Crescent School Model United Nations 2025

A Background Guide for:

United Nations Children's Fund

Written by: **Maria El-Arif**

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Land Acknowledgement

Crescent School and the staff of CSMUN III acknowledge that we are gathered upon and would like to honour the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples and it is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We thank them for their stewardship of the land, and we are in solidarity with our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters as we move forward in reconciliation.

Acknowledging the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples is not only a gesture of respect but also a recognition of the historical and ongoing injustices they face. It is a reminder that the impacts of colonization, displacement, and systemic discrimination continue to reverberate today. We would like to take the opportunity to honour the resilience of Indigenous communities and commit to amplifying their voices in our pursuit of justice and equity.

Equity Disclaimers

In the event that you have concerns about equity, diversity, inclusion, or belonging or are uncomfortable due to the actions of another delegate, chair, co-chair, or staff member of CSMUN III, please reach out to the Equity Team to file your concern. Equity is outlined through the code of conduct listed above. You may reach out to the equity team through an anonymous form, by speaking with your chairs, or by emailing any member of the CSMUN II Secretariat if you feel comfortable doing so. The Equity team can be reached at csmunequity@crescentschool.org

The Equity Form is here to submit any equity concerns (Equity Form). This can be found also in committee rooms.

Equity concerns are taken very seriously at CSMUN III. The equity policy of CSMUN III is strict in accordance with the school's Diversity Statement and the Crescent School Constitution, which includes the Crescent School Declaration of Student Rights, and violations outside of reason will not be tolerated. The School's Constitution was prepared in accordance with, and in support of, the Safe Schools Act and corresponding principles in the Education Act, as well as the Human Rights Code. When an equity is filled, the CSMUN III Equity team will step in and take appropriate steps and actions to remedy the situation. CSMUN III is committed to ensuring that everyone is valued with respect, responsibility, honesty, and compassion. We are committed to pursuing disciplinary action as stated above if needed to facilitate a positive and safe environment.

Tech Policy

Please note that some form of Smart Device is required to participate in CSMUN III. While we are a paper conference (with the exception of crisis committees), delegates will need to use their computers to write and work during the unmods. Communications with delegates, the dias or other staff can be done either via paper notes or email.

Delegates at CSMUN are expected to utilize technology responsibly and ethically throughout the conference. While the use of smart devices, computers, and digital tools is necessary for research, writing, and collaboration, delegates are prohibited from utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) systems or automated tools to gain an unfair advantage or manipulate conference proceedings. Pre-writing resolutions outside of unmods and using AI to write resolutions and working papers is also prohibited. Delegates must also refrain from engaging in any illegal activities, including but not limited to hacking, piracy, or the distribution of harmful content to anyone in or outside of the conference.

Letter from the Secretary-General

A Letter from the Secretaries General and Deputy Secretary General of CSMUN III

Dear Delegates and Faculty Advisors,

Welcome to the third iteration of the Crescent School Model United Nations conference! Thanks to your support, our inaugural conference in April 2024 was a tremendous success, and CSMUN II built on that momentum with even greater participation and enthusiasm. We are now thrilled to invite you to CSMUN III, taking place on December 13–14, 2025, at Crescent School in Toronto.

Since our last conference, the Crescent MUN team has continued to grow in both size and passion. We've welcomed new members, explored fresh ideas, and remained committed to fostering a vibrant environment where students can engage with global affairs, diplomacy, and debate. We're excited to share this passion with you once again.

CSMUN III will feature a dynamic range of committee simulations, including but not limited to DISEC, WHO, the Canadian House of Commons, and an Ad Hoc, along with a special networking event. Delegates can look forward to rigorous debate, thought-provoking dialogue, and the opportunity to connect with peers from across the region and beyond. Registration for CSMUN III is now open! We encourage all interested delegates and faculty advisors to explore our website for full details and to secure your place at the conference. Please note that registration will close on December 10, 2025.

To stay updated on all things CSMUN, be sure to follow us on Instagram at @cs.modelun. If you have any questions or need assistance, don't hesitate to reach out to us at modelun@crescentschool.org. Our team is here to support you every step of the way.

Thank you for considering attending CSMUN III. We can't wait to welcome you to Crescent School for what promises to be our most exciting conference yet.

Sincerely,

Deren Terzioglu & Gregory Mavroudis | Secretaries-General of CSMUN III
Joel Green | Deputy Secretary-General of CSMUN III
Crescent School Model United Nations 2025

A letter from Dais

A Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Thank you for choosing to model one of the most impactful UN agencies in the world here at CSMUN III. My name is Maria El-Arif and I am honoured to serve as your director for UNICEF!

I am currently a senior at the Lycée Français de Toronto. This is my third year of MUN and I have the privilege to be a part of the All-American MUN Team. I intend to attend medical school with the goal of becoming a pediatrician, which is why I am deeply drawn to UNICEF's mission - ensuring every child has the chance to live, learn and thrive. My favourite parts of MUN are seeing how youth channel their willpower into real-world solutions, as well as the friendships we build along the way.

UNICEF is my favourite committee, having represented it internationally at MUNUC in Chicago. I witnessed how countries that may not always agree put aside differences to protect the most precious and vulnerable - through funding collaborations, innovative ideas in conflict zones, policies addressing child labor and so much more. As your director, I am eager to be able to witness you do the same if not better.

In terms of preparation, this background guide will provide broad resources, but it should not be your sole source of information. I encourage all delegates to research their country's positions thoroughly and conduct independent research.The best way to grow in this committee is to speak up, share ideas, and collaborate boldly.

A reminder: unlike some committees where decorum may slip, the topics we will be discussing are real issues children face at this very moment. These are problems that unjustly determine the futures of millions of children worldwide. It is by geographical luck that you and I live in a city safe from danger and harm. That being said, feel free to be creative with your solutions, think outside the box, and use engaging hooks — but never lose sight of our main goal: helping children.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns!
Sincerely,

Maria El-Arif | Chair of CSMUN III: UNICEF

Part 1

Introduction to the Problem

About the Committee

After the devastation of World War II, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund was created in 1946. Its primary mission was to provide food, shelter and healthcare to children who greatly suffered from the war. Decades later, it still serves as humanitarian and development aid for children globally, operating under ECOSOC, and actively collaborating with other UN agencies like UNHCR and WHO. Its primary goal is to protect and promote children's rights, whoever they are, wherever they live.

As the world continues to experience devastating conflicts and humanitarian crises, children pay the highest price. In regions affected by conflict and child labor and exploitation there are millions of boys and girls who are exposed to unthinkable forms of violence, they endure psychological and physical trauma that stems from a variety of root causes. Through it all, they lose critical health, education ,protection services, clean water and food. They are found fighting against life threatening conditions.

UNICEF, is always there, at the forefront, to uphold the rights of all children affected by such events. They stay and deliver before, during and after an emergency. Doing everything to provide vulnerable children with what they need, engaging in partnership with communities, local partners and authorities. UNICEF does not take sides, under international law, parties to a conflict are obliged to protect all children from harm. It is never acceptable to put children at risk during times of war. Delivering aid is always dangerous. Without safe access, unarmed humanitarian workers struggle to reach children and their families.UNICEF cannot end wars, but can serve and protect children. They advocate at every level to demand unimpeded humanitarian access, to speak out on urgent needs of children, and call for an end to conflicts where children's rights are being violated.

Both armed conflict and child labor and exploitation represent severe violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), particularly Articles 6, 19, 28, and 32–36, which guarantee a child's right to life, protection from violence, education, and freedom from economic exploitation. These two issues are deeply interconnected: conflict leads to displacement, poverty, family separation, and instability, making children far more vulnerable to recruitment, trafficking, and exploitative labor.

Conversely, the existence of widespread child labor can reinforce cycles of violence and insecurity—children who are trafficked or exploited for labor may later become involved in conflict activities, forced recruitment, or trafficking networks. The overlap between these crises highlights the urgent need for coordinated, child-centered global action.

With millions of children worldwide affected by armed conflict and forced labor, how can the international community safeguard the world's most vulnerable and guarantee them a future they deserve?

Part 2

Topic A: PROTECTING CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ZONES DEFINITION & SCOPE

Current Situation:

1 in 6 children globally live in areas affected by conflict, forced to face unthinkable violations as the world experiences the highest number of conflicts since World War II. A child in a conflict zone is defined by two key factors, their age (under 18) and their specific exposure to the harms of armed conflict. This includes being a victim of the Six Grave Violations established in 1999 in the first resolution on children and armed conflict adopted by the United Nations Security Council. Later in 2005, the Security Council established a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to systematically monitor, document and report on violations committed against children in situations of concern around the world. A grave violation is an action that causes significant harm or poses a serious threat to the well-being and rights of children, they are severe in nature and demand immediate attention and intervention. The first violation is killing and maiming of children, these are kids who are killed or injured by crossfires, bombardment, shellings, and other tools of destruction. In 2022 the highest number of children killed was in Ukraine, Burkina Faso, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while most cases of maiming of children were in occupied Palestine. The second violation is the recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups. In conflict setting children are abducted and forced to join armed groups, as a means to escape poverty and defend their communities. 16 year old Kabera from the DRC, was threatened to be killed if he did not join the militia. " They trained me on how to assemble and disassemble the weapon and how to do bad things. For example, how to kill people," says the teen. Kabera was reintegrated back into his community with the support of a save the children local partner, however not all have that chance, and experience horrific acts of violence, which can lead to serious long term psychological consequences. The third violation is attacks on schools or hospitals, as they must remain zones of peace for children. When they are attacked or destroyed, the disruption of these services have detrimental effects on children. In Sout-east Ukraine, the Russian armed forces destroyed essential healthcare. The fourth violation is rape or other grave sexual violence. Sexual violence can be a caracteristics of war, often directed towwads girls and boys, marked by a lack of rule of law. It is used as a tactic of war, to humiliate a population and force displacement. Victims of this crime endure psychological trauma, sexually transmitted infections, early projections, rejections from their families, and even be forced to drop out of school. In Sudan girls face an astonoshing high number fo sexual assault and rape by armed combatants. Between april and july 2023, 88 cases of rape were officially verified, this is only 2% of the actual number. The fifth violation is abduction of children. Armed groups abduct children in high quantities as a tactic to terrorize or target ethnic groups or religious communities. These children face brutal treatment, and can be followed

by other grave violations, like killing,maiming,recruitment into armed forces, or sexual violence. Israeli children were abducted and taken hostage by Hamas, a terrorist organization in Palestine. Hostage- taking is an absolute prohibition under international humanitarian law and constitutes a war crime. The last violation is the denial of humanitarian access for children, which threatens the lives of children by refusing the access of basic needs. In Gaza, water, food, shelter, and medicine has been prevented from entering the area, leaving millions of children and families facing famine-like conditions and in desperate needs of basic assistance. In 2022 alone, 27,638 grave violations against children were verified worldwide.

CAUSES AND DRIVERS

The world is currently experiencing the highest number of conflicts since World War II. 2024 has been one of the worst years on record for children in conflict in UNICEF's history- both in terms of the number of children affected and the level of impact on their lives. Conflict drives approximately 80% of all humanitarian needs around the world, disrupting access to essential needs, but why are children being harmed, recruited, displaced or exploited in armed conflict? Around the world thousands of boys and girls are recruited into government forces and armed opposition groups to serve as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers or in other roles. Girls – and sometimes boys – are also recruited for sexual purposes. States/armed groups do this due to weak governance, prolonged conflict, lack of birth registration, and lawlessness. Another factor is their displacement, "One day at school, I heard the war, the guns that sounded like 'tow tow tow'. The soldiers came and fought the pupils and I hid there for three days. My parents came and collected me and we went home for two days. It was so nice and quiet and we didn't think it would get noisy again. When it did, there was no time to think about clothes." These are words from nine-year-old Nyaboth and her twin sister fled their home in South Sudan after witnessing mass killings. Although the pair found safety in Pugnido refugee camp, Ethiopia, she can never forget the simple treasures she left behind. Half of the world's refugees are children, most will spend their entire childhood far from home, exposed to the six grave violations. Other factors of displacement are destruction of essential services, like food, education, healthcare. At the end of 2023, 114 million people worldwide were displaced. A key driver of children being harmed in conflict zones is the collapse of the systems meant to protect them. War crimes—such as attacks on schools, hospitals, and aid routes, and unchecked killing, abduction, and recruitment—break down the rule of law, shut down essential services, and erase protection mechanisms, creating the conditions in which displacement, trafficking, and exploitation intensify. In this vacuum, trafficking networks expand as unaccompanied and displaced adolescents lose family structures and community safeguards and become easy targets in environments where legal oversight has weakened. Sexual violence and conflict-related pregnancies escalate for similar reasons: the loss of safe spaces allows armed groups and opportunistic actors to target girls and adolescents with greater ease. The breakdown of education and health systems removes

the stability, supervision, and essential care children rely on, leaving them unprotected and exposed. Finally, state collapse and weak governance deepen these risks by undermining the institutions responsible for safety, oversight, and basic services, creating a vacuum in which armed groups, traffickers, and other actors can exploit children without restraint.

IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

Understanding how armed conflict impacts children and adolescents in wartime helps us take the necessary time and space to attend to, and address, the unique exposures. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR (1948) Article 25 (1) states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." What happens when children are stripped of this right? One of the most overlooked consequences of conflict is the severe toll it takes on children's mental health. Young people in these regions face high rates of PTSD, chronic stress, and trauma, which create long-term developmental harm. Globally, one in seven adolescents already lives with a mental health condition, but the risk is significantly higher in conflict zones, where constant fear and instability worsen psychological distress. Repeated exposure to violence—such as attacks on homes, health facilities, and communities—creates overwhelming anxiety and feelings of terror. Studies from conflict settings show increases in PTSD and emotional distress, and the effects often persist long after hostilities end.

Conflict also has devastating effects on children's physical health. In 2023 alone, 4.8 million children died before their fifth birthday, including 2.3 million newborns in their first month—deaths largely driven by unequal access to healthcare, nutrition, and protection. In conflict zones, preventable illness and injury worsen dramatically as hospitals are damaged, supplies run out, and vaccination systems collapse. Children face heightened risk of death or lifelong injury from bombings, collapsing buildings, and other explosive weapons used in populated areas. Together, the breakdown of healthcare, exposure to violence, and loss of essential services create severe and lasting physical and mental health consequences for children living through war.

There are fundamental needs a child requires, things we take for granted everyday. In war zones, food insecurity is a huge issue, especially for children as it hinders their growth, learning and survival. In 2024, 150.2 million children under five were stunted, 38 million children under five were acutely malnourished across 26 nutrition crises. Conflict is now the main driver of hunger in 20 of the world's 53 worst food crises, with many children being born into hunger. This worsens when fighting drives large numbers of people from their homes, land and livelihoods.

Another issue is clean water scarcity. This has a direct impact on children, as water is a fundamental necessity to life. More than ten years of conflict in Syria has seriously damaged the water-supply network, reducing supply by between 30 and 40 per cent.

Restricting access to water as a tactic of war – or damaging facilities that supply water, treat wastewater or provide electricity – has a negative impact both immediately and in the long term on the health of already very vulnerable people. The lack of drinking water is one of the major causes of forced displacement.

Not only does conflict affect basic needs to live, but also for hygiene. For young girls, access to menstrual health and hygiene can lead to a variety of health issues. Menstrual hygiene products are largely overlooked, leading women and adolescents to use unhealthy alternatives. The burden of menstruation and the unmet needs of menstruating women rise during conflicts. Menstruation in conflict-affected settings is overlooked in humanitarian responses, as evident by the lack of research, documentation, interest and access to appropriate products, facilities and education.

Nearly 20 million infants missed at least one dose of DTP-containing vaccine, including 14.3 million 'zero-dose' children who never received a single vaccine. This is one example of the impact of collapsed health care systems. Attacks on healthcare have led to suspension, closure, and relocation of health facilities; loss of health workers; and a lack of medical supplies. This reduced functioning capacity makes it difficult to treat chronic diseases or manage outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. Additionally since the service is limited there is an increased triage forcing many patients to be discharged early or left untreated due to lack of space and resources.

Last but not least, a major impact conflict has on children is the complete loss of education and safe learning spaces. Around 103 million school-aged children in conflict-affected or fragile countries missed out on education in 2024.Facilities have been damaged, converted into shelters, or are too dangerous to access, leaving millions out of school.Sharp rise in attacks on schools result in death, abduction and trauma of teachers and students. Some examples are in Gaza, where 660 000 children were left out of school, with many classrooms converted into shelters. In Ukraine 1,850 education facilities have been damaged since the beginning of the conflict.

In conclusion, the impact of conflict zones on children are inhumane and unjust, they persist in the long term and halt the lives of millions. UNICEF can not stop wars, or conflicts, but they can aid by alleviating the impacts of conflict zones

KEY LEGAL & INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The global framework protecting children in armed conflict is built around one simple idea: no child should ever be on a battlefield. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes this foundation, and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) strengthens it by raising the international standard to 18. Under OPAC, States must ensure that children are never forced to fight, cannot be compulsorily recruited, and cannot take a direct part in hostilities. They also must make sure voluntary recruitment is genuinely voluntary—requiring parental consent, proof of age, and full transparency about what military service entails. OPAC goes beyond prevention: it requires States to demobilize any child used in hostilities and provide the

physical, psychological, and social support needed for recovery. UN institutions such as the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) and partners like UNICEF, OHCHR, and UNHCR work alongside governments to push for universal ratification and support reintegration programs worldwide. Countries like Canada have translated these commitments into action by legally prohibiting deployment under 18, creating strict age-verification systems, involving families in the recruitment process, and funding international reintegration projects in places such as the DRC, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka.

However, even the strongest legal tools face serious challenges. OPAC's protections often break down on the ground: armed groups—explicitly banned from recruiting anyone under 18—continue to do so "under any circumstances," and States frequently struggle to monitor or enforce violations in active war zones. Many governments face difficulties implementing mandatory reporting, criminalizing recruitment, or maintaining consistent oversight. Reintegration, although required by OPAC, is chronically underfunded and stretched thin, leaving children without sustained psychological support, education, or family reunification services. Humanitarian access is often restricted, governments sometimes deny violations, and coordination between national institutions and international agencies can be weak. These gaps reveal the stark contrast between what international law promises and what children in conflict actually experience.

Case Study I: Gaza – Denial of Humanitarian Access & Collapse of Basic Services

The crisis in Gaza represents one of the clearest examples of the sixth grave violation: the denial of humanitarian access. For months, children have faced famine-like conditions as food, clean water, medicine, fuel, and shelter are systematically blocked from entering the region. Hospitals operate at a fraction of their capacity, neonatal units lose power, and thousands of injured children go untreated. More than 660,000 children remain out of school, with many classrooms turned into shelters. This case shows how restricting humanitarian access does not only hinder aid — it directly threatens a child's right to survive.

Case Study II: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – Recruitment, Sexual Violence & Displacement

The DRC remains one of the world's largest child-recruitment crises. Armed groups continue to abduct and force children into combat roles, labor, and sexual exploitation — violations intensified by weak governance and lack of birth registration. Children like sixteen-year-old Kabera, who was forced to learn how to "kill people," demonstrate the psychological and physical trauma these children endure. Massive displacement strips children of family protection and exposes them to trafficking networks that thrive in lawless environments. The DRC illustrates how multiple grave violations often occur simultaneously.

Case Study III: Sudan – Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

Since the escalation of conflict in 2023, Sudan has seen an alarming rise in conflict-related sexual violence. Between April and July alone, 88 cases of rape were verified — understood to be only a tiny fraction of the real number. Girls are targeted during displacement, at checkpoints, and inside their homes. Sexual violence is used to terrorize populations, push communities from strategic areas, and silence entire groups. Survivors often face pregnancies, STIs, family rejection, and long-term psychological consequences. Sudan shows how the collapse of rule of law removes every layer of protection for girls.

Case Study IV: Ukraine – Attacks on Schools & Hospitals

Ukraine remains one of the most documented cases of grave violations against children. As explosive weapons continue to be used in populated areas, hundreds of schools and hospitals have been damaged or destroyed — stripping children of education, healthcare, and psychological stability. Attacks on civilian infrastructure violate international humanitarian law and have left more than 1,850 education facilities impacted. Children experience persistent fear, loss, and disruption of their developmental milestones. Ukraine demonstrates how attacks on essential services erase children's sense of safety long after the conflict ends.

Case Study V: South Sudan – Displacement, Hunger & System Collapse

South Sudan shows the extreme vulnerability of displaced children. Millions have fled violent clashes, often separated from their families. In refugee camps across the region, children face acute malnutrition, lack of clean water, and collapsed healthcare systems. UNICEF child protection programmes here are only 20% funded, making long-term recovery extremely difficult. South Sudan exemplifies how displacement, hunger, weak governance, and underfunded services combine to create life-threatening conditions for children.

BARRIERS TO ACTION

Unfortunately, protecting children in conflict zones is not as simple as proposing solutions and implementing them. UNICEF's work is consistently hindered by a series of barriers that limit the impact of humanitarian aid.

Restricted humanitarian access remains one of the most immediate obstacles. In many settings, the physical environment itself becomes a danger: intense hostilities, explosive ordnance, and direct attacks on humanitarian personnel and facilities impede movement and place workers' lives at risk. Equipment and supplies are stolen, convoys are blocked, and communities become unreachable. Beyond physical dangers, bureaucratic measures frequently delay or stall operations, while sanctions and counter-terrorism regulations complicate or impede payments, procurement, and the delivery of essential goods. Even humanitarian neutrality becomes a vulnerability—if an organization is

perceived as aligned with any political or military actor, trust collapses, negotiations fail, and access becomes even more restricted.

Government obstruction and denial of access further exacerbate these barriers. Humanitarian corridors, "days of tranquility," or temporary relief arrangements can only be established with the agreement of all parties involved—yet in many conflict settings, such consent is either delayed, politicized, or withheld altogether. Bureaucratic restrictions, misinformation campaigns, and administrative barriers continue to undermine the ability of humanitarian actors to establish and maintain safe routes to populations in need.

On top of this, funding limitations severely constrain UNICEF's ability to act. UNICEF received only 54% of its US$4.16 billion humanitarian appeal, leaving a staggering 46% gap in essential services for children. Some emergencies face even more dramatic shortfalls—Pakistan (83% underfunded), Cameroon (80%), Burkina Faso (76%), and Venezuela (73%). Without additional resources, millions of children cannot attend school, receive vaccinations, access nutrition programmes, or be protected from abuse. Child protection programmes in South Sudan, for example, are only 20% funded, while WASH programmes stand at just 26%. In Syria and neighbouring countries, nearly 460,000 children risk losing access to education. Globally, funding for peacebuilding and humanitarian work is declining: Germany cut related budgets by 30%, Sweden by nearly 40%, and organisations everywhere are struggling to sustain their operations. The dominance of short-term, project-based funding leads to "stop-start" programming, damages long-term partnerships, and undermines the ability to deliver sustained, effective protection.

Finally, coordination challenges limit the coherence and reach of humanitarian action. UNICEF and its partners are stretched across numerous simultaneous crises—Syria, Yemen, DRC, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Venezuela—each requiring urgent, large-scale intervention. When so many emergencies are drastically underfunded at once, multi-sector coordination becomes almost impossible. Different sectors collapse unevenly: in West and Central Africa, 72% of education assistance is unfunded; in several countries, child protection and WASH have some of the lowest funding rates. Short-term grants force sectors to operate on fragmented timelines, making unified planning deeply difficult. Restricted funding strains relationships with local partners and disrupts the community-level networks that coordination depends on. As humanitarian needs grow more complex, UNICEF and NGOs must triage across too many crises at once, inevitably weakening coordinated responses.

Guiding Questions:

1. How can UNICEF enable safe education during conflict?
2. What strategies reduce recruitment of child soldiers?
3. How can trauma & mental health support be integrated early?
4. How can UNICEF better protect girls (menstrual hygiene, pregnancies)?
5. What role does disability inclusion play in emergencies?
6. How can UNICEF improve access to war-affected areas?

Part 3

Topic B: CHILD LABOR AND EXPLOITATION

DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Child labour refers to work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and exposes them to physical, mental, social, or moral harm. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), child labour is not the same as every form of children's work. Activities such as helping in a family business or doing light tasks outside school hours are not considered child labour if they do not interfere with schooling or development. Instead, child labour refers specifically to work that is dangerous, exploitative, or incompatible with a child's right to education and healthy growth.

Globally, this continues to be a widespread issue. Millions of children between ages 5 and 17 remain in child labour, with 85 million engaged in hazardous forms of child labour. These worst forms, defined under ILO Convention No. 182 (which Canada helped draft and ratified in 2000), include all practices equivalent to slavery such as trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, and the recruitment of children into armed conflict. They also include the use of children in prostitution, pornography, illicit drug activities, and any work that threatens their health, safety, or morals.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) further protects children from economic exploitation and prohibits work that interferes with their education or harms their well-being. Many countries — including Canada — support these standards and reinforce them through laws setting minimum ages for employment, restrictions on hazardous work, and initiatives promoting access to education.

Despite these global frameworks, child labour persists due to poverty, lack of accessible and quality education, economic shocks, weak labour enforcement, and cultural acceptance of child work—especially in regions where families rely on children's earnings for survival. The ILO notes that the vast majority of child labour occurs in agriculture, but children are also involved in domestic work, small urban services, informal industry, and, in extreme cases, cross-border trafficking.

As a result, the scope of this issue spans multiple sectors and regions, ranging from hazardous farm work and household exploitation to trafficking networks and forced labour in global supply chains. Eliminating child labour remains a central priority for the ILO, UNICEF, and national governments, who aim to align policies, strengthen protections, and ultimately ensure that every child has the right to education, safety, and a childhood free from exploitation.

CAUSES AND DRIVERS

Child labour is driven by a web of structural pressures that push children into work and trap families in cycles of poverty. Across low-income and crisis-affected settings, children often contribute a significant share of household income, sometimes up to a quarter or more, making their labour a survival strategy when families cannot meet basic needs such as food, housing, health care, or school costs. Poverty is therefore one of the strongest drivers of child labour, closely linked to low adult wages, unemployment, and a lack of social protection. When households have no savings and no safety net, economic shocks—sudden price rises, job loss, illness, or debt—push children into work or deeper into more hazardous forms of work.

A second core driver is the lack of accessible, quality education. In many rural and informal urban areas, schools are too far, too expensive, overcrowded, or of such poor quality that families no longer see education as a worthwhile investment. Children who do start school may be pulled out early to work in fields, markets, or domestic service; others never enrol at all. Education and child labour become two sides of the same problem: when school is unavailable or ineffective, work becomes "the best use" of a child's time, and when children work long hours, they fall behind or drop out, locking them into low-wage work as adults and perpetuating intergenerational poverty.

Weak governance and the structure of the economy also play a major role. In many countries, legislation on minimum age, hazardous work, and worst forms of child labour either does not fully exist, leaves gaps, or is poorly enforced. At the same time, a large share of work takes place in the informal economy—family farms, home-based workshops, street vending, small unregistered enterprises—where inspections are rare and labour standards are difficult to monitor. Globally, the majority of child labour occurs in agriculture and other informal activities, often within family enterprises rather than formal factories. Demand for cheap, flexible labour in domestic markets and global supply chains adds another layer: in sectors like agriculture, mining, textiles, and other low-cost exports, children are drawn into long hours and hazardous tasks because they are seen as low-cost, easily controlled workers within systems where oversight is weak and subcontracting chains are opaque.

Discrimination, marginalisation and social norms further increase vulnerability. Children from poorer households, migrant families, rural communities, or minority groups are disproportionately represented in child labour. Girls, in particular, are more likely to be pushed into unpaid domestic work—cooking, cleaning, caring for siblings—or into hidden forms of exploitation such as domestic servitude, which are harder to detect and regulate. In many communities, there is still a belief that work is good for children's character or that boys and girls must "learn the family trade," making child labour socially acceptable even when the work is clearly harmful or interferes with schooling.

Finally, crises amplify all of these drivers. Armed conflict, displacement, natural disasters and climate shocks destroy livelihoods, disrupt education, and weaken

child-protection systems. Families who lose land to droughts or floods, or who flee violence, often have no option but to rely on their children's work in agriculture, informal urban jobs, or dangerous activities such as mining and illicit trades. In countries affected by conflict and mass migration, the incidence of child labour is significantly higher than the global average, and children on the move are at particular risk of being trafficked, bonded, or pushed into the worst forms of child labour, including armed groups, commercial sexual exploitation, and criminal economies.

IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

Child labour takes an enormous toll on children's health, safety, and futures. The picture is clear: when a child enters the workforce, they lose far more than time—they lose opportunities, growth, and the basic conditions needed to develop into healthy adults.

One of the most serious impacts is on children's physical health. Millions of children work in environments that directly endanger their bodies. The EU–ILO reports that 73 million children are involved in hazardous labour, meaning work that exposes them to toxic chemicals, heavy machinery, unsafe heights, extreme temperatures, or harmful pesticides—especially in agriculture, which accounts for 71% of all child labourers. Many work in mines, construction sites, manufacturing workshops, or private homes where there is no safety oversight at all. There are an estimated 22,000 children that die each year because of the dangers they face on the job, though the true number is likely higher because much of this work is hidden. Girls face an added layer of risk: in domestic service and trafficking situations, they are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. These harms do not end when the job ends—long-term effects such as chronic pain, respiratory illness, infertility, and even cancer often appear only in adulthood.

Child labour also causes deep psychological harm. Children forced into work—especially in the worst forms such as slavery, trafficking, domestic servitude, or prostitution—experience fear, intimidation, emotional abuse, and trauma daily. They grow up in environments where they are threatened, controlled, and deprived of care. The emotional impact can be long-lasting, contributing to anxiety, depression, PTSD, and developmental difficulties well into adulthood. For children in violent or exploitative forms of work, this trauma is often lifelong.

Another major consequence is the loss of education. Millions of children who work either never enter school or drop out early because long hours and physical exhaustion make learning impossible. Even those who manage to attend classes struggle to concentrate or complete homework. While school attendance drops sharply only after very long work hours, academic performance begins declining much earlier. The result is devastating: children who miss schooling grow up with fewer skills, lower wages, and limited job options. Education is one of the strongest tools for breaking poverty, yet child labour consistently removes this possibility.

These harms also increase children's vulnerability to exploitation. Without the protection of school, family stability, or community services, children become easy targets for traffickers, forced labour networks, and armed groups. Emergencies and displacement worsen this risk—families who have lost homes, income, or stability often feel they have no choice but to send their children to work simply to survive.

Finally, the impacts of child labour extend far into adulthood, creating long-term socioeconomic consequences. Children who work instead of learning grow up to earn less, lack professional mobility, and continue to rely on low-wage, informal jobs. This traps entire families in intergenerational poverty. Physical injuries or long-term illnesses from hazardous work further reduce adult earning potential, and communities lose critical human capital, weakening national development.

Case Study II: The Stuxnet Cyber Operation Against Iran's Nuclear Facilities

The Stuxnet worm was a sophisticated and highly developed cyber tool that was discovered in 2010 and widely linked to a covert underground operation by the United States and Israel. Its purpose was to sabotage the Natanz uranium enrichment facility in

CASE STUDIES

The eastern provinces of the DRC—especially North and South Kivu—hold major deposits of cobalt, tin, gold, and other high-value minerals. Ongoing conflict, displacement, and extreme poverty have created conditions where children are routinely pushed into hazardous mining work or exposed to exploitation around mining sites. Armed groups, middlemen, and even some private actors benefit from weak oversight, making children highly vulnerable.

Key Issues:

Hazardous Child Labour: Children work in artisanal mines carrying heavy loads, sorting minerals, and entering unsafe pits without protection. Many are paid extremely low wages or trapped in debt-based arrangements that leave them unable to leave.

Sexual Exploitation: Girls and young women are recruited around mining areas as "waitresses" but forced into sexual activities they cannot refuse. Some are coerced into transporting smuggled minerals in exchange for promised—often withheld—payment.

Forced Labour & Coercion: Workers, including children, face threats from mine operators or armed groups. In conflict-controlled zones, refusing labour can result in violence or displacement.

Community Displacement: Entire villages have been evicted near expanding mining concessions, losing homes, farmland, and livelihoods—deepening family vulnerability and increasing reliance on child labour.

Weak Protection Systems: Police units responsible for monitoring mines and protecting women and children lack personnel, equipment, and reach. Audits of mining sites are easily bypassed, allowing continued hidden exploitation.

BARRIERS TO ACTION

Despite global commitments to eliminate child labour and exploitation, several entrenched barriers continue to obstruct effective action. These barriers operate at multiple levels — legal, social, institutional, and cultural — and collectively weaken protection systems for at-risk children. Many legal systems still fail to cover the full scope of child exploitation. Laws often rely on binary gender terminology, which leaves boys and gender-diverse children without explicit protection from sexual exploitation. Legal definitions may separate child labour, child sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation, creating confusion that complicates reporting and enforcement. In some countries, legislation permits hazardous work for children under 18, leaving them unprotected in high-risk sectors like mining, agriculture, and domestic work. Even where laws exist, they are weakened by loopholes, outdated definitions, and inadequate implementation. This inconsistency prevents many victims from receiving support, and makes it easier for exploitative practices to continue undisrupted.Children experiencing exploitation face major difficulties accessing support. Gender norms create stigma around male victimization — boys are often viewed as "invulnerable," leading to disbelief, shame, or ridicule when they seek help. Service providers themselves may rely on harmful assumptions, resulting in responses that are justice-focused rather than trauma-informed. Many children fear judgment, punishment, or social rejection, particularly in contexts where victimization is associated with weakness or personal failure. In rural or conflict-affected regions, support centers are scarce, and emergency shelter, counseling, or safe spaces are limited or nonexistent. As a result, many exploited children remain hidden and unsupported. Deep-rooted social norms normalize certain forms of child labour, framing work as "character-building" or necessary for family survival. In some communities, harmful gender norms excuse the exploitation of boys by suggesting that males "cannot be overpowered" or that unwanted sexual attention is something boys should resist on their own. Stigma surrounding sexual exploitation — especially of boys — prevents disclosure, increases shame, and isolates victims. These norms also shape how institutions respond: professionals may overlook signs of abuse, minimize harm, or fail to provide appropriate care. As long as these beliefs persist, prevention and intervention efforts struggle to take hold. Support systems often operate with severe resource shortages and fragmented coordination. Child protection services may lack trained personnel, trauma-informed approaches, or mechanisms to actively reach victims. Short-term or project-based funding weakens coordination between sectors and undermines long-term strategies. Limited communication between legal systems, police, healthcare providers, and community organizations makes it difficult to identify victims or sustain follow-up support. Conflicts between agencies, unclear mandates, and insufficient inter-sector collaboration delay responses and leave many children without consistent assistance. In many regions, institutional structures are simply not strong enough to manage the scale and complexity of child labour and sexual exploitation.

Guiding Questions:

1. What economic, social, and educational factors push children into labour, and how do these drivers vary across regions and crises?

2. How does child labour—especially hazardous and exploitative forms—impact children's physical health, mental health, and long-term development?

3. Which legal frameworks (national and international) are failing to protect children effectively, and what enforcement gaps allow exploitation to persist?

4. How can UNICEF strengthen child-protection systems and expand access to quality education to prevent child labour at its roots?

5. What strategies can address the hidden and informal sectors where most child labour occurs, including domestic work, agriculture, and artisanal mining?

6. How can stigma, harmful gender norms, and cultural acceptance of child work be challenged to improve identification of victims and access to support?

Part 4

Closing Remarks

The story of UNICEF is a story of how much good the human family can achieve when it unites to protect the rights of its youngest and most vulnerable. Over the past 75 years, UNICEF's mission has evolved with the changing needs of children worldwide — but its core promise has never shifted: every child deserves safety, dignity, and a chance to build a future.

Today, as conflicts grow more complex, inequalities deepen, and exploitation becomes harder to detect, the international community faces a defining test. Millions of children trapped in war zones or forced into labour are not statistics — they are lives interrupted, dreams deferred, and futures stolen. Their protection depends on the choices we make, the policies we advance, and the courage we bring into this room.

As delegates, you now carry the responsibility to think boldly, negotiate compassionately, and act with purpose. The solutions you craft here may not end every conflict or dismantle every system of exploitation — but they can shape the global effort to protect children, strengthen institutions, and inspire real change beyond this conference.

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