rates and achieving herd immunity?
4. What are the potential public health consequences of not implementing mandates in areas with low vaccination rates?
5. How can we ensure that vaccines are accessible to all children worldwide, particularly in low-income or marginalized communities?
6. What strategies can be implemented to build trust in vaccines among communities with a history of distrust toward medical and healthcare systems?
7. What potential ethical and legal issues will parents/guardians see arising from mandating vaccines in children?
8. How can global health and United Nations organizations coordinate efforts to establish and enforce vaccination mandates across different countries?
9. How do current political and cultural factors/events influence a country's willingness to adopt vaccination mandates?
10. What alternative strategies (eg. incentives for vaccination) could be effective in increasing vaccination rates without mandates.

## Topic B: Child Labour and Exploitation

### Overview:

Child labour and exploitation refers to the employment of children in industry or business that deprives them of their childhood, education, health, and natural development. It has typically been more impactful in Global South nations and less socioeconomically developed nations, particularly rampant in industries such as mining, manufacturing, agriculture, and more. It can be sometimes assumed to be an issue of the past, however, approximately 160 million children worldwide aged 5 and over are engaged in child labour as of 2020, making up one in every ten children across the globe. Of these 10 children, almost 9 of them are predicted to come from Africa or Asia/Pacific, with these regions accounting for approximately 45% and 40% respectively.<sup>18</sup>

Child labour also perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities, an example being access to quality education for children needing to work to support their families. Additionally, it can also leave these kids vulnerable to trafficking and abuse. Furthermore, due to the aforementioned lack of access to quality education, these children are often unable to get better jobs in the future, leading to an endless cycle of poverty and exploitation. Numerous efforts have been taken in the past to eliminate child labour, however, due to economic disparities, inadequate infrastructure to build on, and the various other factors that exacerbate this issue in many Global South nations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> UNICEF. 2021. "Child Labour." Unicef. 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour>.

<sup>19</sup> Dubay, Alicia. 2020. "Child Labour: Facts and How to Help." Worldvision.ca. World Vision. October 2, 2020. <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/child-protection/child-labour-facts-and-how-to-help>.

### **History in the Western World:**

While child labour, most particularly in the form of apprenticeships placing children in work settings has existed forever, the Industrial Revolution (approx. 1760-1840) greatly exacerbated and amplified the issue of children in dangerous work settings. Due to the high demand for positions, children would work long hours in hazardous environments such as factories and mines, for little profit to support their families. The United Kingdom's Factory Act of 1833, was one of the first major regulations around children in the workplace, and although a very small step, began to increase social movements towards the cause, however, it was not until 1933 that child labour truly 'ended' in the nation.<sup>20</sup>

Aside from wealthy producing nations during the Industrial Revolution, Child labour has also greatly impacted nations in the Middle East. A global study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF estimates that almost 2.5 million children in the Arab States were in child labour at the beginning of 2020, approximately 6% of all children in the region.<sup>21</sup> A large player in the expansion of child labour is multinational corporations. Delegates should keep in mind the current regulations in place for multinational corporations and deliberate ways to ensure corporate compliance with international guidelines so wealthy enterprises do not escape from international law.

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<sup>20</sup> Cartwright, Mark. 2023. "Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution." World History Encyclopedia. Mark Cartwright. April 12, 2023. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2216/child-labour-in-the-british-industrial-revolution/>.

<sup>21</sup> "This Profile Provides Statistics on Child Labour Prevalence and Characteristics in the Arab States Region, Based on the ILO-UNICEF 2020 Global Estimates of Child Labour. Child Labour Statistical Profile: Arab States." n.d. [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Statistical\\_profile\\_GE\\_Arab\\_States\\_FINAL\\_NEW.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Statistical_profile_GE_Arab_States_FINAL_NEW.pdf).

## **Root Causes of Child Labour:**

Several causes continue the issue of child labour worldwide, the first cause centring around the focal point of poverty. The need to survive – and to do so to make money – will lead families to make desperate decisions, such as having a child take on employment, as it is the only thing they can currently do to support themselves. Additionally, this is exacerbated by the lack of education that is available to those stuck in poverty cycles, on a public and personal level. Parents do not understand the short vs. long-term impacts that such employment can lead to uninformed and unwise decision-making, and the children who are forced to work instead of receiving an education are unable to move up in society.<sup>22</sup> This is especially seen when multinational corporations from – particularly – Western nations outsource to the Global South to cheapen labour costs. Secondly, many nations may have a work culture that makes child labour more normalized in their societies. In many cultures, many families require children to perform domestic duties and work as a part of their growth, however, this has enabled a culture where child labour has become acceptable and a normal practice within many communities, especially in Asian nations, where the child labour is the most prominent. This overall perpetuates a long cycle of children being pushed into work by family, community, and societal cultures. Aside from long-term issues, several immediate factors could influence the influx of child labour, such as personal or regional crises.<sup>23</sup> Some examples of such emergencies are armed conflict, natural disasters, and economic conditions, and the regulation of such industries can often be overlooked by corruption if profitable for those at the top.<sup>24</sup> Delegations are encouraged to further look into these root causes when considering solutions and to explore ways for patching up long-term issues.

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<sup>22</sup> ECLT Foundation. 2022. "Why Does Child Labour Happen? Here Are Some of the Root Causes." [Www.eclt.org. eclt Foundation. 2022. https://www.eclt.org/en/news/child-labour-causes.](https://www.eclt.org/en/news/child-labour-causes)

<sup>23</sup> "Child Labour and Domestic Work | International Labour Organization." 2024. [Www.ilo.org. January 28, 2024.](https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipec/sectors-and-topics/child-labour-and-domestic-work)

<sup>24</sup> https://www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipec/sectors-and-topics/child-labour-and-domestic-work.

<sup>24</sup> ECLT Foundation. 2022. "Why Does Child Labour Happen? Here Are Some of the Root Causes." [Www.eclt.org. eclt Foundation. 2022. https://www.eclt.org/en/news/child-labour-causes.](https://www.eclt.org/en/news/child-labour-causes)

## **Major Issues:**

### ***Major Issue One: Access to Education***

Globally, according to the ILO (International Labour Organization), approximately 35% of children, aged 5-17, that are involved in child labour also do not attend school. This presents a significant issue and one of the most prevalent consequences of child labour, as it often traps children in lasting cycles of poverty and limits them from achieving their full potential further in the future.<sup>25</sup> Oftentimes, children engaged in child labour are simply unable to access education for a few reasons. Firstly, in many regions where child labour is more prevalent, geographic barriers may prevent these children from accessing schools. Schools may be further away or non-existent in some rural areas, making education highly inaccessible. Secondly, many families may face financial barriers, causing them to be unable to access quality education. Families who rely on child labour often cannot afford school fees, uniform fees, school supplies, transportation fees, etc. This makes it impossible for many children to access education, as their families are unable to support their education financially. Thirdly, many child labourers work extremely long hours, from early in the morning, until late at night, leaving no time for education. Many of these children are unable to attend school or study due to these time constraints, making attending school very difficult. Overall, there are a multitude of factors causing children who are involved in child labour to have limited access to education.<sup>26</sup> Delegates are encouraged to think about the impacts of these educational barriers when approaching this issue.

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<sup>25</sup> International Labour Organization. 2021. "Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward | International Labour Organization." [Www.ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2020-trends-and-road-forward). June 10, 2021. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2020-trends-and-road-forward>.

<sup>26</sup> European Commission. 2021. "Child Labour Is Keeping Millions of Children out of School." [International-Partnerships.ec.europa.eu](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/stories/child-labour-keeping-millions-children-out-school_en). European Commission. 2021. [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/stories/child-labour-keeping-millions-children-out-school\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/stories/child-labour-keeping-millions-children-out-school_en).

### **Case Study - Mica Mining:**

Micas are a group of silicate minerals that are commonly found in cosmetic products, electronics, paints, and construction materials. Approximately, 25% of the global production of mica is sourced from two regions in India: Jharkhand and Bihar. In these two regions alone, it is estimated that over 22,000 children, some being as young as 4 or 5, work in mica mines. Many of these children are unable to access proper education and rely on mica mining to make a living. For instance, Pavan, a 10-year-old boy working in a mica mine, works from 7:30 in the morning to 6:00 at night, collecting over 20 kilograms of mica. He says “If I could, I would definitely go to school, but I have to work here”. During his work day, he, his younger brother and mother, Kiran, make a total of 200 rupees (\$3.35 CAD) combined. His mother Kiran says “Of course, I want to send my children to school, [but] there is no other livelihood for us, except this”. This case study shows the dilemma and reality that many families stuck in cycles of poverty and engaged in child labour face. These families may want to send their children to school and their children want to get an education but it is simply inaccessible and impossible for them if they want to be able to afford basic needs such as food and shelter.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Major Issue Two: Unsafe Working Conditions & The Informal Sector***

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines informal work as, “Working arrangements that are in practice or by law not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, or entitlement to social protection or other employment guarantees; for example, advance notice of dismissal, severance pay, or paid annual or sick leave.”<sup>28</sup> In short, it is a part of an economy that is neither taxed nor regulated by a form of government. Because of both of

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<sup>27</sup> “HIDDEN COST of BEAUTY the RISK of CHILD LABOUR in CANADIAN COSMETICS.” n.d. <https://www.worldvision.ca/WorldVisionCanada/media/NCF/Reports/risk-of-child-labour-in-canadian-cosmetics-mica-research-brief-2018-v2.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> (*What Is Informal Employment? ILO Brief*)

these parts of informal work, various issues –including child labour– are exacerbated by the presence of informal sectors. There are several reasons that informal work continues, most notably due to ease of entry, impoverished individuals' need for work, corruption, and more. Economically, untaxed work means that domestic governments will lose money that should have gone to support development programs and infrastructure building. For example, a nation that has lost 20 million dollars due to untaxed resource extraction cannot use that money to support education-building programs. Then, because of the lack of educational development in this nation, children cannot access learning opportunities and may find themselves working in a factory instead of being in a school. Secondly, informal work is unregulated. Because of this, work will often be unsafe, with neither proper training nor resources for employees to succeed, but also a lack of safety measures for workers to be safe in their jobs. This issue is worsened with regard to child labour, as these children may not know the rights and risks associated with work they may be participating in, with safety risks such as machinery, hazardous materials, physical risks, and more. This is relevant no matter what form of work children may be participating in, although perhaps most visually seen in the mining industries. Of course, the only way to truly keep children safe is to keep them from working and being exploited in the first place. Due to this, in regard to the informal sector, we encourage delegates to focus on the monitoring and assurance that laws and regulations surrounding the employment of children are not ignored in the pursuit of financial gain.<sup>29</sup> Delegates should consider ways to strengthen the regulation of informal work sectors and ensure that the employment of children cannot be perpetuated through unmonitored workplaces.

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<sup>29</sup> ibid

### **Case Study - Mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):**

Despite the multitude of regulations and efforts The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has placed on regulating safe and ethical work, the informal job sector remains extremely active and exacerbates the issue of illegal child labour in the nation. The DRC produces approximately 70% of the world's cobalt, and of this number, the majority is mined informally, in which regulation and proper enforcement are difficult to manage. As this work is unregulated and children may not know the basic rights and safety precautions that should be administered, employers will get away with critically dangerous working conditions that will save them money.<sup>30</sup> Firstly, this is an issue as many resources to be mined –such as mercury– are toxic, and without the proper protection, miners will be exposed to materials that will inflict long-term health problems. Children who are forced to work in these mines, typically those in desperate need of money, cannot access proper medical care which only worsens the trouble they are in. Physically speaking, children in mines are also subjected to a variety of issues, such as exhaustion from overwork, exposure to dangerous working equipment –worsened by the lack of skilled training on how to use such equipment– and as mines in informal sectors are unregulated there is increased risk of an overall mine collapse leading to severe issues for these unknowing, exploited children who simply needed money to help support their families.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Major Issue Three: Businesses and their Role in Child Labour***

The involvement of businesses in child labour is a critical problem that occurs when companies employ or benefit from child labour in their operations or supply chains, either directly or indirectly. The biggest factor contributing to the prevalence of child labour within

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<sup>30</sup> Bureau of International Labor Affairs. 2023. "Combatting Child Labor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Cobalt Industry (COTECCO) | U.S. Department of Labor." [Www.dol.gov](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/combatting-child-labor-democratic-republic-congos-cobalt-industry-cotecco). 2023. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/combatting-child-labor-democratic-republic-congos-cobalt-industry-cotecco>.

<sup>31</sup> "Cobalt Sourcing Responsibility: Ensuring Ethical Practices." 2021. Cobalt Institute. May 27, 2021. <https://www.cobaltnstitute.org/cobalt-sourcing-responsibility/>.

businesses is the economic factor. Many businesses may use child labour to reduce production costs and as a means of cheap labour. In competitive industries, businesses may turn to unethical labour practices, such as child labour, to maintain low prices, as consumers will most likely lean towards a business with lower prices, without thinking or caring about ethical labour practices. Additionally, businesses may take advantage of the limited enforcement and cheap wages in certain regions where child labour is a prominent issue, causing them to outsource the majority of their labour to regions typically in developing nations. Furthermore, when businesses outsource their labour, supply chains can easily become extremely complex, especially in industries such as fashion, mining, agriculture, etc. It becomes increasingly difficult to monitor these supply chains, making child labour laws and standards hard to enforce.<sup>32</sup> Overall, delegates are encouraged to think about the role of both businesses and consumers in child labour.

Additionally, addressing issues surrounding child labour may spark concerns about infringing on corporations' rights, such as autonomy in decision-making. Many corporations may feel that strict regulations and oversight on child labour will interfere with their ability to maximize profits and remain competitive with other corporations. Moreover, UNICEF in many cases does not have the power to force corporations to comply with regulations and oversight, as it may violate a corporation's rights. In conclusion, delegates are encouraged to think of creative solutions to address child labour within corporate supply chains, without infringing upon corporate rights.

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<sup>32</sup> Kielburger, Craig. 2024. "Council Post: Supply, Demand and Child Labor: How Businesses and Nonprofits Can Get Kids out of Factories." *Forbes*, August 12, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2019/06/12/supply-demand-and-child-labor-how-businesses-and-nonprofits-can-get-kids-out-of-factories/>.

### Case Study - Shein:

During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Shein, a fashion brand based in Singapore rose in popularity exponentially. Shein offers drastically lower prices than most fashion retailers and is popular amongst many teens for its popular styles and affordable clothes. On social media, many influencers and content creators have been seen buying massive hauls from Shein and throwing away old clothes from Shein that are “not in style” anymore, creating a rapid cycle of fast fashion and high consumer demand. One of the primary reasons this is so commonly done is because Shein offers such low prices, that it becomes easy to buy tons of clothes and disregard old ones. However, this poses an issue as the skyrocket in popularity has caused major problems surrounding sustainable labour practices. The company has faced major criticism and backlash on its labour practices and supply chain. In 2023, the company admitted that they found cases two cases of child labour and factories that were paying workers below minimum wage. Aside from this, an abundance of rumours and allegations of child labour in Shein have surfaced over the past few years online. Many speculate that the majority of the workforce for Shein comes from children working in poor working conditions for extremely long hours at a time. The primary cause of child labour practices is the demand and competition for Shein. Since Shein offers such low prices, they must also produce their clothes at low prices, which often involves the use of child labour, as they typically get paid at a much lower rate. Overall, as the demand for Shein’s cheap products continues to rise, the use of child labour within the company will continue to worsen as well.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Rajvanshi, Astha. 2023. “Shein Is the World’s Most Popular Fashion Brand—at a Huge Cost to Us All.” Time Magazine. January 17, 2023. <https://time.com/6247732/shein-climate-change-labor-fashion/>.

## **Impacts:**

Child labour has profound and long-term impacts on the children and families involved with it. Firstly, child labour can affect the children engaged with it both physically and physiologically. According to the Global Estimates of Child Labour 2017, 73 million children are working in hazardous conditions that can directly endanger their safety and well-being.<sup>34</sup> This hazardous work can lead to injury, disease, disability, physiological damage or even death, as a result of exploitation, abuse, and poor working conditions. Because many work sectors such as agriculture, mining, and other forms of domestic work require the handling of heavy equipment or strong chemicals, it can subject children to serious chronic pain or illnesses. Additionally, many child labourers can often be subject to abuse in forms such as physical, physiological, and sexual, which can deteriorate the mental health and well-being of these children greatly.

Additionally, child labour may provide families with short-term financial relief, as the income generated by their child is typically used to fund basic needs such as food. However, this can often trap families into cycles of poverty further, because their dependence on child labour can prevent them from investing in education for their children. This overall can trap families in cycles of poverty for multiple generations. Ultimately, child labour can cause detrimental effects on the children and families engaged in it, and delegates are encouraged to explore how to minimize the effect of these impacts or stop them altogether.

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<sup>34</sup> International Labour Organization. 2021. "Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward | International Labour Organization." [Www.ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2020-trends-and-road-forward). June 10, 2021. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2020-trends-and-road-forward>.

## **Benefits/Drawbacks:**

### ***Benefits:***

In many developing countries, child labour serves as a major contributor to their economies. While not ideal, many developing nations rely on child labour to sustain industries such as agriculture, textiles, manufacturing, and mining; industries that many developing countries count on to boost their economic growth. While many developed countries may have adult workforces strong enough to maintain these work sectors, many developing countries lack the human resources to create proper workforces without the use of child labour. For example, Niger, the nation with the youngest population in the world, with 58.2% of its population being under 18, may not have a large enough adult population to employ people in sectors such as agriculture.<sup>35</sup> These nations may rely on child labour as a means of reducing labour costs, therefore making exports more competitive between global markets. Ultimately, despite the many concerns and drawbacks raised with child labour, delegates are encouraged to consider how their solutions may impact nations that rely on child labour to sustain their economies,

### ***Drawbacks:***

While there are many drawbacks to child labour such as limiting children's education and endangering their physical and mental health, many more, this drawback section primarily focuses on the long-term drawbacks for nations as a whole. As mentioned, while many nations may rely on child labour as a large portion of their economy, child labour may limit their long-term socioeconomic growth as a nation. In the short term, child labour can reduce costs and boost the economy in many sectors such as agriculture, textiles, manufacturing, and mining, it may reduce the nation's workforce productivity and growth by limiting skill development

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<sup>35</sup> "Strengthening Resilience in Niger | UNICEF Niger." n.d. [Www.unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org/niger/strengthening-resilience-niger). <https://www.unicef.org/niger/strengthening-resilience-niger>.

through education in many cases. Because many children engaged in child labour have limited access to education, in many cases, they will be unable to achieve their full potential and get better jobs in the future. This can overall perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit a nation's growth. In conclusion, delegates are urged to think about the long-term drawbacks of child labour on a nation's growth.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How can we improve access to education as a way to break the cycle of child labour?
2. What are the cultural, societal, or educational barriers preventing families from seeing the long-term impacts of child labour?
3. What strategies can be implemented to help those who have escaped child labour?
4. How can we ensure transparency within business supply chains as a way to prevent child labour?
5. How can businesses balance ethical labour practices with economic pressures to reduce costs?
6. Should consumers be held responsible for unethical labour practices by demanding cheap goods and to what level should they be held responsible?
7. How can we ensure that children working in unregulated industries –such as mining in the DRC– are educated about their rights and the safety risks of their work?
8. How can nations effectively regulate industries where informal work is prevalent, especially when enforcement mechanisms are weak or corruption is widespread?
9. What measures can be taken to potentially help nations that rely on child labour as a large portion of their economy?
10. What are some ways to support children who are currently stuck in unsafe work and cannot escape?

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