

# NHSMUN50

National High School Model United Nations



UNICEF

UPDATE PAPER

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)! I am so excited to see the change you will make throughout this conference. My name is Molly Rourke, and I will be your Assistant Director for Session I of NHSMUN 2024. This is my first year on NHSMUN staff, but my second at the conference—I represented Costa Rica in UNICEF as a high school senior. I have been involved in various Model UN conferences over the years and always find myself loving the critical thinking they encourage.

I was born and raised in rural Connecticut, surrounded by many animals and forests. I love nature and am most definitely not a lover of cities. Trees are my jam! I am a sophomore at the University of Connecticut (UConn) studying Spanish and Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences with a minor in American Sign Language (ASL). I am passionate about languages and their development; my goal is to learn as many languages as possible. I am a part of the university's fencing team and spend much of my free time training for tournaments. I am a Conference Director for UConn's next Model UN conference and am involved in a couple more organizations like the ASL club. I love to travel and have studied abroad twice in Costa Rica. I hope to travel as part of my work someday! Outside of school, you can find me reading, baking bread, or doing art.

Model UN has had a tremendous impact on me in so many ways. It has allowed me to come out of my shell, gain confidence, and learn to be more of an articulate speaker. I have met so many amazing people worldwide during conferences and learned so much about the global developments and issues I am passionate about. I have prepared this Update Paper to help guide your research and educate you on the newer happenings in the realm of UNICEF. The developments discussed in this paper have taken place after the publication of the background guide. You should allow them to help formulate your research and develop your country's stance.

This conference will provide you with many opportunities to learn and grow, no matter how experienced a delegate you are. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out. I am here to support you and your research. I look forward to meeting all of you!

Best,

Molly Rourke

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United Nations Children's Fund

Session I





UNICEF

NHSMUN 2024



## TOPIC A: ELIMINATING CHILD ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Photo Credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Eddie Harrison

## Introduction

Globally, up to one billion children aged 2–17 years have faced physical, sexual, or psychological abuse in the past year.<sup>1</sup> Only a small percentage of child abuse and domestic violence victims ever receive support or treatment from health professionals.<sup>2</sup> This is because abusers often work hard to hide this violence. Abuse and domestic violence typically cause extreme mental, social, physical, and economic impacts. An abused child is more likely to abuse others as an adult, forming a cycle of violence.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is important to break these cycles.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused child abuse and domestic violence rates to soar. Many people turned to technology during the worldwide shutdown to allow life to continue as normal. This increased online use caused a rise in child abuse and exploitation in the media. This was especially seen in vlogging, reality TV, and online gaming. The role of children in TV and media has recently become more common and more sought out. An already vulnerable population, children are facing increasingly higher rates of violence within the media industry. Additionally, as the pandemic resulted in thousands of deaths, millions of children lost their parents or became orphans. Children without parents had to stay with relatives, in orphanages, foster care, or group homes. In these institutions, they are more likely to face abuse and neglect. The pandemic coming to a close is uncovering patterns of increased domestic violence and abuse.<sup>4</sup>

Collaborative solutions can help prevent the lifelong physical, mental, and social impacts of such violence. Because children are one of society's most vulnerable populations, it is important to establish extensive support networks to ensure their health. With this in mind, the delegates of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) must collaborate to consider how these recent developments impact their resolutions regarding child abuse and domestic violence.

## Exploitation and Abuse of Children Within The Media

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) aims to protect children from all violations of their well-being.<sup>5</sup> This includes protecting children from all types of abuse, including physical, psychological, sexual, and neglect.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, protecting children using and participating in media is essential for UNICEF. Several key areas in which children are active include family vlogging, online gaming, and the entertainment industry. Family vlogging is a genre of social media content that shows the daily lives of content creators and their children.<sup>7</sup> This type of content may show children without their knowledge or permission. Therefore, vlogging can be exploitative and put children in vulnerable situations. Other online platforms like video games also attract a large population of young people. In video games, children are at risk of harmful behaviors like sexual abuse, harassment, cyberbullying, and more as they interact with other players.<sup>8</sup> Within the entertainment industry, children are also commonly exploited and abused. Children may be forced into working long hours in inappropriate situations and hazardous environments.<sup>9</sup> Delegates of UNICEF need to understand child exploitation and abuse within media to develop solutions to promote the rights and safety of children

1 "Violence against children," World Health Organization (WHO), last modified November 19, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>.

2 "Child maltreatment," WHO, last modified September 19, 2022,

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>.

3 WHO, "Child maltreatment."

4 WHO, "Child maltreatment."

5 UN General Assembly, Resolution 44/25, Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/25, (Nov. 20, 1989), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

6 A/RES/44/25.

7 Monica Reilly, "Family Vlogging: Blurring the Line Between Parent and Employer," The Science Survey, last modified January 18, 2023, <https://thesciencesurvey.com/editorial/2023/01/18/family-vlogging-blurring-the-line-between-parent-and-employer/>.

8 "Child Safety in Gaming: Addressing Online Safety Amidst the Prevalence of Bullying and Abuse," INHOPE, last modified December 9, 2023, <https://inhope.org/EN/articles/child-safety-in-gaming>.

9 "Call For Inputs: A Study on the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in the Entertainment Industry," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, last modified October 4, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-study>.

worldwide.

As online family vlogging has become more popular, it is crucial to look behind the camera. Most family channels are based around using their children to gain views. Sometimes, this is harmless, but many times it is anything but. Parents film their children while pranking, embarrassing, or exploiting them and/or filming them in vulnerable situations. This is seen in a few main ways. Some parents post them having sensitive conversations. Others film their children while injured, upset, or having behavioral issues. In both situations, a private part of a child's life is shared with the world. Predators can easily take these pictures and videos. Family influencers violate various policies and encounter many legal issues, including potential human rights violations. The CRC has multiple articles that aim to protect children from the abuse and exploitation that commonly takes place within this industry. Article 12 requires that children are allowed to form their own beliefs and express their views freely.<sup>10</sup> Influencer channels may not allow children to consent to be featured in online content. If they are young, they might not understand what is being asked of them. They also might fail to consider the future implications

sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-children-entertainment.

<sup>10</sup> A/RES/44/25.

<sup>11</sup> A/RES/44/25.

<sup>12</sup> Abrams, "Family Influencing in the Best Interests of the Child."

<sup>13</sup> Remy Tumin, "Host of Youtube Parenting Channel is Charged with Child Abuse," *New York Times*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/01/us/ruby-franke-child-abuse-arrest.html>.

of content being posted online. A child may feel pressured to consent because of financial or family factors. Article 16 of the CRC recognizes children's right to privacy and a maintained reputation.<sup>11</sup> Many family influencer channels violate this article by posting children during medical, emotional, or behavioral challenges. The social and emotional development of children with a large online presence will likely be affected.<sup>12</sup> Psychological abuse is widely seen within the media, especially because it is less direct and harder to prove. Having sensitive information on the internet can build barriers and expose children to the world. This can be isolating and incredibly harmful.

Highlighting child abuse within the family vlogging, well-known American vlogger Ruby Franke was arrested on August 30, 2023. She faced six counts of aggravated child abuse after one of her children reportedly climbed out a window of the house to get help from the neighbors.<sup>13</sup> Franke ran the popular YouTube channel "8 Passengers." She was known for documenting her strict parenting style on YouTube. Her channel, which started in 2015, depicted her life with her children. On the account, she often filmed them in private



Children playing video games

Credit: Gamesingear

situations, such as during behavioral challenges while being punished and having sensitive conversations. She also uploaded videos of herself explaining the punishments she inflicted on her children, including refusing them food and a bed.<sup>14</sup> In court, she pled guilty to four of the six counts. She tortured them by holding their heads underwater and cutting off oxygen by holding her hand over their mouths. She admitted to making them work outside in the heat for days without food, sunscreen, or water. She made them do wall sits and carry books up and down stairs.<sup>15</sup> Her children are facing the extreme physical and emotional effects of her abuse. Though this particular case does not represent the entire family influencer industry, it shows the severe exploitation, abuse, and violations of privacy many children face to gain views and make money.

In addition to family vlogging, children using online gaming are also at risk for exploitation and abuse. The interactions between children and older populations in online gaming can be harmless but can also result in negative relationships. This can have dangerous results like sexual exploitation or grooming. Online child sexual exploitation refers to any sexually exploitative actions against children that have an online connection.<sup>16</sup> Typically, this abuse is exchanged for money, protection, or a promise.<sup>17</sup> This can be through gaming, online chats, live streaming, sextortion, and more. Sextortion is a form of blackmail where an offender threatens to share private information unless specific demands are met.<sup>18</sup> These demands are usually sexually explicit images, favors, or money.<sup>19</sup> Between

one and two percent of internet-using children have received requests for sexual content, a meeting, explicit images, or faced online extortion.<sup>20</sup> According to UNICEF, an additional 80 percent of children in 25 countries have reported feeling in danger of sexual abuse or exploitation online.<sup>21</sup> In addition to online sexual exploitation, grooming is the manipulation of children to gain access to them in vulnerable situations. Grooming is often used to convince youth to agree to their abuse, reducing their risk of being caught.<sup>22</sup> In addition to grooming online, Patterns of manipulation, blackmail, and cyberbullying can have a lasting impact on youth's mental health.

These dangers in online gaming are concerning because there are few safeguards in place for minors online.<sup>23</sup> Many gaming sites allow users to state their age or sign up anonymously, allowing underage youth to play online games. Without data privacy and safeguards, children can access inappropriate content. Media companies use personal data to target ads towards their users. Being confronted with inappropriate content and ads causes children to normalize high-risk behavior.<sup>24</sup> The US Federal Trade Commission proposes changes to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA Rule).<sup>25</sup> These changes would put new restrictions on the use of children's personal information. They would also adjust how companies collect personal data and how long they keep it. An Online Safety Bill passed in the United Kingdom advises social media platforms to use age-verification technology and put age limits on their media.<sup>26</sup> Countries must implement more safeguarding

14 Tumin, "Host of Youtube Parenting Channel is Charged with Child Abuse."

15 Jen Smith, "Ruby Franke tortured kids by holding their heads underwater, keeping them handcuffed and shackled and starving them while telling them they were 'possessed,'" *Daily Mail*, December 19, 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12881673/Ruby-Franke-tortured-kids-holding-heads-underwater-keeping-handcuffed-shackled-starving-telling-possessed.html>.

16 Mark Kavenagh, "Child Sexual Exploitation in Online Gaming," United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), last modified November 17, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/blog/child-sexual-exploitation-online-gaming>

17 Kavenagh, "Child Sexual Exploitation in Online Gaming."

18 "What is sextortion?" Federal Bureau of Investigation, last modified July 7, 2015, <https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/newss-what-is-sextortion/view>.

19 FBI, "What is sextortion?"

20 Daniel Kardefelt Winther, Angela Davis, Camila Perera Aladro, Jennifer Quarti, Mariam Saeed, and Rogers Twesigye, "Disrupting Harm," UNICEF, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/disrupting-harm/>.

21 "Protecting Children Online," United Nations Children's Fund, accessed January 25, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children-online>.

22 "Grooming: Know the Warning Signs," RAINN, last modified July 10, 2020, <https://www.rainn.org/news/grooming-know-warning-signs>.

23 Kavenagh, "Child Sexual Exploitation in Online Gaming."

24 "Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material," Protect Kids Online, accessed January 5, 2024, [https://protectkidsonline.ca/app/en/info\\_exposure](https://protectkidsonline.ca/app/en/info_exposure).

25 Federal Trade Commission, "FTC Proposes Strengthening Children's Privacy Rule to Further Limit Companies' Ability to Monetize Children's Data," news release, December 20, 2023, <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2023/12/ftc-proposes-strengthening-childrens-privacy-rule-further-limit-companies-ability-monetize-childrens>.

26 Paul Sandle, "UK's Online Safety Bill finally passed by parliament," *Reuters*, September 19, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/>

policies and collaborative efforts among law enforcement and gaming companies to protect youth more effectively.

Within the United States, the state of New Mexico recently filed a lawsuit against Meta.<sup>27</sup> Meta is the technology company that owns Facebook and Instagram, founded in large by Mark Zuckerberg. The lawsuit describes how these applications attract child predators. They allow children to sign up for social media accounts without age verification. According to the case, Meta has the technology to determine whether these users are minors but fails to use it. Meta then shows these youths inappropriate and uncensored content. The platforms also allow adults to have access to contact with these children, which is a way predators may connect with them. Meta profits from these young users and has not implemented safeguards.<sup>28</sup> Recently, however, they released a statement saying they have formed a Child Safety Task Force and introduced technology to deactivate suspicious accounts.<sup>29</sup> Forty-seven percent of the UK's online grooming offenses in the past five years took place on Meta platforms.<sup>30</sup> Both the content shown and easy access to it puts children at risk for exploitation and abuse.

In addition to child exploitation and abuse within family vlogging and online gaming, the entertainment industry also poses risks to children. Article three of the CRC states, “[i]n all actions concerning children... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”<sup>31</sup> This encourages stricter legislation in child labor and film industries.<sup>32</sup> As mentioned, media sectors like reality TV and acting can be hosts for abuse and exploitation. Children are sometimes forced to work long hours or in dangerous places. Article 32 of the CRC recognizes protection against work that interferes

with the child's development.<sup>33</sup> Unhealthy working conditions or missing school can negatively affect a child's education and development. Many children working in the entertainment industry do not live with their parents or guardians. This makes them more vulnerable to abuse.<sup>34</sup> They often interact with authoritative figures like bosses or other powerful figures. Sometimes, these adults abuse their power for sexual exploitation. A child may not fully recognize or understand when they have been assaulted or abused. They may also feel ashamed or scared and not tell anyone. Even if a child reports abuse or exploitation, many cases are overlooked. They might be carelessly investigated, ignored, or met with intimidation.<sup>35</sup> This is because children are not always listened to. Adults may believe they are lying or exaggerating and not believe them. Governments must have laws that regulate the entertainment industry and protect children from exploitation. This legislation may relate to minimum age requirements for employment, regular welfare checks, or restrictions on working hours. They might also include mandatory education and training for those working with children, preventing opportunities for exploitation and abuse to take place, and creating regulations for working conditions.<sup>36</sup>

Many barriers are in place that must be taken into account when generating solutions to protect children from exploitation and abuse. For one, not much is known about the prevalence of sexual abuse and exploitation within the industry.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes, the circumstances of abuse make it difficult for the victim to come forward. The influence of authority or those whom children look up to impacts whether they report violence. They may face intimidation, retaliation, or threats

uks-online-safety-bill-passed-by-parliament-2023-09-19/.

27 State of New Mexico, ex Rel., Raúl Torrez, Attorney General v Meta Platforms, Inc.; Instagram, LLC; Meta Payments, Inc.; Meta Platforms Technologies, LLC; and Mark Zuckerberg, D-101-CV-2023-02838 4, (December 5, 2023), <https://www.nmag.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2023-12-05-NM-v-Meta-et-al.-COMPLAINT-REDACTED.pdf>

28 State of New Mexico, ex Rel., Raúl Torrez, Attorney General v Meta Platforms, Inc.; Instagram, LLC; Meta Payments, Inc.; Meta Platforms Technologies, LLC; and Mark Zuckerberg, 4.

29 Meta, “Our Work to Fight Online Predators,” News Release, December 1, 2023, <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/12/combating-online-predators/>

30 NSPCC, “82% rise in online grooming crimes against children in the last 5 years.”

31 A/RES/44/25

32 Rachel Caitlin Abrams, “Family Influencing in the Best Interests of the Child,” *Chicago Journal of International Law* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2023), <https://cjl.uchicago.edu/online-archive/family-influencing-best-interests-child>.

33 A/RES/44/25

34 “Call for inputs: A study on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the entertainment industry,” United Nations, last modified October 3, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/call-inputs-study-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-children-entertainment>.

35 Nikki Breeland, “‘All the Truth I Could Tell’: A Discussion of Title VII’s Potential Impact on Systemic Entertainment Industry Victimization,” *UCLA Women’s Law Journal* (January 18, 2018), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3106284](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3106284).

36 UN, “Call for inputs: A study on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the entertainment industry.”

37 UN, “Call for inputs: A study on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the entertainment industry.”

against their reputation, job, passions, or family. If someone waits long enough to report a crime against them, the statute of limitations for some regions may affect whether the case is seen by the law as ‘legitimate.’<sup>38</sup> Some children may also see this violence as ‘normal’ if it happens frequently in their lives or by someone they trust. The rights of child performers and influencers vary widely depending on the region or country.

Article 36 of the CRC urges that children be protected against any form of exploitation.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, exploitation is common among the entertainment industry, television shows, family influencers, and online media platforms. International collaboration and establishing protective legislation are critical to ensure the safety and well-being of children across the globe.

## Child Abuse in Foster Care and Orphanages

147 million children across the world have lost one or both parents to any cause of death.<sup>40</sup> These children stay with relatives, in foster homes, group homes, or orphanages. COVID-19 only worsened this issue. 10.5 million children have lost a parent or caregiver due to the pandemic.<sup>41</sup> 7.5 million became orphans due to that loss.<sup>42</sup> This rise in orphanhood has put more children in orphanages and foster care, where they are more likely to face abuse or neglect.<sup>43</sup> There are also regional disparities in orphanhood. Countries

with the highest estimated number of orphans include India, China, Nigeria, Russia, and Ethiopia.<sup>44</sup> India is home to over 20 million orphans. China houses about 8 million, and Nigeria has over 7 million.<sup>45</sup> These regional differences are due largely to poverty, natural disasters, disease, and violent conflict.

Up to eight million children live in orphanages across the world.<sup>46</sup> 80 percent of orphans have at least one living parent, but many children move to orphanages due to poverty or other factors.<sup>47</sup> Poverty is the main driver of child institutionalization, but other factors include social isolation, poor parenting, child illness or disability, natural disasters, and abuse or neglect.<sup>48</sup> Orphans face greater rates of abuse, neglect, and human trafficking.<sup>49</sup> Living in a home with unfamiliar adults can hurt children’s emotional and physical health. Some institutions use solitary confinement as a punishment, resulting in emotional trauma.<sup>50</sup> Orphanage staff may not have time to bond with children individually or respond to their specific needs. Children can be socially isolated or become distrustful of adults. This is especially common where orphanage staff or other adults are not consistent in their lives. Those growing up in orphanages show cognitive and developmental delays. They are also at a greater risk for psychiatric disorders. Children under three are especially vulnerable to the effects of living in an orphanage.<sup>51</sup> Youth with disabilities, deaf children, or children with special support needs might not receive the resources they need to thrive. Depending on how long a child

<sup>38</sup> UN, “Call for inputs: A study on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the entertainment industry.”

<sup>39</sup> A/RES/44/25.

<sup>40</sup> Yusra Ribhi Shawar and Jeremy Shiffman, “Global priority for the care of orphans and other vulnerable children: transcending problem definition challenges,” *Global Health* 19, no. 75 (October 10 2023): 1-3,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10566118/>.

<sup>41</sup> *Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health (2016-2030)* (Geneva: WHO, April 6, 2023), 3, [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA76/A76\\_5-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA76/A76_5-en.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Susan Hillis, Joel-Pascal Ntwali N’konzi, William Msemburi, Lucie Cluver, Andrés Villaveces, Seth Flaxmen, and H. Juliet T. Unwin, “Orphanhood and Caregiver Loss Among Children Based on New Global Excess COVID-19 Death Estimates,” *JAMA Pediatrics* (September 6, 2022): 1145-1148, doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3157

<sup>43</sup> Steven Ucembe, “The Harm of Orphanages (Part 1): The Illusion of Protection,” Hope and Homes for Children, October 17, 2023, <https://www.hopeandhomes.org/blog/the-harm-of-orphanages-part-1-the-illusion-of-protection/>

<sup>44</sup> “The Most Orphans by Country,” Ronnah Orphanage, last modified December 3 2023, <https://www.ronnah-orphanage.com/most-orphans-by-country/>

<sup>45</sup> Ronnah Orphanage, “The Most Orphans by Country.”

<sup>46</sup> “Orphanage Trafficking Legislative Toolkit,” Interparliamentary Taskforce on Human Trafficking, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://taskforceonht.org/orphanage-trafficking/>

<sup>47</sup> “What’s Wrong With Visiting and Volunteering in Orphanages?” Hopes and Homes for Children, last modified October 26, 2023, <https://www.hopeandhomes.org/blog/orphanage-volunteering/>.

<sup>48</sup> Shawar and Shiffman, “Global priority for the care of orphans and other vulnerable children: transcending problem definition challenges,” 1-3.

<sup>49</sup> Ucembe, “The Harm of Orphanages (Part 1): The Illusion of Protection.”

<sup>50</sup> “Why it Matters: How Orphanages Harm Children,” Hope and Homes for Children, accessed December 24, 2023, <https://www.hopeandhomes.org/why-it-matters/how-orphanages-harm-children/>.

<sup>51</sup> Hope and Homes for Children, “Why it Matters: How Orphanages Harm Children.”

spends in an institution, its effects can last forever.

Orphanages also present greater opportunities for orphan trafficking. “Orphan trafficking” is the transfer of children from their families into orphanages to use them for profit or exploitation. According to a study on the connection between child welfare systems and human trafficking, sixty percent of child sex trafficking victims have been within the child welfare system.<sup>52</sup> Traffickers receive, hold, and transport these children. They can include orphanage staff, recruiters, community members, or tourists. Orphanage trafficking recruiters sometimes take on children by promising their families support, an education, or other opportunities. Orphanage trafficking has strong ties to voluntourism. Voluntourism is a popular form of international travel where people volunteer and sightsee together. These trips often come in package deals. During the trip, hosting organizations pay orphanages to allow the group to visit them and volunteer there. Voluntourism is a large source of funding for orphanages, along with illegal international adoption.<sup>53</sup> Illegal adoption can be used for false adoption, which can result in acts of violence against children.<sup>54</sup> UNICEF has recommended that countries adopt legislation that prohibits illegal adoption. It also urges for more effective national child protective systems.<sup>55</sup>

Orphanage volunteering allows opportunities for the abuse and sexual exploitation of children. In 2017, a teenager from the United States volunteered in an orphanage in Kenya. He received 40 years in prison for sexually assaulting four children while working at the orphanage.<sup>56</sup> In 2019, a man from the United States was convicted of sexually abusing children at an orphanage he had started in Cambodia.<sup>57</sup> These incidents

are unfortunately not isolated to just visitors. In 2020, police arrested three staff members at a children’s institution in Armenia for physically abusing young children.<sup>58</sup> In most circumstances, orphanage volunteers have little to no experience and have not received a background check. This results from a lack of funding and insufficient staff or volunteers. Voluntourists tend to form connections with children as they volunteer, only to depart a few months or weeks later. This leaves children with the expectation that anyone they bond with will eventually leave them and perpetuates a cycle of trauma and attachment issues. Orphanages can also be a form of tourism in themselves. As mentioned, visits to orphanages are common as part of a tourist package. Overfilled orphanages or those kept in poverty can encourage tourists to visit them and collect money from visitors continually.

Foster care is a temporary living situation for children who cannot live with their guardian(s).<sup>59</sup> This may be a result of death, illness, poverty, abuse, or neglect. It can also be from drug or alcohol use or other circumstances that leave the caregiver unable to care for the child. Unfortunately, foster care can be a dangerous place for many children. A study published in the *Violence Against Women* journal found that a third of youth in foster care faced neglect and a quarter experienced physical abuse by a foster caregiver.<sup>60</sup>

On October 25, 2023, the United States Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and Law held a hearing investigating the human rights of foster children. This allowed two of Georgia’s Division of Family & Child Services (DCFS) victims to share their stories. DCFS is in place to protect children from abuse, neglect, child trafficking, and any

52 “The Foster Care to Human Trafficking Pipeline: Why Children and Teens in Foster Care are More Likely to Be Trafficked,” SOS Children’s Villages, last modified December 8, 2023, <https://www.sosillinois.org/the-foster-care-to-human-trafficking-pipeline-why-children-and-teens-in-foster-care-are-more-likely-to-be-trafficked/>.

53 Interparliamentary Taskforce on Human Trafficking, “Orphanage Trafficking Legislative Toolkit.”

54

55 “Illegal adoptions,” UNICEF, accessed December 24, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-sale-of-children/illegal-adoptions>.

56 Ucembe, “The Harm of Orphanages (Part 1): The Illusion of Protection.”

57 U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Oregon, “ICYMI: Oregon Man Sentenced to Life in Prison for Sexually Abusing Children at an Orphanage in Cambodia,” News Release, January 30 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-or/pr/icymi-oregon-man-sentenced-life-prison-sexually-abusing-children-orphanage-cambodia>.

58 “Yerevan Orphanage Workers Arrested on Child Abuse Charges,” *Azbarez*, September 24, 2023, <https://azbarez.com/yerevan-orphanage-workers-arrested-on-child-abuse-charges/>.

59 “Foster Carers Raising Foster Children,” The Australian Parenting Website, last updated September 21, 2023, <https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-diversity/parents-like-me/raising-foster-children>.

60 Barbara Ball, Sharon Hofer, Xiao Ding, Lalaine Sevillano, and Monica Faulkner, “Promoting Healthy Relationships in Foster Care—‘If I Had Seen What a Healthy Relationship Looks Like, That Would Have Changed My Perspective,’” *Violence Against Women* 29, no. 14 (November 2023): 2827, doi: 10.1177/10778012231199106.

other child-related crimes. Though it is a system with good intentions, DCFS does not always investigate crimes to their full extent. Due to inadequacies of the system, they sometimes fail to prevent abuse from occurring. One case presented in the hearing was from a mother to a two-year-old. DCFS's lack of receptiveness contributed to the child's death. A mother, Rachel Aldridge, told the story of how her child was put into the father's care against her will. When Rachel was wrongfully arrested and detained, DCFS was called to the scene to make sure her daughter Brooklyn had a safe place to stay. She had arranged for her child to stay with her sister and brother-in-law. The two knew her daughter well and were certified foster parents. Despite this, DCFS placed Brooklyn in her father's custody. The father was not involved in his child's life, nor was he a foster parent. When Rachel was released, Brooklyn's father showed her a falsified DCFS document that denied her custody. Brooklyn had to stay in the care of her father and father's girlfriend, who was a methamphetamine user. Even after Rachel explained the situation to DCFS, she was not given custody, and Brooklyn remained with her father. Later, her father's girlfriend was convicted of murdering Brooklyn.<sup>61</sup> This case shows how some policies can cause harm even when put in place for a good reason. DCFS strives to protect children

but failed this case and many others. Laws and agencies like DCFS exist internationally: Norwegian Child Welfare Services, Children's Aid Society in Canada, Jugendamt in Germany, and others. They are important to ensure the safety of children but must be maintained and regulated. Those working with children need training in receptivity and providing adequate care. The quality of support for the world's most vulnerable population must be exceptional.

A 2023 *Global and Health* journal study has created a strategy to address the care of children. They proposed the 'children's care agenda.' The children's care agenda refers to the various donors, foundations, agencies, and organizations working hard to address the care of orphaned children worldwide. It includes at least three main components. First, strengthening the ability of families to care for their children. Second, preventing family separation in groups most at risk. Third, providing suitable and appropriate alternative care for the millions of children separated from their biological parents. The children's care agenda also endorses a deinstitutionalization (DI) strategy. DI refers to reforming the child welfare system by closing orphanages and current childcare institutions. It would replace this type of care with that in a family or family-

61 Sydney Johnson, "The Foster Care System, Built to Protect Vulnerable Children, Has Routinely Ignored Cases of Child Abuse and Trafficking," Government Accountability Project, last modified November 20, 2023, <https://whistleblower.org/blog/the-foster-care-system-built-to-protect-vulnerable-children-has-routinely-ignored-cases-of-child-abuse-and-trafficking/>.

Ghana Africa Orphanage  
 Credit: Lauren Gardenbelle Fritts



like environment in the community.<sup>62</sup> The study found that global policy conflicts made it difficult for lawmakers to coordinate initiatives. It recommends applying this strategy globally and urges countries to build trust and cooperation in managing disagreements regarding deinstitutionalization.

The relationship between a child and their caregiver is significant for developing their mental wellness. A study of child and caregiver relationships found that the level of trusting relationships between children and caregivers was strongly related to the child's mental health. A lack of these relationships causes a higher likelihood of depression, social anxiety, and low self-esteem.<sup>63</sup> Foster care and residential institutions do not always have the resources that children with disabilities or additional support needs require. Children in these facilities should have access to the support they need to thrive.

Caseworkers, orphanage staff, medical professionals, and other adults who are aware a child is in foster care must monitor the child's physical and emotional state for signs of abuse. The first resort for a family does not always need to be putting a child in an orphanage where they may be abused. Instead, policies must work towards keeping a child in a healthy family through financial and educational support. Donor agencies, international organizations, governmental agencies, and non-governmental associations need to work together to advance legislation and policies for the care and protection of children. This legislation must represent the needs of individual children and families. Through a multisectoral approach, countries can better manage disagreements. Thus, governments can reach cooperation around the legitimacy of institution-based care as opposed to family-based care as a strategy for mitigating child abuse and domestic violence.

## Conclusion

Through recent global patterns of armed conflict,

humanitarian conflict, and public health emergencies, child abuse, and domestic violence have recently reached higher rates than they have in years. As these violence rates rise, they interconnect themselves within families and relationships. Child maltreatment is much more likely to occur in a home in which spousal abuse or domestic violence takes place.<sup>64</sup> The effects of violence, abuse, and neglect on a child can last them well beyond their childhood. A neglected or abused child is more likely to neglect or abuse their future child than someone who did not face abuse.<sup>65</sup>

As the rates of abuse in orphanages and foster homes have been rising, this scenario is becoming more common. The lack of effective laws regarding child abuse and domestic violence in foster care, orphanages, and residential institutions perpetuates a traumatic cycle. Cutting off this cycle is critical to protecting children's well-being. Although parents decide whether a child goes into the entertainment industry, they are not always aware of what goes on behind the scenes. Children in this industry are often separated from their caregiver(s) for extended periods. This puts the child in a vulnerable position regarding authority. Many children fail to report abuse or neglect due to threats, fear of losing money or their job, or fear of losing a reputation. Online platforms like social media and gaming, which are becoming more popular and widely used, also expose children to dangerous media and an increased risk of sexual exploitation. Delegates of UNICEF must take into account the massive intersectionality of child abuse and domestic violence. Through this and its recent developments in the areas of the media industry and orphanages/ foster homes, they can unwind these issues to their roots and develop effective solutions to combat child abuse and domestic violence.

<sup>62</sup> Shawar and Shiffman, "Global priority for the care of orphans and other vulnerable children: transcending problem definition challenges," 1-3.

<sup>63</sup> Beneyam Lake Yimer and Shouket Ahmad Tilwani, "The association between caregiver child relationships and mental health of Ethiopian orphans," *Clin Child Psychol Psychiatry* (October 16, 2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13591045231205968>.

<sup>64</sup> *Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Contributing to Child Maltreatment* (Los Angeles: Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021), <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/factors/family/domviolence/>.

<sup>65</sup> *Long Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect* (Los Angeles: Child Welfare Information Gateway, April 2019), [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/long\\_term\\_consequences.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/long_term_consequences.pdf).



UNICEF

NHSMUN 2024



## TOPIC B: ENSURING CHILDREN'S HEALTH THROUGH IMPROVED IMMUNIZATION

Photo Credit: U.S. Department of State

## Introduction

Through advances in vaccination development and implementation, the field of immunization is constantly evolving. There has been a lot of progress regarding childhood immunization in recent decades. This has led to increased vaccine coverage and a reduction in vaccine-preventable diseases. Today, vaccines can target specific diseases, but they can also offer cross-protection that strengthens the immune system's ability to defend itself from similar diseases. These advancements have increased the overall efficiency of immunization while reducing the number of vaccine doses needed worldwide. This has significantly helped both healthcare providers and parents.

Immunization schedules are used to know the best time intervals and ages for children to receive vaccines.<sup>1</sup> This is important information for healthcare providers and parents to access. As guidelines change, they must have access to the most updated information possible. However, progress in addressing vaccination confusion—especially since the COVID-19 pandemic—and the resulting distrust have stalled complete children's immunization. Additionally, the overall health shortages since the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a worldwide decline in vaccination. UNICEF calls for all governments to work together to ensure that children receive the vaccinations they need in a timely manner. This requires knowledge of recent trends, vaccine technology changes, and global collaboration toward these efforts. Delegates in this committee should work towards achieving these goals and working for a better future for our children.

## Current Policy Changes and Trends in Childhood Vaccination

In recent months, immunization guidelines have been changed worldwide. These changes have occurred in countries like the United States and Armenia, addressing how children are currently becoming sick. However, it is still difficult for children to become completely immunized, as they face many barriers. As the field of vaccines changes and science

advances, updates are valuable. However, this can also make it difficult for parents and other caregivers to vaccinate their children completely. Therefore, delegates of UNICEF need to consider recent policy changes and barriers to childhood vaccine schedules when improving childhood immunization.

In the United States, government organizations and private groups have updated vaccination guidelines for children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published updated guidelines on childhood vaccination in November 2023. The CDC changed their recommendations for children and adolescents to include new vaccines, such as the Mpox vaccine and the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine. These are both diseases that have seen recent surges in the United States.<sup>2</sup> These surges are due to low vaccination rates and a rise in pathogens, which are microorganisms such as bacteria that cause disease.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released new guidance on the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination for girls.<sup>4</sup> This vaccine aims to protect against HPV, a virus that can cause cervical cancer.<sup>5</sup> The AAP now recommends that girls receive the first dose of the HPV vaccine when they are nine years old instead of 11 or 12 years old, the current CDC recommendation. The AAP cites research that shows that young women who receive the first dose when they are younger are more likely to come back to receive the second dose that is needed for protection by

1 "Armenia launches revised immunization schedule and catch-up campaign," World Health Organization, November 6, 2023, <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/photo-stories/item/armenia-launches-revised-immunization-schedule-and-catch-up-campaign>.

2 "Schedule Changes & Guidance," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November 16, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/schedule-changes.html>.

3 "Urgent Need to Increase Immunization Coverage for Influenza, COVID-19, and RSV and Use of Authorized/Approved Therapeutics in the Setting of Increased Respiratory Disease Activity During the 2023 - 2024 Winter Season," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified December 14, 2023, <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2023/han00503.asp>.

4 Mary Koslap-Petraco, "Immunization Update: 2024 Vaccine Schedules for Infants, Children, and Adolescents," Clinical Advisor, last modified August 24, 2023, [https://www.clinicaladvisor.com/home/topics/pediatrics-information-center/immunization\\_update\\_children\\_2024/](https://www.clinicaladvisor.com/home/topics/pediatrics-information-center/immunization_update_children_2024/).

5 "HPV Vaccine Information For Young Women," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv-vaccine-young-women.htm>.



Measles vaccination in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Credit: CDC Global

the time they reach age 15.<sup>6</sup> These new guidelines within the United States tackle new threats to childhood health, such as surges in disease activity. Guidelines like these are examples of the policy changes that can occur related to vaccinations.

Armenia also updated its immunization schedule for children in November 2023. These changes were made under the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. This development follows a recent surge in infectious diseases in Armenia in 2023. Measles cases, for example, have increased by 3266 percent in Europe and Central Asia in 2023 compared to 2022.<sup>7</sup> According to UNICEF, this increase is because fewer children are vaccinated against these diseases. In many cases, children missed out on vaccinations or only received partial immunizations. This new immunization schedule should help reduce the current disease surge in Armenia.<sup>8</sup> This schedule includes visual aids and summary tables to help healthcare providers and parents understand the steps required to vaccinate children. This new guideline also includes guidance on catching up on vaccinations for children, adolescents, and

adults who are behind. This targets people who missed out on vaccines before and during the pandemic and over 100,000 refugees from the Karabakh region who recently entered Armenia.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this policy change addresses current problems within Armenia and emphasizes the importance of following immunization schedules.

In addition to changing policy, several recent trends have negatively impacted global levels of childhood vaccination. Updated in December 2023, UNICEF reported that 67 million children have not received mandatory vaccinations. This is due to two primary reasons: lack of access to vaccines and decreased confidence in vaccines. Supply chain disruptions, conflict, and lack of funding have made vaccines unavailable for many communities. Additionally, there is a global decline in vaccine confidence of up to 44 percent. This has impacted children most strongly.<sup>10</sup> This decline is due to different beliefs, such as thinking vaccines will not protect against disease or fear about side effects.<sup>11</sup> As a result, some children do not receive all the required vaccines. Others might not receive the

<sup>6</sup> Koslap-Petraco, "Immunization Update."

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, "Measles Cases in Europe and Central Asia Skyrocket by 3000 Per Cent This Year Compared to Last," press release, December 14, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/measles-cases-europe-and-central-asia-skyrocket-3000-cent-year-compared-last>.

<sup>8</sup> "Measles Cases in Europe and Central Asia Skyrocket by 3000 Per Cent This Year Compared to Last."

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization, "Armenia launches revised immunization schedule and catch-up campaign."

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, "New Data Indicates Declining Confidence in Childhood Vaccines of Up to 44 Percentage Points in Some Countries During the COVID-19 Pandemic," press release, last modified December 19, 2023, [https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/sowc\\_2023\\_immunization](https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/sowc_2023_immunization).

<sup>11</sup> M. Lelinneth B. Novilla, Michael C. Goates, Alisha H. Redelfs, Mallory Quenzer, Lynneeth Kirsten B. Novilla, Tyler Leffler, Christian A. Holt, Russell B. Doria, Michael T. Dang, Melissa Hewitt, Emma Lind, Elizabeth Prickett, and Katelyn Aldridge, "Why Parents Say No to Having Their Children Vaccinated against Measles: A Systematic Review of the Social Determinants of Parental Perceptions on MMR Vaccine

second dose needed to make the vaccine effective or receive the doses too far apart. This decline in immunization opens different countries to increased outbreaks and children to harmful diseases.

The CDC and WHO found that vaccination rates for the measles vaccine are declining globally.<sup>12</sup> To be fully protected, children must receive two doses of the measles vaccine. According to the report, 22 million children worldwide never received a measles vaccine, and 11 million never received a second dose. Furthermore, global vaccine coverage for the first dose of the measles vaccine was 83 percent, while the global coverage for the second dose was only 74 percent. To prevent outbreaks, 95 percent coverage is necessary, meaning that many countries are currently at risk.<sup>13</sup> Due to lower vaccine coverage, 47 countries have reported large outbreaks in 2023. This is an increase of 10 countries compared to 2022 and an increase of 25 countries compared to 2021.<sup>14</sup>

The reasons for poor childhood vaccination change depending on the income level of the country. Currently, in higher-income countries, vaccination rates are mostly declining because of vaccine hesitancy or the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite having access to vaccines.<sup>15</sup> Other barriers to childhood vaccination, such as social factors like limited access to healthcare, still apply to a lesser degree. In one example, as of November 2023, only 5 percent of children in the United States had received a COVID-19 booster vaccine.<sup>16</sup> In the United States, parents choose not to vaccinate their

children because they believe the booster will not provide extra protection against new coronavirus types. Additionally, parents are worried about the potential side effects of the vaccine.<sup>17</sup> Published in October 2023, a nationwide study based in South Korea determined that 82.5 percent of parents are highly hesitant about vaccinating their children against COVID-19.<sup>18</sup> This survey confirmed that many parents are worried about the safety and effectiveness of these vaccines. This recent decrease in the confidence of vaccines has decreased global vaccination rates. However, low- and middle-income countries also face increasing hesitancy and poor access to vaccines.

In low- and middle-income countries, vaccination rates are largely declining because of poor accessibility to vaccines and supply chain issues.<sup>19</sup> A report from the CDC in October 2023 found that 84 percent of children who have received no routine vaccination live in low- and lower-middle-income countries.<sup>20</sup> Scarce resources, insufficient healthcare infrastructure, and a lack of trained personnel can result in few childhood vaccinations. Additionally, lower-income countries that suffer from conflict or frequent natural disasters often experience significant damage to their healthcare systems. This causes many children to fall behind on their vaccinations.<sup>21</sup> For example, Ghana relies on the RTS, S/AS01<sub>E</sub> vaccine to protect children under five from malaria. Children must receive four doses of the vaccine to be fully protected. In Ghana, the supply of this vaccine is minimal, and many children cannot

Hesitancy," *Vaccines* 11, no. 5 (May 2023), <http://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines11050926>.

12 Anna A. Minta, Matt Ferrari, Sebastien Antoni, Allison Portnoy, Alyssa Sbarra, Brian Lambert, Cynthia Hatcher, Christopher H. Hsu, Lee Lee Ho, Claudia Steulet, Marta Gacic-Dobo, Paul A. Rota, Mick N. Mulders, Anindya Sekhar Bose, William Perea Caro, Patrick O'Connor, and Natasha S. Crowcroft, *Progress Toward Measles Elimination — Worldwide, 2000–2022* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/pdfs/mm7246a3-H.pdf>.

13 World Health Organization, "Global measles threat continues to grow as another year passes with millions of unvaccinated children," news release, November 16, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news/item/16-11-2023-global-measles-threat-continues-to-grow-as-another-year-passes-with-millions-of-children-unvaccinated>.

14 Helen Branswell, "Report: Measles Cases and Deaths Increase Worldwide, as Childhood Vaccination Rates Decline," *Stat News*, November 16, 2023, <https://www.statnews.com/2023/11/16/measles-cases-and-deaths-increase-worldwide-as-childhood-vaccination-rates-decline-report/>.

15 Branswell, "Report: Measles Cases and Deaths Increase Worldwide."

16 Cecelia Smith-Schoenwalder, "COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake 'Disappointing' Ahead of Holidays, Winter," *U.S. News*, November 21, 2023, <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-11-21/covid-19-vaccine-uptake-disappointing-ahead-of-holidays-winter>.

17 "Why So Many Americans Aren't Getting COVID Boosters," Alton Memorial Hospital, last modified October 5, 2023, <https://www.altonmemorialhospital.org/Health-Library/View-Content?contentTypeid=68&contentid=1665786297>.

18 Ju Hwan Kim, Dongwon Yoon, Yunha Noh, Jaehun Jung, Young June Choe, and Ju-Young Shin, "Predictors of COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Among Parents of Children Aged 5–11 Years in Korea," *Journal of Korean Medical Science* 38, no. 42 (October 2023), <https://doi.org/10.3346/jkms.2023.38.e315>.

19 Ashley M. Fox, Yongjin Choi, and Leesa Lin, "Substantial Disparities in COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake and Unmet Immunization Demand in Low and Middle-Income Countries," *Health Affairs* 42, no. 12 (December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2023.00729>.

20 Gurpreet Kaur et al., "Routine Vaccination Coverage – Worldwide, 2022," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 72, no. 43 (October 2023): 1158, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7243a1.htm>.

21 "Measles," World Health Organization, last modified August 9, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/measles>.

receive all doses necessary to be immunized. Despite Ghana having over four million children under the age of five years old, only two million children have been vaccinated across Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi with this vaccine since it was first administered in 2019.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the excessive demand for this vaccine is the primary reason why children in Ghana are not vaccinated against malaria. However, vaccine hesitancy is still part of the problem here. A qualitative study published in the *Malaria Journal* in September 2023 explored why children did not complete their immunization series. Many caretakers reported that they did not take their child to receive the last dose of the vaccine because it overlapped with when the children started school. Currently, the recommendation is that children receive the final dose of the vaccine when they are 24 months old, but most children in Ghana have already begun schooling at this age. In addition to scheduling conflicts, the 15-month gap between the third and fourth doses causes some caregivers to forget to immunize their children fully. Some parents also reported that they did not take their children back to receive subsequent doses because of negative attitudes from healthcare providers. They claimed that some healthcare providers insulted them or were rude, especially when they did not take their child to receive a dose on time. This discouraged parents from returning and fully immunizing their children. Other caregivers had concerns after their child experienced a reaction to a previous dose or felt that four doses were too many.<sup>23</sup> This example from Ghana illustrates the importance of considering vaccine accessibility and hesitancy when administering immunization guidelines and programs. It also shows the role that the attitude and training of healthcare providers play in this topic.

Many issues have made childhood vaccination a challenge recently. Changes in policies, vaccine hesitancy, and a lack of access to vaccines are all issues that have to be considered.

Recent updates to vaccine policies are important to understand to develop solutions to the topic at hand. Delegates of UNICEF must work together to consider all the other barriers children may face in getting vaccinations. Finally, increasing positive feelings about vaccination services is essential to this topic. By considering all these angles, delegates should be able to develop holistic solutions.

## Recent Global Collaboration on Immunization Projects

The international community's role is essential to understand the needs of children worldwide. Collaborative research and development (R&D) programs between countries and organizations, such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), have been key to responding quickly and effectively to diseases. Additionally, global programs focusing on administering vaccines, including Rotary International's "Rotary Give Every Child a Future" (RGECAF), have improved childhood vaccination levels. Both R&D and administrative programs have implemented recent changes since August 2023. Understanding these updates and how these programs work will be key to working towards solutions.

R&D measures are usually the first stage in the creation of vaccines. These are used by companies, organizations, and government programs to introduce vaccines to the market.<sup>24</sup> This is a critical step in supplying vaccinations to children globally. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, global vaccine markets and R&D have grown to meet the increased vaccine demand.<sup>25</sup> Currently, more than half of the vaccines currently in development focus on various cancers, coronavirus, and influenza. The remaining 46 percent target infectious diseases such as HPV and Ebola. With this work, it is estimated that 14 additional vaccines will be included in vaccination schedules

22 "How are Ghana's Children?," The World's Children Prize, accessed January 17, 2024, <https://worldschildrengprize.org/ghana>.

"Health Workers: Key to the Success of Malaria Vaccine Implementation Programme," *World Health Organization News*, November 23, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/photo-story/photo-story-detail/health-workers--key-to-the-success-of-the-malaria-vaccine-implementation-programme>.

23 Joshua Okyere et al., "RTS, S/AS01<sub>E</sub> vaccine defaults in Ghana: a qualitative exploration of the perspectives of defaulters and frontline health service providers," *Malaria Journal* 22, no. 260 (September 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12936-023-04690-4>.

24 Will Kenton, "Research and Development (R&D) Definition, Types, and Importance," Investopedia, last modified July 19, 2023, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/randd.asp>.

25 Katherine Berry and Luly Dickinson, "The Global Vaccine R&D Pipeline and Delivery Implications," *Pharmaceutical Executive*, last modified September 20, 2023, <https://www.pharmexec.com/view/global-vaccine-rd-pipeline-and-delivery-implications>.

by 2035.<sup>26</sup> This development is showcased by several key vaccines and programs.

In October 2023, the WHO recommended an additional vaccine for childhood malaria prevention.<sup>27</sup> In a joint operation, the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom and the Serum Institute of India Private Limited Company (SIPL) have worked to develop, manufacture, and scale up the new vaccine, R21/Matrix-M.<sup>28</sup> An American company, Novavax, also supplied vaccine technology in this development process.<sup>29</sup> This collaborative development of this new vaccine is meant to offset the demand for malaria vaccines. Therefore, using both malaria vaccines is expected to supply enough vaccines for children living in areas prone to malaria. Since R21/Matrix-M was successful in clinical trials, it was cleared as both safe and effective in preventing malaria in children. It is expected to be available to countries in mid-2024, and currently, 28 countries in Africa plan on administering it to

their children. This is only one example of a current R&D project that highlights the role that international cooperation can play in reducing severe illness, hospitalizations, and child deaths.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the R21/Matrix-M vaccine as a recent R&D project, some organizations are dedicated to global vaccine R&D. CEPI is an international group providing funding, technology, and scientific infrastructure. This organization works with independent research projects by giving them the connections and resources to develop vaccines.<sup>31</sup> Founded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, it hopes to respond to any potential disease with a new vaccine within 100 days, hopefully reducing the threat of a future global pandemic.<sup>32</sup> Since it was created in 2017, CEPI has developed over 30 vaccines against diseases like Ebola, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), SARS-CoV-2, and more. In December 2023, the CEPI worked with the University

<sup>26</sup> Berry and Dickinson, "The Global Vaccine R&D Pipeline."

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organization, "WHO Recommends R21/Matrix-M Vaccine for Malaria Prevention in Updated Advice on Immunization," news release, October 2, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-10-2023-who-recommends-r21-matrix-m-vaccine-for-malaria-prevention-in-updated-advice-on-immunization>.

<sup>28</sup> "R21/Matrix-M™ Malaria Vaccine Developed by University of Oxford Receives Regulatory Clearance for Use in Ghana," University of Oxford, accessed January 17, 2024, <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2023-04-13-r21matrix-m-malaria-vaccine-developed-university-oxford-receives-regulatory>.

<sup>29</sup> "Our Matrix-M™ Adjuvant Technology," Novavax, accessed January 17, 2024, <https://www.novavax.com/science-technology/matrix-m-adjuvant-technology>.

<sup>30</sup> World Health Organization, "WHO Recommends R21/Matrix-M Vaccine for Malaria Prevention."

<sup>31</sup> "Preparing for Future Pandemics," Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://cepi.net/>.

<sup>32</sup> "Scientists Explore How Chrysalis-Based 'Living Bioreactors' Could Accelerate New Vaccine Production," Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, last modified January 17, 2024, [https://cepi.net/news\\_cepi/scientists-explore-how-chrysalis-based-living-bioreactors-could-accelerate-new-vaccine-production/](https://cepi.net/news_cepi/scientists-explore-how-chrysalis-based-living-bioreactors-could-accelerate-new-vaccine-production/).



Vaccination at Naval Medical Center

Credit: Navy Medicine

of Oxford and another United Kingdom-based company, Barinthus Biotherapeutics, to develop a potential vaccine named VTP-500.<sup>33</sup> This vaccine is meant to prevent MERS, a disease that has no current vaccine and can be fatal for children. This vaccine is still in its testing phases. However, in the case of an outbreak, they are prepared to spread over 100,000 doses within a clinical trial setting.<sup>34</sup> For children, symptoms of MERS range from being asymptomatic to severe pneumonia, septic shock, and organ failure.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, this collaborative R&D project is critical for the well-being and health of children.

Although R&D is critical to developing vaccines for children, distributing and administering them is just as important. Because of this, the involvement of countries and organizations is key in providing vaccines to children.<sup>36</sup> For example, the organization Gavi improves access to immunization for children in countries with limited access to vaccines. Between 2000 and 2023, Gavi has vaccinated over one billion children in 78 countries, averting an estimated 17.3 million deaths.<sup>37</sup> Rotary International is also a leading organization that distributes and administers vaccines to children worldwide. By 2023, Rotary has immunized more than 2.5 billion children in 122 countries since it was founded in 1905.<sup>38</sup> Both organizations distribute and administer vaccines, improving children's lives and global health security. The work of international cooperation has positive effects on current childhood immunization rates.

In partnership with UNICEF, Rotary Gives Every Child a Future (RGECAF), Rotary International provides various vaccines to children living in nine South Pacific Island countries. This includes over 330 islands and atolls within

Nauru, Tuvalu, Samoa, Vanuatu, Tonga, Niue, the Cook Islands, Kiribati, and Tokelau.<sup>39</sup> These specific vaccines are comparatively new and expensive, making it difficult for these islands to obtain them without the assistance of the RGECAF program. Rotavirus and pneumococcal vaccines prevent illness and death related to pneumonia and diarrhea, which are the leading killers of children under the age of five in the Pacific Islands. Since Pacific Island families suffer from high rates of life-threatening cervical cancer, HPV vaccines are also being administered to protect girls in their adulthood.<sup>40</sup> UNICEF and Rotary plan to vaccinate 100,000 children within these communities in the next three years. To distribute these vaccines, they are working with local governments to develop programs to deliver them to children in need. The RGECAF program will also strengthen healthcare systems within these nine countries to ensure that vaccines can be delivered during these three years and in the future. To improve administering these vaccines, this program will also provide necessary supplies like temperature-controlled vaccine storage and training to healthcare workers.<sup>41</sup> This program is supported by a USD 4 million budget that the Asian Development Bank and Rotary International funded. The success of the RGECAF program is intended to protect children in the Pacific Islands from deadly diseases and improve healthcare infrastructure in the long run.

In addition to Rotary International's program, individual countries have received assistance from international organizations in distributing and administering vaccines to children. In Haiti, the combination of several public crises, vaccine hesitancy, and poor access to health care has led to low vaccination rates.<sup>42</sup> For example, only 2 percent of Haiti's

33 "New Partnership Aims to Advance Vaccine Against MERS Coronavirus," Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, last modified December 21, 2023, [https://cepi.net/news\\_cepi/new-partnership-aims-to-advance-vaccine-against-mers-coronavirus/](https://cepi.net/news_cepi/new-partnership-aims-to-advance-vaccine-against-mers-coronavirus/).

34 Sophia Abene, "New Partnership Aiming to Advance Vaccine for MERS," *Contagion Live*, January 18, 2024, <https://www.contagionlive.com/view/mers-coronavirus-meets-a-new-partnership-aiming-to-advance-vaccine>.

35 "Factsheet about Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)," European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus/factsheet>.

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41 Rotary International, "Give Every Child a Future - Our Australasian Centenary Project: Our Goal."

42 "Young Health Volunteers Mobilize to Reverse Decline in Vaccination in Haiti Due to Crisis and Vaccine Hesitancy," Pan American Health Organization, last modified November 21, 2023, <https://www.paho.org/en/news/21-11-2023-young-health-volunteers-mobilize-reverse-decline-vaccination-haiti-due-crisis-and>.

population has been vaccinated against COVID-19 as of October 2023.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the Canadian government and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) will work together as part of Canada's Global Initiative for Vaccine Equity (CanGIVE). This gives Haiti around USD 4.4 million to improve vaccine outreach and operations.<sup>44</sup> First, this initiative began with an awareness campaign to identify and monitor the vaccinations of pregnant women and children between 0 and 23 months. Then, unvaccinated individuals were encouraged to visit vaccine sites to catch up on missed vaccinations. Since it was implemented in September 2023, over 75,000 people have been informed about the benefits of vaccines. As of November 2023, 839 children and 254 pregnant women have been vaccinated for polio, rubella, measles, diphtheria, and more.<sup>45</sup> This program to administer vaccines shows the importance of international cooperation in providing children with vaccines.

The international community must work together to address childhood immunization. By working together on R&D initiatives, children can be vaccinated against more diseases. These collaborative projects have allowed countries to respond to emerging diseases quickly and effectively. This subtopic has also given many examples of how global programs that administer vaccines have improved childhood vaccination rates. These types of programs are critical to understand for delegates of UNICEF to solve current issues in childhood immunization. By collaborating, delegates should be able to establish programs such as the ones mentioned above that immunize children worldwide.

## Conclusion

The issue of childhood vaccinations is a complex one. Many issues, such as lack of access, mistrust of health systems, and changing policies, have all impacted many children's ability to receive vaccines when needed. Many countries and organizations have implemented programs that attempt

to address these issues. While they have succeeded to some extent, the international community must work together to strengthen these programs and create globally successful ones. Whether these programs are dedicated to education surrounding vaccines or providing vaccines to remote communities, they are all important and necessary. Delegates must consider how each program may have positives and negatives. For example, although updated vaccine schedules can help prevent outbreaks, they may make it more difficult for caregivers to vaccinate their children in time. The challenges that come with these programs, however, should not dissuade delegates from the ultimate goal of improving children's health worldwide. This committee's mission is to improve vaccination for children around the world. This is an issue that cannot be solved by one country or one program alone. Rather, diplomacy and teamwork must prevail to solve this problem once and for all.

<sup>43</sup> Diana Roy and Rocio Cara Labrador, "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified October 3, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/haitis-troubled-path-development>.

<sup>44</sup> "PAHO Joins Forces With Canada to Reverse Declining Immunization Against Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in Haiti," Pan American Health Organization, last modified October 18, 2023, <https://www.paho.org/en/news/18-10-2023-paho-joins-forces-canada-reverse-declining-immunization-against-vaccine-preventable>.

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