

# NHSMUN50

National High School Model United Nations



**SOCHUM**  
**UPDATE PAPER**



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Dear Delegates,

I welcome you to the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM)! My name is Andrea Jurado Pérez, and I will be your Assistant Director for Session I of NHSMUN 2024! This is my first year as a member of NHSMUN staff, but it will be my fourth year attending the conference. I have also been a chair a few times at other MUN conferences. I represented Poland in the World Health Assembly (WHA) as a delegate at NHSMUN 2021, Poland in UN-Habitat at NHSMUN 2022, and Singapore in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) at NHSMUN 2023. Being a delegate is one of my best experiences, so I am thrilled to be a staff member. I hope to make this experience as significant for you as it was for me!

I was born in Mexico City, but as a child, I lived in Monterrey, Panama, and Brazil. Afterward, I moved back to Mexico City. I've lived back home for 10 years now. I am studying economics in my second semester of college at Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (TEC)!

Outside of school, I love spending time with my family, friends, and dog. I am also very creative and love to write, draw, and paint. I also love to read. It is so relaxing and entertaining and a great way to be creative. If you have any book recommendations, I would love to hear them! I also love to watch movies and TV shows, mostly about romance or musicals! My biggest passion of all, however, is traveling! I love learning about new cultures, meeting new people, and enjoying different places.

One of the best decisions I ever made was getting involved with Model United Nations (MUN). I've grown in my organization, leadership, and public speaking skills and explored critical global issues. I met three of my best friends from high school through MUN! I know firsthand how MUN conferences can be very stressful, but believe me, it is all worth it. If you believe in yourselves, you will do great and have the time of your lives! I am very excited to meet all of you and work together for a great conference. I can't wait to hear all your ideas, research, and solutions. The best tip I can give you is to come with an open mind, be ready to work, and have fun!

Nicole and I have worked very hard on the Update Paper, addressing essential topics to the debate. Please email us if you have any questions about the issues or anything in general. We would love to answer and help you out! I look forward to meeting all of you, and I cannot wait for the conference! We will have a fantastic time and a great debate!

Andrea Jurado Pérez

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Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee

Session I



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Dear Delegates,

I welcome you to the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM)! My name is Nicole Vázquez, and I will be one of your Assistant Directors for Session I of NHSMUN 2024. This is my first year as a member of NHSMUN Staff, but my second time attending the conference. I participated in NHSMUN 2022 as a delegate representing Belarus in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and it was one of my favorite experiences ever!

I was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, but most of my family is from Spain. I will study Medicine at Universidad Central de Venezuela, and I hope to specialize in oncological pediatrics. Outside school, I work as a camp counselor and love outdoor activities! I enjoy spending time with nature. The ocean is my happy place. You could find me hiking, camping, snorkeling, or running during a free weekend. One of my true passions is working with children. Therefore, I have volunteered at local schools and organized educational workshops to help kids in my community. I am also a very creative person. I love books, animals, rom-coms, and sour candy. My favorite genres are romance and fantasy, so I am happy to hear any movie/book recommendations! I am learning to play piano, so music is always in my head. Above all, I have a deep passion for Model UN and everything it involves.

I have participated in MUN since my first year of high school (five years total!). I was Secretary-General of my school's Model UN conference in my senior year and loved it. I am faculty advisor of my school's national delegation, so if you have any questions about NHSMUN or MUN in general, feel free to ask! After years of practice, I can say that MUN has changed my life completely. It has given me qualities that make me who I am today. For my five years, NHSMUN has been my favorite MUN experience. You get to know many people and end up with friends worldwide. It is an excellent opportunity to grow in many aspects.

I know conferences can be very stressful, but if you do it with your heart, I assure you that you will have the time of your life! Engaging in activities with passion and sincere dedication generates a sense of empathy and compassion in all our undertakings. I am very excited to hear all your ideas and new research. I am sure that you will surprise us all!

I hope you enjoy reading about them! If you have any questions or comments, we are happy to help. We all know what it's like to be a delegate! Once again, I look forward to seeing you all and your excellent speeches. Good luck!

Best regards,

Nicole Vázquez

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Lucas Pham, and I am honored to welcome you all to the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM) for NHSMUN 2024! I am pleased to serve alongside Avery Chen as one of your Assistant Directors for Session II of the conference. I have been participating in MUN as a delegate and conference staffer for five years now, but this is my first year as a NHSMUN staff member. I attended NHSMUN 2022 as a delegate as a junior in high school, and it was undoubtedly my favorite conference ever (which is a big claim because I've done many of them)! If you have any questions about NHSMUN or MUN, don't hesitate to ask!

I am from Huntington Beach in Southern California, where I happily take refuge from the cold winters of my college in Rhode Island. I am a first-year student at Brown University, which is a perfect fit because my academic interests are constantly changing. I'm interested in studying Political Science and Music, but that could easily change at any time since I don't have to declare a major until next year. I wouldn't be surprised if my interests changed before the start of the conference! I'm considering attending business or law school after graduation, and my sights are (currently) set on working on the business side of the music industry. A fun fact is that I wrote and composed a song about Topic B as part of our preparation for the conference. That being said, some of my hobbies include music production, singing, painting, and traveling. I also love fashion and food.

Based on my experience, I know that conferences can be stressful and nerve-wracking. Regardless of how you feel leading up to the conference, I assure you that you will be surrounded by a welcoming community of other passionate, kind, and intelligent young people when you step into the committee room. My time in NHSMUN as a delegate is marked by memories of the interesting conversations and exciting exchanges, I had with new people worldwide. I met plenty of people at NHSMUN nearly two years ago who I still keep in touch with today. Months of work have been put into this conference to ensure that it is as educational and memorable as possible for every person in attendance, and I know that you all will have a great time!

I hope you all find it a helpful resource, and I encourage you to keep looking for the most up-to-date information regarding the topics. Good luck, and I look forward to seeing you in the committee!

Lucas Pham

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Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee

Session II



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**Ellie White**

Delegates,

I am so thrilled to welcome everyone to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural (SOCHUM) Committee this year! My name is Avery Chen, and I will be one of your Assistant Directors for Session II alongside Lucas.

I'm originally from East Brunswick, New Jersey (Central Jersey is not a myth!), where I started my Model UN journey in high school. MUN has been a wonderful experience for me. I'm privileged to have so many fond memories of NHSMUN, whether it was the incredible opportunity to speak at the UN Headquarters or send my friend off to her midnight crisis committee. I've made the best friends both in committee sessions and in the hotel room afterward and discovered a strong passion for public speaking. As a delegate, I've been to NHSMUN twice, once in a general assembly committee (UNCTAD) and once in a historical crisis committee. This is my first time staffing the conference, and being on the other side of everything is super exciting. I hope I'll be able to help all of you have as impressive of an experience as I have had at NHSMUN in the past!

I'm a freshman at the University of California - Los Angeles (UCLA) as an economics major, but I'm considering a pre-law track. At college, I have also been staffing Model UN conferences. In November, I was part of the crisis staff at UCLA's high school conference (BruinMUN), and in April, I'll do the same at their college conference (LAMUN). Although I enjoy the constant warm weather in LA, I'm excited to experience seasons again in New York!

In my free time, I love playing games! At college, though, I'm more limited to online games like Papa's Freezeria (I know every customer's order by heart!) or Minesweeper (I've managed to get all my friends to play, too!). However, at home, I enjoy PC video games (I've recently been playing a lot of Lethal Company.), and I'm a bit obsessed with mechanical keyboards (I've built around five at this point!). I also spend much of my spare time reading (I'm very proud of my 700+ days reading streak!).

The topics we'll discuss this year are vital and intriguing, so I hope you will all enjoy researching these issues and discussing creative solutions. Please feel free to reach out with any questions. I look forward to meeting everyone!

Avery Chen

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Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee

Session II





SOCHUM

NHSMUN 2024



# TOPIC A: IMPROVING RURAL ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Photo Credit: USAID Vietnam

## Introduction

People with disabilities who live in rural areas often face unique challenges. As a result, they may face discrimination and social or cultural rejection. These obstacles can feed cycles of exclusion. Rural groups often hold values that lead to harm to people with disabilities. Delegates must address these social attitudes and actions. Delegates should also consider the many structures and systems that limit accessibility.

These problems are complex and include widespread discrimination. Applying artificial intelligence (AI) to rural healthcare is one way to deal with some of these problems. AI provides creative solutions and fills in gaps in access to public services. This new technology may also help reduce stigmas and the discrimination that people with disabilities face. Therefore, AI's use in healthcare could help people with disabilities live better. Delegates should work towards creating a world in which people with disabilities may be themselves and not live in fear of stigmas and discrimination.

Many states can break down barriers for all of their citizens. This can be done by raising awareness, confronting deeply rooted stereotypes, and using state-of-the-art technologies. It can also be achieved by guaranteeing that people with disabilities in remote places receive the respect, rights, and dignity they deserve. These actions can build more accessible, fair, and caring communities for everyone.

## Healthcare Powered by Artificial Intelligence in Rural Areas

People with disabilities differ in the quality of healthcare they receive. They are likely to face difficulties when accessing healthcare services or may struggle to find these services. This is especially true if they live in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> The United States National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities has recognized the unique barriers that people with disabilities

living in rural areas face.<sup>2</sup> One of the most significant barriers is the inaccessibility of infrastructure in rural areas compared to urban ones. Another is the rural disabled community's lack of advocates. These explain the massive disparity between rural and urban healthcare outcomes for people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

AI refers to computer systems that can perform actions and tasks as if humans did them.<sup>4</sup> These tasks include reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making. AI allows machines to learn from experience. This means they look for patterns within the data they process to model their decision-making. In healthcare, AI includes a wide range of technologies that can vary from virtual assistants to medical diagnosis and healthcare systems.<sup>5</sup> AI can often perform the role a human would function as a doctor. This ranges from determining a medical diagnosis to developing vaccines.

Healthcare solutions based on artificial intelligence can enhance the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of healthcare delivery in rural communities. AI has also been used to prevent medical errors. Medical errors occur in rural areas due to the lack of physicians and resources.<sup>6</sup> Many countries have begun to implement AI systems. For instance, the University of Florida developed a new system called "MySurgeryRisk." The system predicts which patients are more susceptible to complications and may need more attention post-operation. The system was created in 2019, but it began to gain more publicity during the last months of 2023. Surgeons began to

1 Kayla Alvis, "Individuals with Disabilities in Rural America: The Need for Health Services Research," *Academy Health*, November 15, 2023, <https://academyhealth.org/blog/2023-11/individuals-disabilities-rural-america-need-health-services-research>.

2 Alvis, "Individuals with Disabilities."

3 Rayna Sage, Genna Mashinchi, and Craig Ravesloot, "Disability and Rural Health," *Global Public Health*, October 18, 2023, <https://oxfordre.com/publichealth/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190632366.001.0001/acrefore-9780190632366-e-492>.

4 "What is artificial intelligence?" Coursera, November 29, 2023, <https://www.coursera.org/articles/what-is-artificial-intelligence>.

5 Perri Lorri, "What's New in Artificial Intelligence from the 2023 Gartner hype Cycle?" *Gartner*, August 17, 2023, <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/what-s-new-in-artificial-intelligence-from-the-2023-gartner-hype-cycle>.

6 Saurabh A. Pahun, "How does AI help in Rural Development in Healthcare Domain: A Short Survey," *International Journal for Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology* 11, no. 6 (June 2023): 4184-4186,

share that they found the system helpful due to its accuracy. Surgeons have been found to underestimate the risks of specific procedures. The AI tool has proven to be beneficial by accounting for those risks. These risks can include blood clot formation or severe infections.<sup>7</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also recognized that AI has a lot of promise. In October 2023, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO, supported AI's use in healthcare. WHO states that by improving medical diagnosis, AI would help to improve the overall healthcare system. It would also increase the skills of healthcare professionals.<sup>8</sup> WHO also highlights the importance of quality data, which can enhance AI in healthcare. It also notes the importance of establishing safe and efficient regulations to minimize risks and discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

People living in rural areas often lack access to diagnosis centers. Diagnosis centers perform several tests to determine the cause of a condition. These tests include scans, biopsies, hearing tests, and more. These centers are vital. If they are not accessible, untreated illnesses can cause disabilities. In cases of pregnant people experiencing illnesses, lack of diagnoses can result in the deaths of the parent or child.<sup>10</sup>

To address this, many rural areas are beginning to use AI to give a diagnosis. AI-powered diagnostic tools can analyze medical data and support decision-making to give an accurate diagnosis. These tools use up-to-date algorithms and techniques to provide personalized treatment plans to patients. This is done after analyzing their symptoms and medical history.<sup>11</sup> This technology has been implemented in Uttar Pradesh, India. Uttar Pradesh is on its way to becoming a leader in AI-driven solutions for healthcare.

Before AI, Uttar Pradesh had trouble providing its residents with enough healthcare access and services. This is mainly due to its large population. Doctors, nurses, or other healthcare staff use manual ways to diagnose or treat illness. This was extremely time-consuming, which made procedures prone to errors.<sup>12</sup> Now, the state government is working to use AI-based technologies to offer diagnostic services in community health centers in rural areas. Three healthcare sites dedicated to researching AI in healthcare have also been established. Their advances might bridge the gap between urban and rural healthcare.<sup>13</sup>

In Bihar, a largely rural state in India, data shows that early diagnosis leads to positive outcomes for patients. Early diagnosis corresponds to lower treatment costs. It also leads to the prevention of the spread of disease. Bihar has some of the country's highest rates of maternal, neonatal, and infant mortality. For example, in 2020, the maternal mortality rate was 118 deaths per 100,000 women. This rate could be reduced by improving the quality and accuracy of medical attention given to patients.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the long travel times in the country caused by the lack of healthcare infrastructure provoke delayed diagnosis and treatment. This is considered a critical barrier for people with disabilities. Artificial intelligence can fill this absence of immediate and accurate services.<sup>15</sup>

Predictive analytics is one of the most common new services in India. Predictive analytics uses AI to find risk factors and to catch conditions early. This allows for quicker responses and can improve the treatment of those with disabilities. Predictive analytics is used frequently because it provides affordable, successful, and personalized treatments. Hospitals in Bangalore, a city in India, have been using a predictive

7 Lauren Landro, "How 4 hospitals are using technology to reduce medical errors," *Advisory Board*, March 17, 2023, <https://www.advisory.com/daily-briefing/2023/03/15/medical-errors>.

8 "AI shows 'great promise for health' but regulation is key: WHO chief," *United Nations News*, October 19, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142527>.

9 *United Nations News*, "AI shows 'great promise.'"

10 "Discover The Challenges And Strategies For Rural Healthcare In India," Bansal Hospital, September 5, 2023, <https://bansalhospital.com/challenges-and-strategies-for-rural-healthcare-in-india/>.

11 "AI-Powered Diagnostics: The Future of Early Disease Detection and Prevention," LinkedIn, September 27, 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/ai-powered-diagnostics-future-early>.

12 Michal Rogucki, "Innovative Use of AI Brings Diagnostics to Rural Areas of Uttar Pradesh," November 4, 2023, <https://ts2.space/en/innovative-use-of-ai-brings-diagnostics-to-rural-areas-of-uttar-pradesh/>.

13 Rogucki, "Innovative Use."

14 Ruchir Kumar, "Bihar's maternal mortality rate improves, still worse than national average," *Hindustan Times*, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/patna-news/bihars-maternal-mortality-rate-improves-still-worse-than-national-average-101669912444584.html>.

15 Vikram Thaploo, "The State of Telemedicine in India," *Deccan Chronicle*, September 13, 2023, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/lifestyle/health-and-wellbeing/130923/the-state-of-telemedicine-in-india.html>.





Man in a wheelchair in Uttar Pradesh, India

Credit: Adam Jones

analytics-based AI system to provide diagnosis assistance to cancer doctors. Studies suggest the success of this system is 90 percent.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, a lot of people develop disabilities naturally due to aging. This is especially true in rural areas. However, many disabilities related to aging can be avoided or postponed. When health is closely managed, many negative effects of aging can be addressed. This is called preventative care. Preventive care helps anticipate health problems or find them before they become serious. Predictive analytics, such as that used in India, can also help with preventative care.<sup>17</sup>

As of December 2023, Indian hospitals use AI to conduct and analyze imaging. AI can run MRIs of patients and then analyze the images and identify the root causes of illnesses. AI is also used to provide surgeons with more complete views of the areas in which they are operating.<sup>18</sup> AI will only continue to grow in Indian healthcare. Current estimates suggest that the use of AI in Indian healthcare was worth USD 14.6 billion in

2023. This is predicted to exceed USD 100 billion by 2028.<sup>19</sup>

WHO defines telemedicine as the delivery of healthcare services through communication technologies for the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease.<sup>20</sup> This could include video chats and remote monitoring. It could also have care where there is no real-time interaction between the doctor and the patient. For example, a patient sends a picture of a rash that a dermatologist later reviews.<sup>21</sup> While telemedicine is normally used to treat chronic diseases, it can also benefit people with disabilities, especially those in rural communities.<sup>22</sup>

Telehealth can overcome several barriers. It also helps create direct access to safe medical assistance. Patients who do not have access to public transport can use telehealth to be treated from home. Also, people who do not speak the same language as the available doctor can ask for translation options when

16 Vikram Venkateswaran, "Predictive analytics has the potential to revolutionize Indian healthcare," Future Tech Congress, Accessed February 4, 2024, <https://futuretechcongress.com/blog-details/predictive-analytics-has-the-potential-to-revolutionise-indian-healthcare>.

17 Kristi Eaton, "Census: Rural Americans Have Higher Rates of Disabilities Than Urban Dwellers," The Daily Yonder, July 17, 2023, <https://dailyyonder.com/census-rural-americans-have-higher-rates-of-disabilities-than-urban-dwellers/2023/07/17/>.

18 Pooja Jaiswal, "How Artificial Intelligence Is Redefining Health Care in India," The Week, December 10, 2023, <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/cover/2023/12/02/artificial-intelligence-is-redefining-healthcare-in-india.html>.

19 Jaiswal, "How Artificial Intelligence."

20 Vikram Thaploo, "The State of Telemedicine in India."

21 "Asynchronous direct-to-consumer telehealth," Telehealth.HHS.gov, accessed December 26, 2023,

<https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/best-practice-guides/direct-to-consumer/asynchronous-direct-to-consumer-telehealth>.

22 Danny Bonvissuto and Shawna Seed, "What is Telemedicine?" WebMD, November 15, 2023, <https://www.webmd.com/covid/how-does-telemedicine-work>.

using telehealth.<sup>23</sup> People with visual, hearing, or cognitive disabilities can use assistive technologies to better access services. Assistive technologies include screen reading software and text-to-speech systems.<sup>24</sup> Other benefits include increased access to mental health care specialists and wellness programs. Telehealth is also often more convenient in rural areas, as physical healthcare services may be inaccessible.<sup>25</sup>

Machine learning is a type of artificial intelligence that can learn without being constantly programmed with specific commands. Machine learning uses an algorithm that allows it to reason on its own. Given enough data, machine learning can operate with little insight. Machine learning also can help people with disabilities. It does this through various tools that allow people with disabilities to sense and identify without difficulties. For example, machine learning can benefit people who are blind by helping them sense objects around them.<sup>26</sup> Machine learning can also make devices that help with daily activities. This can be applied in fields such as mobility and medication management.<sup>27</sup> Using machine learning algorithms, assistive technology can address the specific needs of individuals with disabilities.

The use of AI in healthcare has multiple benefits. These include prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. There are some ethical and private concerns with these technologies.<sup>28</sup> These include the possibility of leaked personal information. Furthermore, algorithms often can perpetuate myths and stereotypes.<sup>29</sup> Members of SOCHUM should balance AI's benefits with potential concerns when debating its use.

## Stigma and Discrimination Against Vulnerable Groups

According to the UN, “Discrimination is any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on a person’s race, sex, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, language, social origin or other status.”<sup>30</sup> Stigma is defined as “the extreme disapproval of a person or group on socially characteristic grounds that are perceived, and serve to distinguish them, from other members of a society.”<sup>31</sup> It is common for stigma to be attached to disabilities. In turn, this can fuel shame and exclusion. Stigma interferes with individuals’ lives unfairly.<sup>32</sup> Because of stigma, people with disabilities frequently experience discrimination. They are denied employment and education opportunities. They are not allowed to fully participate in all parts of society. Stigma can often lead to unequal opportunities and the denial of rights.

This is a widespread issue. In October 2023, it was found that 20 percent of British people had admitted to having made fun of a person with learning disabilities. A further six percent admitted to having physically assaulted a person with disabilities.<sup>33</sup> This survey required people to volunteer this information. Therefore, it is likely that the actual rate of these acts of discrimination is higher. The recognition and support of the rights of people with disabilities has generally improved in recent years. However, in most societies, firm traditional beliefs have limited progress.<sup>34</sup> As a result, rural communities, which often hold more traditional values, often have higher

23 “Telehealth for Rural Areas,” Telehealth.HHS.gov, accessed December 13, 2023, <https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/best-practice-guides/telehealth-for-rural-areas/getting-started>.

24 Telehealth.HHS.gov, “Telehealth for Rural Areas.”

25 Telehealth.HHS.gov, “Telehealth for Rural Areas.”

26 “Machine Learning vs AI: What’s the difference?” Zapier, October 5, 2023, <https://zapier.com/blog/machine-learning-vs-ai/>.

27 Abe Rafi, “Using Machine Learning to Match Assistive Technology to People with Disabilities,” National Library of Medicine, accessed February 7, 2024, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28873832/>.

28 “Reimagining Healthcare: Unleashing the Power of Artificial Intelligence in Medicine,” National Library of Medicine, September 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10549955/>.

29 National Library of Medicine, “Reimagining Healthcare: Unleashing the Power of Artificial Intelligence in Medicine.”

30 “Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority,” UN Women, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/uncoordination/antiharassment.html>.

31 “Social Stigma,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, January 14, 2016, <https://archive.unescwa.org/social-stigma>.

32 “Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness,” accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination>.

33 Jordan Page, “People with Autism and Learning Disabilities are Still Facing Hate Crimes. Here’s What the Government Needs to Do,” Huffington Post UK, November 1, 2023, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/people-with-autism-and-learning-disabilities-are-still-facing-hate-crimes-heres-what-the-government-needs-to-do\\_uk\\_653bcc14e4b05def8bc77ab6](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/people-with-autism-and-learning-disabilities-are-still-facing-hate-crimes-heres-what-the-government-needs-to-do_uk_653bcc14e4b05def8bc77ab6).

34 UN General Assembly, Convention GC/24, Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/GC/24, (Sept. 18, 2019), <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsqIkirKQZLK2M58RF%2F5F0vEnG3QGKUxFivhToQfjGxYjV05tUAlgpOwHQJsfPpDjXCvIPDmeQ6GNHkvDSHn%2B9q%2FAU8slpDcDhK6MpaRN6iP0I>.

levels of stigma.

The stigma faced by children with disabilities harms their development. This is often worse for girls with disabilities. Because of the lack of educational opportunities, girls have reduced self-esteem and confidence.<sup>35</sup> The lack of accommodations may also prevent students from accessing educational opportunities. One example is poor infrastructure. Many school buildings lack ramps, elevators, or accessible bathrooms. In these schools, students with mobility impairments may find navigating the building challenging and have poor attendance. Negative attitudes and stereotyping can also lead to lower expectations, reduced support, or even bullying. This can create a hostile learning environment, impeding the students' ability to focus on their studies. In addition, children with disabilities frequently encounter obstacles in the healthcare system, which can limit their whole development. To guarantee that all children can develop and thrive, it is imperative to tackle these obstacles and end the cycle of discrimination.<sup>36</sup>

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

<sup>35</sup> "Children with disabilities still excluded from school," Handicap International, November 17, 2022, <https://www.hi.org/en/news/children-with-disabilities-still-excluded-from-school>.

<sup>36</sup> Handicap International, "Children with disabilities."

<sup>37</sup> *Reducing stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities*. (New York: UNICEF, 2021), [https://www.unicef.org/media/120421/file/Social\\_and\\_Behavioural\\_Change\\_Interventions\\_to\\_Strengthen\\_Disability\\_Inclusive\\_Programming\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/120421/file/Social_and_Behavioural_Change_Interventions_to_Strengthen_Disability_Inclusive_Programming_Summary.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> "New Report Highlights Neglected Health Needs of Children with Developmental Disabilities," WHO, September 15, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-09-2023-new-reports-highlights-neglected-health-needs-of-children-with-developmental-disabilities>.

<sup>39</sup> WHO, "New Report."

(UNICEF) examined the impacts of discrimination on the development of children with disabilities. It found that stigma is circular. This means that the effects of stigma can lead to stronger feelings of dislike towards a particular group. This can result in several adverse effects. This can include social, emotional, and cognitive issues. It can also lead to slowed development. This results in poor educational outcomes and low self-esteem. UNICEF suggests targeting the root causes of stigma. This includes dispelling myths, raising awareness, and advocating for the rights of children with disabilities.<sup>37</sup>

The failure to address stigma also has tangible health impacts. A WHO and UNICEF joint report released in September 2023 found that over 139 million children worldwide have developmental disabilities. Developmental disabilities include conditions such as cerebral palsy and Down syndrome.<sup>38</sup> Stigma negatively affects the treatment of people with developmental disabilities in healthcare settings. Additionally, in rural areas, hospitals are often underfunded. When this occurs, other aspects of care are prioritized over caring for people with disabilities.<sup>39</sup> The organizations recommend that

Personalized special education

Credit: Luisfer Valenzuela



countries hold healthcare providers to higher standards. They also agree that stigma must be tackled at its source. Finally, they highlight the importance of further research into care for people with disabilities.<sup>40</sup>

Another minority that faces discrimination is women. Women who also have disabilities, therefore, face even greater challenges than people who belong to only one of these two groups. This is called double marginalization. Double marginalization refers to how people who are part of multiple stigmatized groups face more difficulties.<sup>41</sup> Often, programs focused on both women and people with disabilities are ignored and underfunded.

In December 2023, UN Women released a report focused on how to better fund initiatives for women with disabilities.<sup>42</sup> It found that policy upholds discrimination against women with disabilities. The report also states that policy must be mindful of how initiatives to support marginalized groups require more funding than those for groups that do not face the same obstacles. It argues that policies must consider the unique needs of women with disabilities. This includes programs in sectors like social services and education. It also recommends that money for programs demonstrate a dedication to equity.<sup>43</sup>

Understanding how stigma affects people with disabilities' access to services, especially in rural areas, is essential. However, solutions that are empowering and inclusive can overcome the difficulties of stigma. These solutions can help create a just society for people with disabilities living in rural communities. This is especially true for those vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

People with disabilities are considered a vulnerable group.

<sup>40</sup> WHO, "New Report."

<sup>41</sup> Chiara Oriti, *Accepting the Challenge: Women with Disabilities: for a life free of violence. An inclusive and cross-cutting perspective*, (New York: UN Women, 2021), <https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Americas/Documentos/Publicaciones/2021/09/Report%20Accepting%20The%20Challenge%20EN%20WEB.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> UN Women Disability Inclusion and Intersectionality Portfolio (DIIP) Team, *Gender and Disability Inclusive Budgeting: Issues and Policy Options*, (New York: UN Women, December 2023),

[https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/issue-paper-gender-disability-budgeting-en\\_0.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/issue-paper-gender-disability-budgeting-en_0.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> UN Women DIIP Team, *Gender and Disability Inclusive Budgeting*.

<sup>44</sup> *Exploring intersectional approaches to preventing violence against women and girls*, (New York: UN Women, 2021), <https://unfpa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/synthesis%20review%20-%20intersectional%20approaches.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration, "Introduction to Rural Telehealth," accessed December 7, 2023, <https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/best-practice-guides/telehealth-for-rural-areas>.

<sup>46</sup> Acinfotech, "Generative AI-Powered mHealth: Enhancing Mobile Health Solutions."

Improving accessibility for people with disabilities in rural areas requires creative solutions. The challenges they face are widespread. From assistive technologies to gender inclusion, many social, economic, and humanitarian factors can affect or improve the lives of these individuals.<sup>45</sup>

The development of AI in healthcare is a significant new trend. AI allows rural communities to access quality services by overcoming physical distances. It can also be more accessible for people with disabilities. Early detection is now a key aspect to consider in rural areas when discussing the convergence of technologies and healthcare.<sup>46</sup> These changes have helped improve the lives of rural people with disabilities.

Children and women with disabilities need additional attention in policy solutions. This is because they are vulnerable to discrimination in multiple ways. By promoting awareness and supporting research, delegates can advocate for equal access to healthcare and essential social services, regardless of gender or disability. Delegates in SOCHUM should consider the use of AI and the presence of stigma to inform their solutions in committee.



SOCHUM  
NHSMUN 2024



**TOPIC B:**  
**UPHOLDING PRISONERS' RIGHT TO HEALTHCARE**

Photo Credit: kalev kevad

## Introduction

In prisons worldwide, inmates experience poor healthcare. This could be due to a lack of proper infrastructure, poor conditions, or overcrowding. As the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights outlines, all prisoners are entitled to fair treatment and support for their health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> There must be more support for prisoners, prisons, and healthcare providers. Various areas must be considered due to their impact on healthcare accessibility in prisons. Overcrowding in prisons harms the wellbeing of prisoners and their medical resources. This has been observed in Senegal, where the prison population is 30 percent higher than the capacity.<sup>2</sup>

It is also common for the medical needs of women to be ignored in prisons. For example, incarcerated women in the United Kingdom (UK) experience significant delays in their healthcare. One-fifth of pregnant prisoners in the UK in 2023 were unable to attend their maternal appointments due to prisons limiting their access.<sup>3</sup> This paper will serve as an update to the issues introduced in the Background Guide. Delegates of SOCHUM should consider how they can support prisoners' healthcare by addressing these issues.

## The Impact of Overcrowding on Healthcare in Prisons

Prisons worldwide are notoriously overcrowded. This has been a pressing concern for the United Nations. Overcrowding can worsen other issues, such as lack of adequate healthcare and violence within prisons. Violence in prison is closely linked to overpopulation, especially with issues related to gang violence.<sup>4</sup> As mentioned in the Background Guide, many facilities do not have enough officers to keep the entire prison population safe. Thus, gang disputes and general fighting can overwhelm guards.<sup>5</sup> This poses a significant healthcare risk, not only to the prisoners involved but also to the guards. Violence also means that people in prisons face a high risk of serious physical injuries that are, at times, fatal. Furthermore, overcrowding

means that prisoners can struggle to access healthcare as well as essentials such as food and water. The proximity of prisoners can also allow infectious diseases to spread more quickly. Prisoners' lack of privacy and freedom can also often take a mental toll on them, causing or worsening mental illnesses.

The United States is a country where overcrowded prisons are very common. The US is the country with the most people in prison in the world.<sup>6</sup> Over two million people are imprisoned in the country. This is just under one percent of the population. Under this pressure, prisons often fail to provide for prisoners. In February 2022, in the state of Arkansas, a woman suffering from an episode where she lost touch with reality due to her two mental disorders, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, was the target of a car chase. She was then arrested and jailed in solitary confinement for eight months without trial or treatment for her disorders.<sup>7</sup> This was a direct result of the state only having 50 beds in its psychiatric hospital for a total population of 18,000 inmates, 600 of whom have a pressing need for treatment. Rather than increase mental healthcare services, the Governor of Arkansas, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, has proposed to expand prisons.<sup>8</sup> This, however, fails to address the underlying issue, which is the jailing of those suffering from untreated mental disorders. This is, in part, caused by the United States' lack of hospitals specializing in mental illnesses.

1 Navi Pillay, "Will Human Rights Survive?" *The Nation*, December 28, 2023, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/will-human-rights-survive/>.

2 Zohra Bensemra, "Senegal tackles prison overcrowding – in pictures," *The Guardian*, January 1, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2024/jan/01/senegal-tackles-prison-overcrowding-in-pictures>.

3 Nic Murray, "Exclusive: Abortions in prison fall by 75% despite rise in general population," *OpenDemocracy*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/abortions-in-prisons-fall-england-exclusive-barriers-access-healthcare-women/>.

4 Ana María Cañizares, Marlon Sorto, and Mohammed Tawfeeq, "Dozens of Prison Officers Freed after Being Taken Hostage in Ecuador Jails," *CNN*, September 2, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/02/americas/ecuador-prison-guards-hostage-intl/index.html>.

5 Cañizares, Sorto, and Tawfeeq, "Dozens of Prison Officers."

6 Prison Policy Initiative, "United States Profile," accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/US.html>.

7 Eric Ferkenhoff and Valerie Bauman, "Not Treated as Humans': Critics Say Arkansas Neglects Inmates' Health," *Newsweek*, December 22, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/not-treated-humans-critics-say-arkansas-neglects-inmates-health-1852495>.

8 Ferkenhoff and Bauman, "Not Treated as Humans."



Inside overcrowded Bunia Prison  
 Credit: Oxfam East Africa

The US underwent a process called deinstitutionalization in the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> This process saw the closing of mental hospitals due to widespread occurrences of mistreatment and abuse against patients. However, an unforeseen outcome of closing these hospitals was that there was often no one capable of caring for people who needed specialized care and treatments for their illnesses.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, people with mental illnesses are often seen as public nuisances that the police should deal with. This ultimately results in their incarceration and contributes to overcrowding. Prisons are not designed or prepared to treat mental illness, so these new inmates do not receive proper treatment. When their illnesses go untreated in prisons for extended periods, prisoners' conditions may worsen.<sup>11</sup>

As the country with the second highest incarceration rate, many of these issues are also seen in the United Kingdom. In 2023, the UK saw a 24 percent rise in the number of suicides in prisons. Part of the reason for this is that when prisons are overwhelmed, they do not have the bandwidth to monitor

prisoners for signs of suicide.<sup>12</sup> This means that many prisoners who require mental healthcare do not receive it because they are neglected in prison.

Mental illnesses, however, are not the only types of conditions that can worsen in prisons. One jail in Atlanta saw 17 prisoners die “of severe neglect” between September 2022 and October 2023.<sup>13</sup> This is because the jail's total number of inmates was twice as many people as it is designed to hold. Therefore, it lacked the facilities to house inmates or provide them with proper hygiene. The US Department of Justice investigated this jail, finding that prisoners had died covered in insects, bedbug bites, and untreated sores.<sup>14</sup> In some British prisons, prisoners must use buckets rather than toilets. This practice is illegal in the UK but persists.<sup>15</sup> When prisons are overcrowded, administrators cannot attend to prisoners' hygiene. This can result in the spread of infectious diseases, pests, and parasites. This presents a major health risk for prisoners.

These issues are not unique to prisons in the US or the UK. In

9 H. Richard Lamb and Linda E. Weinberger, “Persons With Severe Mental Illness in Jails and Prisons: A Review,” *Psychiatric Services* 49, no. 4 (April 1998): 483–92, <https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.49.4.483>.

10 Lamb and Weinberger, “Persons With Severe.”

11 Lamb and Weinberger, “Persons With Severe.”

12 Andy Gregory, “Suicides in Prison Rises by Nearly 25% as Self-Harm Hits All-Time High,” *The Independent*, October 26, 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prison-suicide-self-harm-overcrowding-b2436530.html>.

13 Alec Grosswald, “Fulton County Jail Living Conditions Deteriorating,” *Technique*, October 6, 2023, <https://nique.net/news/2023/10/06/fulton-county-jail-living-conditions-deteriorating/>.

14 Grosswald, “Fulton County.”

15 Helen Pidd, “Jail Cells without Toilets Persist in England despite ‘Slopping out’ Law,” *The Guardian*, October 25, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/oct/25/jail-cells-without-toilets-persist-england-despite-slopping-out-law>.

Mozambique, for example, tuberculosis is common in prisons. Tuberculosis is an airborne illness, meaning that it spreads in the air. It can cause fever, bloody coughs, and death. Some estimates suggest that Mozambican prisoners are anywhere from six to 30 times more likely to contract tuberculosis. Worldwide, estimates suggest that prisoners are 10 times more likely to contract tuberculosis than the general populace.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the causes of overcrowding are also healthcare related. Like with the imprisonment of people with mental illnesses in the US, many countries criminalize drug use and addiction. However, drug addictions are healthcare issues that must be treated with addiction services rather than jail. In November 2023, the UN Committee Against Torture met to discuss overcrowding in Costa Rican prisons.<sup>17</sup> They noted that Costa Rica is considered the Central American country with the best rights for prisoners. It has a strong constitution that protects prisoners from experiencing inhumane conditions. It also has frameworks in place to prevent torture from occurring.<sup>18</sup> However, Costa Rica, like other Central American countries, is now experiencing prison overcrowding due to its harsh sentences for people convicted of drug use. Costa Rican prisons have now exceeded their capacity by 2,000 people. For this reason, the Committee expressed concern that torture against prisoners may now occur.<sup>19</sup>

Costa Rica is pioneering new strategies to combat harsh sentences for drug crimes. Two of these strategies include providing restorative sentences that do not have prison time for some people and reduced sentences for others. Restorative sentences refer to any type of sentence that seeks to help people avoid crime in the future rather than punishing them for committing a crime. In Costa Rica, these include providing addiction treatment, access to support groups, and community service. Those who qualify for reduced sentences

include those in difficult situations, such as being homeless, addicted to drugs, or escaping abuse, as well as women, parents, and older people.<sup>20</sup> This strategy has been praised for being more compassionate to people who are poor or vulnerable and who are often pushed into crime because it is their only option.<sup>21</sup> Beyond this, it also has the potential to solve Costa Rica's emerging overcrowding and healthcare issues in prisons in two ways. First, by providing addiction treatment, rates of addiction in prisons will drop. Second, by not sending drug addicts to prison, Costa Rica will avoid sending people who require healthcare to prison in the first place, treating them instead.

Critics of this program claim it is too lax and lets criminals off the hook. The head of the Costa Rican Office of Restorative Justice, Jovana Calderón Altamirano, says this is not the case. Restorative justice is highly regulated and monitored in Costa Rica. Furthermore, the punishments are designed to ensure that the harms done by those convicted are actively reversed. It has also proven highly effective at preventing offenders from committing crimes again. Only four percent of those provided with alternative sentences re-offend. In comparison, 36-60 percent of former criminals in other Latin American countries re-offend. The Costa Rican system is also cheaper, as it does not have to pay for housing and food for prisoners.<sup>22</sup> Delegates in SOCHUM should consider restorative justice and other methods to address prison overcrowding and improve prisoners' access to healthcare.

## Disparities in Healthcare for Female Prisoners

There is a shortage of resources in prisons, and the resources prisons do have often lack quality. These issues are worsened by

16 Diego Menjibar, "Mozambique Prison: 'With so Many People, It's Hard to Know Who Has Tuberculosis,'" *El País English*, December 9, 2023, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-12-09/mozambique-prison-with-so-many-people-its-hard-to-know-who-has-tuberculosis.html>.

17 "In Dialogue with Costa Rica, Experts of the Committee against Torture Praise the State's Legal and Institutional Safeguards against Torture, Ask about Prison Overcrowding and Attacks on Indigenous Human Rights Defenders," UN Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights, November 3, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/11/dialogue-costa-rica-experts-committee-against-torture-praise-states-legal-and>

18 UN Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights, "In Dialogue."

19 UN Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights, "In Dialogue."

20 Noor Mahtani, "A Successful 'Anti-Bukele' Criminal Justice Model in Costa Rica," *El País English*, November 14, 2023, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-11-14/a-successful-anti-bukele-criminal-justice-model-in-costa-rica.html>.

21 Mahtani, "A Successful 'Anti-Bukele.'"

22 Mahtani, "A Successful 'Anti-Bukele.'"



the differences between male and female prisoners' healthcare. Across the world, the conditions faced by female prisoners are inadequate and fail to accommodate women's needs. Many prisons do not provide adequate care, if any at all, for women's health. Female reproductive issues are especially overlooked.

A major cause is the lack of prison healthcare workers, including specialized doctors. In Bogotá, Colombia, some prisons often only have one doctor on duty at a time for 1,859 women.<sup>23</sup> Prisoners cannot receive care appointments when there are few medical providers. It is even more difficult to access specialized types of medicine. Examples include gynecology, a branch of medicine intended to treat women, and oncology, the branch of medicine for treating cancer. As a result, issues such as breast cancer, as well as uterine and ovarian problems, often go untreated. In Bogotá, a prisoner named Claudia Cardona required treatment for uterine issues but was unable to access care for the eight years that she was imprisoned. Upon being released, she found out that because she was not treated for these issues, she would have to have her uterus removed.<sup>24</sup> Cardona also notes that she was lucky to have a job in prison. This is how she could afford enough

menstrual products, stating that most prisoners did not receive enough sanitary towels.<sup>25</sup>

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN Women recently met to discuss the experience of women in prisons. In March 2023, the leaders of these organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the issue. In November 2023, they collaborated to address the needs of female Afghan prisoners in Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar. UN representatives met at the Kabul Female Prison and Detention Center in Afghanistan to hear the needs of imprisoned women. The goal was to provide medical services, protection, and assistance with reintegration into society.<sup>26</sup>

Representatives were concerned with the mental health of the women in the prison. One reason is that many prisoners face extreme consequences for non-violent crimes. Another is that these women feel unsafe inside and outside of prison. These are compounded by concerns about their children and families. After speaking to a female doctor serving an average of 30 female prisoners daily, a UN Women representative echoed that counseling is imperative for at-risk women. This is

<sup>23</sup> Claudia Cardona, "I spent nine years in a Colombian women's prison. This is what I learned," *The Guardian*, September 19, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/19/i-spent-nine-years-in-a-colombian-womens-prison-this-is-what-i-learned>.

<sup>24</sup> Cardona, "I spent nine years."

<sup>25</sup> Cardona, "I spent nine years."

<sup>26</sup> "Supporting the women of Afghanistan: New partnership between UN Women and UNODC aims to work with women most at risk," UN Women, November 20, 2023, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/11/supporting-the-women-of-afghanistan-new-partnership-between-un-women-and-unodc-aims-to-work-with-women-most-at-risk>.

A female prisoner with her 3 month old baby in the mother and baby unit

Credit: PrisonImage



because they often need psychosocial support and meaningful engagement with others.<sup>27</sup>

Therapy has had proven positive effects on at-risk women. One example is the Reclamation Center in Pilsen, Illinois, in the US. There, community gatherings and emotional support are offered for at-risk women in the justice system. In one meeting, 25 women facing incarceration offered each other psychosocial care and talked about their experiences. With such efforts one member can stay out of prison for 20 years with such efforts.<sup>28</sup> These programs demonstrate the importance of expanding healthcare for female prisoners. Many necessary treatments, such as reproductive healthcare and mental health counseling, are not currently provided to female prisoners. However, these treatments would address issues faced inside prisons as well as poverty, violence, and discrimination faced outside of prisons. This collaboration exemplifies how existing UN frameworks can be built upon. It also can serve as a potential inspiration for future frameworks to address the needs of women in prisons.<sup>29</sup>

Many female prisoners' human rights are violated despite legal protections. A Human Rights Watch report on women in the Japanese justice system from November 2023 found that imprisoned women experienced major human rights abuses, even under Japanese law protection. Under the Act on Penal Detention Facilities and Treatment of Inmates and Detainees, female prisoners can legally request to be with their babies until they are up to one year old. However, the report found that most female prisoners are separated from their babies upon birth without a proper explanation of their rights. The lack of parent-child bonding can lead to long-term harm and trauma for both the mother and infant. Breastfeeding is a vital aspect of child development that is impossible when mother and child are separated. The separation of prisoners from their

infants is, therefore, not just a human rights violation, but also a healthcare concern. This specific case demonstrates the need to inform female prisoners in Japan of their legal rights.<sup>30</sup>

The state of Washington in the United States can serve as a model for how to care for pregnant prisoners. The Residential Parenting Program allows pregnant women in the justice system to coexist with their babies and receive parenting support. At the Washington Corrections Center for Women in Gig Harbor, over 800 women have participated in the Program since 1999.<sup>31</sup> There, they can receive support and develop childcare skills. The Gig Harbor Center is just one of a few prisons in the world with such a program. It is an example of proper support for incarcerated mothers and their children. Unfortunately, despite this center's successes, it only housed three women in 2023. This shows that many pregnant prisoners and imprisoned new mothers do not have access to programs such as the Residential Parenting Program. Nonetheless, this program serves as a model that other countries can apply to their prisons to lower the risks of separating mothers from their children.<sup>32</sup>

The Human Rights Watch report also calls attention to elderly prisoners. In Japan, the number of incarcerated older women has increased by 18.1 percent since 1998.<sup>33</sup> Some older women became repeat offenders for non-violent minor crimes like shoplifting due to social isolation and loneliness. The Human Rights Watch and the Japanese Ministry of Justice discovered this. Former Japanese female prisoners stated that there is a lack of support for imprisoned older women. This is especially true when it comes to community reintegration. The cycle of incarceration has factors inside and outside of the prison. More efforts must be made to protect the wellbeing of female prisoners upon their return to society.<sup>34</sup>

27 Andy Gregory, "Women in mental health crisis still being jailed in prisons deemed 'unfit for purpose', major review warns," *Independent*, November 23, 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prison-women-mental-health-care-b2452523.html>.

28 Annie Sweeney, "This is our house': Reclamation Center in Pilsen connects women leaving prison to services, emotional support," *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 2023, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/criminal-justice/ct-incarcerated-women-release-support-20220921-27mbuyatfzhlldkkcbd2w6vxxse-story.html>.

29 UN Women, "Supporting the women of Afghanistan."

30 "They Don't Treat Us like Human Beings': Abuse of Imprisoned Women in Japan," Human Rights Watch, November 14, 2023,

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/11/14/they-dont-treat-us-human-beings/abuse-imprisoned-women-japan>.

31 Joseph O'Sullivan, "New mothers can stay with their babies at this Washington prison," *The Wenatchee World*, November 8, 2023, [https://www.wenatchee-world.com/news/northwest/new-mothers-can-stay-with-their-babies-at-this-washington-prison/article\\_51536396-7e89-11ee-a5f0-9fe0f3c3b5c7.html](https://www.wenatchee-world.com/news/northwest/new-mothers-can-stay-with-their-babies-at-this-washington-prison/article_51536396-7e89-11ee-a5f0-9fe0f3c3b5c7.html).

32 O'Sullivan, "New mothers."

33 Human Rights Watch, "They Don't Treat."

34 Human Rights Watch, "They Don't Treat."

The report offered new information on the experience of female drug offenders. In Japan, drug violations are the second highest cause of incarceration for women.<sup>35</sup> Studies revealed that women imprisoned for drug use or possession often face reincarceration later. Since 2004, the number of women admitted to prison with previous convictions has increased by 18 percent.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that there are substance abuse disorders among these individuals that have gone untreated. Furthermore, 73 percent of female prisoners in Japan were victims of childhood abuse and domestic violence trauma. These issues are also improperly addressed in prisons.<sup>37</sup> Incarceration for minor drug offenses can encourage recidivism due to the continuation of unresolved trauma. Recidivism refers to the repeated incarceration of former prisoners. Countries should consider how prisoners with preexisting health conditions can be accommodated. In some cases, traditional imprisonment may not be the best option. One Japanese officer stated that many female prisoners should not have been imprisoned at all due to the low severity of their crimes. Thus, Japan should consider alternatives to imprisonment to support the health of these women.<sup>38</sup> Japan is a party to many foundational conventions on human rights. However, its treatment of prisoners violates international regulations, according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>39</sup>

Rehabilitation programs, like those offered by Costa Rica's restorative justice programs, are a common alternative to traditional incarceration. Prisoners build new skills in these programs to support their lives after release. South Africa offers 13 rehabilitation programs and various skills development programs for male and female prisoners. The Department of Correctional Services has reported that there are currently

4,053 incarcerated women in South Africa. These women can enroll in classes at higher learning institutions and borrow library books. The Department also provides information and communication technology for them to use.<sup>40</sup> However, a report based on interviews with 18 women at the Johannesburg Correctional Centre has revealed conflicting information.<sup>41</sup> It states that the programs and opportunities were not offered equally between male and female prisoners. Statements revealed that most of the programs for women were centered around beadwork, knitting, sewing, laundry, and caring for the sick. Furthermore, one woman stated that she had to take court action to obtain laptop access to her cell.<sup>42</sup> Based on these testimonies, the rehabilitation programs in South Africa are reinforcing traditional gender roles. The lack of opportunities is also stunting the growth of female prisoners. One female prisoner stated that obtaining a higher education was important to her self-esteem and motherhood. In her testimony, she describes that through studying, she can set a positive example for her children and feel assured that she is a good mother.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, successful rehabilitation programs support healthcare accessibility by decreasing recidivism. In a study conducted in the United States, a rehabilitative approach led to a 33 percent lower recidivism rate.<sup>44</sup> As illustrated in the first subtopic, lower prison populations increase healthcare accessibility and prevent violence. Still, the testimonies of prisoners in South Africa have raised questions about the legitimacy of female prison support efforts.

Another important topic is the reintegration and sustained wellbeing of former prisoners. One successful example is the Massachusetts Correctional Institution in the United States. In the United States, women are more likely than men to

35 "Japan: Women Seriously Abused in Prisons," Human Rights Watch, November 14, 2023,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/14/japan-women-seriously-abused-prisons>.

36 Human Rights Watch, "They Don't Treat."

37 Human Rights Watch, "They Don't Treat."

38 Human Rights Watch, "Japan: Women Seriously Abused in Prisons."

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face drug abuse, psychiatric disorders, poverty, and trauma. Additionally, 1.5 million children have an imprisoned parent.<sup>45</sup> Justice 4 Housing's 18-month Stable Housing and Reintegration Program supports women leaving prison. Through this program, formerly incarcerated women can receive trauma counseling, financial literacy education, help with obtaining housing, and financial assistance. Another program is New Beginnings Reentry Services. This program offers women housing, clothing, and trauma support in a safe community. Their goal is to rebuild women's confidence to reenter society.<sup>46</sup> Both of these programs are physically located near the Massachusetts Correctional Institution. This location encourages easy access for formerly incarcerated women. As observed in Japan's justice system, unresolved trauma can lead to reincarceration. Trauma counseling is an essential tool offered for women leaving this prison. With this, the two programs promote positive mental health and lower recidivism rates. In addition, resources like shelter, money, and clothing play a role in women's overall wellbeing and quality of life. They allow former prisoners to feel comfortable in society and have the means to support themselves. With better self-esteem and financial means, women can seek medical attention for untreated conditions. Formerly incarcerated women created both of these programs. Such women can offer their voices and lived experiences for future programs that bolster the health of female prisoners. These instances have displayed the importance of healthy and safe environments for women, mainly due to the trauma endured by many female prisoners. They are also examples of how communities outside of prison can encourage or discourage health, imprisonment, and recidivism.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

In recent months, multiple cases have highlighted the urgency of addressing international issues in incarceration systems. The prevalence of overcrowding in prisons has led to significant healthcare issues, thinly spread workers, and poor treatment of prisoners. Spread of disease, criminalization of addiction

and mental health disorders, and high suicide rates indicate a need for change in how countries handle overcrowding and healthcare in prisons. Furthermore, the lack of support for women in prisons underscores more considerable gender disparities. Countries like Costa Rica that are taking steps towards reducing the harsh sentencing of vulnerable populations and pioneering restorative justice plans provide a framework for addressing these issues. Furthermore, violations of international regulations highlight the urgency of this situation. Delegates must explore ways to hold countries accountable for their actions while remaining within the UN's powers. For these reasons, delegates in SOCHUM must work together to draft resolutions to improve incarceration systems worldwide.

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<sup>45</sup> Betancourt, "Women coming home from prison get little Massachusetts Correctional Institution to help rebuilding."

<sup>46</sup> Betancourt, "Women coming home from prison get little help rebuilding."

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The National High School Model United Nations Conference (NHSMUN) is a project of IMUNA, a non-profit organization formally associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications (UNDGC). IMUNA is dedicated to promoting global issues education through simulation.

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