



NHSMUN

National High School Model United Nations

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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2027! We are Armen Bagdassarian and Sabeeh Mirza, and we are elated to serve as this year's Secretaries-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse high school Model United Nations conference. As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience.

Realism and Accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. We strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational Emphasis: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership and diplomacy that strive toward consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Research and a Dedicated Staff: Our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Our Directors spend over six months preparing Background Guides, in addition to Update Briefs written to reflect the rapidly changing nature of the topics to be discussed. Our staffers are trained rigorously to provide the best conference experience possible. Our daises provide thoughtful comments on submitted position papers. Our staff aims to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research, but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering Participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions. This is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. Delegates spend countless hours researching topics critical to the UN and broader international sphere.

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

Best,

Armen Bagdassarian
Secretary-General

Sabeeh Mirza
Secretary-General

Position Paper Requirements

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

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

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the [Research Guide](#). To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections.

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

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

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

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages long** double-spaced with standard margins and 12 point font size. This is a maximum; **3–5 pages per topic is often a suitable length**. The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for submitting position papers on or before **February 26, 2027**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, their position paper must be submitted on or before **February 5, 2027**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the committee dais and returned before February 26. Instructions on how to submit position papers will be shared directly with faculty advisors.

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

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

Set up in 1946 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 10 (II), the United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD) is one of ECOSOC's key groups. It is the United Nations' main place to talk about social progress. At first, it was called the Social Commission. It got its current name in 1966. Its first job was to advise ECOSOC on general social rules not handled by other agencies. Over time, this role grew. Now, it works to promote plans that end poverty, build social unity, and create good jobs for all. Today, the Commission has 46 Member States. ECOSOC picks them to ensure fair global representation. The group meets every year at United Nations Headquarters in New York.¹

The Commission's current goals were shaped heavily by the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen. At that meeting, member states agreed on the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. They named ending poverty, plenty of jobs, and social unity as deeply linked pillars of social progress. Since then, CSocD has acted as the main United Nations body in charge of checking progress toward these goals. Starting in 2006, the Commission chose one main theme each year, helping it tackle new social problems through focused talks.²

After the Copenhagen Summit, the Commission went through a major change. In 1996, ECOSOC updated the Commission's rules. It started a long-term plan to boost its role in tracking the summit's promises. Its membership grew to 46 states. Its sessions became yearly starting in 1997. The Commission's working time was also lengthened to allow for deeper talks and planning.³

Since 2006, CSocD has built its work around yearly main themes. This allows member states to look closely at big barriers to fair social growth. Across its sessions, the Commission has tackled ending poverty, social integration, disability inclusion, aging, family policy, homelessness, digital technologies, care and support systems, and the social impacts of global crises.⁴

More recently, the Commission has assumed a renewed role following the Second World Summit for Social Development, held in Doha in 2025. The General Assembly's adoption of the Doha Political Declaration reaffirmed the principles first articulated in Copenhagen and strengthened CSocD's responsibility for reviewing progress.⁵ At its sixty-fourth session in 2026, the Commission focused on advancing social development and social justice through coordinated, equitable, and inclusive policies.⁶

¹ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)", <https://social.desa.un.org/csocd>.

² Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)"

³ UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. "COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT TO HOLD SPECIAL SESSION IN NEW YORK, 21-30 MAY." UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, May 13, 1996. <https://press.un.org/en/1996/19960517.soc4390.html>.

⁴ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)"

⁵ World Social Summit under the title Second World Summit for Social Development. "Second World Summit for Social Development 2025 | Second World Summit for Social Development 2025," November 10, 2025. <https://social.desa.un.org/world-summit-2025>

⁶ Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "64th Commission for Social Development - CSocD64," n.d. <https://social.desa.un.org/csocd/64th-session>

TOPIC A

CSOCD | NHSMUN 2027

Addressing Youth Unemployment



Introduction

The modern youth employment crisis is influenced by how opportunities are distributed, how education systems prepare young people, and how economies grow.¹ It is affected by changing labor markets, new technologies, and relationships between countries and private companies. In the past 30 years, global markets have shifted towards more service-based employment, like the healthcare or technology sectors.² These shifts make young people's transition from school to work much harder, especially as young workers may lack strong networks and training.³ The global financial crisis of 2008 also showed how vulnerable youth were to economic shocks. The recovery that followed was slow and uneven. In many countries, employers preferred experienced workers when hiring. Thus, young people without work were more likely to stay unemployed.⁴

These problems also worsened old inequalities. Youth unemployment is not shared equally across society. Young people from low-income families, rural communities, ethnic minorities, and indigenous groups usually face more barriers. These youth are most affected by youth unemployment. They are also the last to benefit even when conditions improve especially as they tend to have less school resources, transportation access, and employer connections.⁵

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that global youth unemployment fell to 13 percent in 2023, its lowest level in 15 years. However, this is a global average. It hides regional gaps.⁶ For example, in many developing countries, informal employment is common. This keeps young workers in unstable conditions without job benefits or security. In contrast, youth in developed countries may struggle with unemployment differently. Common issues include rising living costs, mental health pressures, and the loss of entry-level jobs. Therefore, positive statistics like the ILO's can be misleading.⁷ Despite progress, youth unemployment remains a big global issue.

Youth unemployment must be solved by short- and long-term solutions. This includes improving training and education quality, strengthening

social protections, and increasing digital access.⁸ The sections that follow trace how this issue developed, who is affected most, which policy responses have helped, and why the problem remains one of the most important social and economic challenges today.⁹

History and Description of the Issue

THE EVOLUTION OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

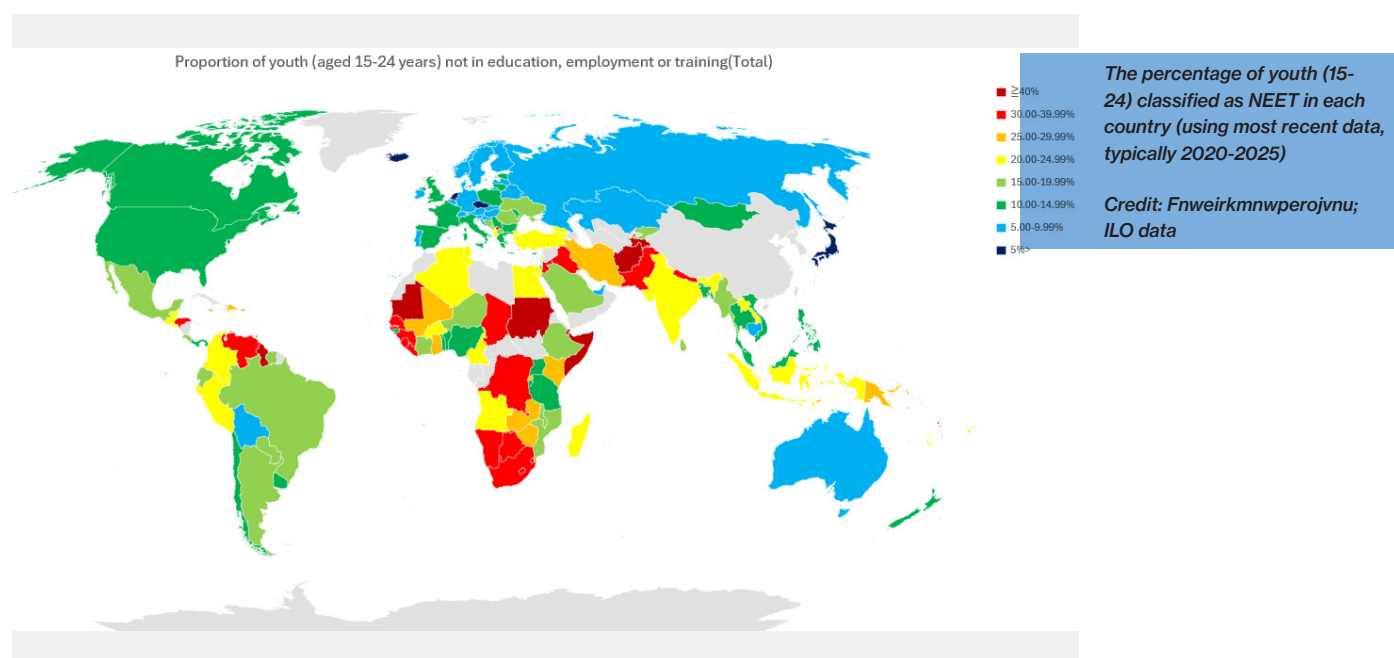
Young people have always faced more risk getting a job than established workers. This is because they have less experience, fewer connections, and less ability to negotiate their working terms. However, this fact stayed largely invisible for much of the twentieth century. Strong manufacturing sectors, powerful unions, and expanding economies in many countries absorbed young workers quickly.¹⁰ Youth unemployment was rarely tracked, debated, or treated as a problem because it was not seen as one. As the global economy restructured in the 1970s and 1980s, this began to change. Manufacturing declined across much of Europe and North America and shifted into lower-cost

regions like Asia and Latin America.¹¹ At the same time, service and knowledge industries grew. Thus, new workers were expected to have more education, specific skills.¹² Also, governments allowed employers to rely more on temporary or part-time contracts instead of full-time ones.¹³ Together, these shifts weakened the common paths that had once moved young people from school into stable work. This made that transition longer and more uncertain throughout the world.¹⁴

As youth unemployment increased, monitoring became necessary. Today, youth unemployment is measured in two ways. In general, youth unemployment refers to people aged 15 to 24 who are not working but are looking for a job.¹⁵ A wider measure is “Not in Employment, Education, or Training,” or NEET. This includes young people who are not working nor studying, no matter if they are looking for work or not.¹⁶ Tracking NEET matters because a country can have a moderate youth unemployment rate while still having a large hidden population of young people disconnected from the labor market.

These measures were most impacted by the 2008 global financial crisis. When banks collapsed and economies shrank, young workers

were hit the hardest. They were often the newest hires and were the easiest to fire. Across developed economies, youth unemployment jumped by 4.6 percentage points in a single year.¹⁷ In 2009, the United States male youth unemployment rate rose from 12.1 percent in 2008 to 19.8.¹⁸ Similar trends were seen in Southern Europe. In Greece and Spain, youth unemployment rose above 40 percent during the crisis.¹⁹ In Spain, half of all young workers had temporary contracts and were the first to lose their jobs.²⁰ These trends created a “scarred generation.” As defined by the UN, this refers to young people whose careers were damaged before they even began.²¹ The effects of this can last beyond the end of a recession. A study from the United Kingdom found that for every month of unemployment for youth aged 18 to 20, their annual income is reduced by about 1.2 percent.²² A 2014 European Commission report also found that young people who experienced unemployment right after leaving school tended to earn less for years afterward.²³ In some countries, this lasted almost a decade after the 2008 crisis. Researchers also describe part of this problem as a “matching” problem, where high unemployment can push young workers into jobs that do not fully use their skills or match their



training. It can take years of job changes and effort before they escape those early, poor job matches.²⁴

Unemployment does not affect all young people equally. Young people from lower income backgrounds are especially affected since they may have less education and training. In developing countries, many young people end up in informal work with no contracts, social protection, or training. This keeps them trapped in low-paying jobs even as a country's economy might improve. For example, studies from Latin America and the Caribbean show that young workers from low-income families, rural areas, and marginalized ethnic groups are more likely to move between unemployment and informal jobs, and less likely to find formal work with a clear career path.²⁵ Without family savings, strong professional networks, or quality education, many of these young people take whatever job is available, even if it pays poorly or does not match their skills. Over time, this furthers inequality.

These inequalities also vary across different regions. In 2024, young people in the Middle East and North Africa faced very high unemployment, while in Sub-Saharan Africa almost three-quarters of young workers were in informal jobs, often in farming or urban services.²⁶ Meanwhile, South Africa's youth unemployment rate reached 61 percent, compared to an average of around 6 percent across Europe.²⁷ In addition to this regional gap, a gender gap also exists. In 2024, the ILO found that two out of every three NEET young people worldwide were women. This is a pattern shaped by discrimination, societal roles, and economic conditions.²⁸ For example, one

in five job advertisements were found to have a gender preference in Vietnam, with 70 percent of advertisements favoring men.²⁹ Thus, youth unemployment is not only caused by economic factors. It is also shaped by structural factors, like who has education access. These differences help explain why the same economic crisis can affect young people in very different ways.

LABOR MARKET ACCESS LIMITATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth unemployment has many causes that go beyond any one crisis. The first major structural cause of youth unemployment is a mismatch between the skills schools teach and the skills jobs need. Thus, skills that employers require may not be ones that job seekers actually have.³⁰ Vocational and technical training in many countries lacks funding, equipment, or connections to employers, leaving young people without the skills needed to thrive even after completing school. This means that education systems can not do what the market demands, or employers are not offering jobs that match the skills young people are taught. The scale of this mismatch is large. A 2020 analysis found that more than half of the 108 countries studied had a skills mismatch rate above 50 percent.³¹

Employers have reported difficulty in finding workers with the skills they need, even as young people struggle to find work at all. In Asia and the Pacific, the share of employers reporting difficulty finding needed workers climbed from 28 percent in 2006 to 48 percent by 2015. In Latin America, over four in ten firms report the same

In 2024, the ILO found that two out of every three NEET young people worldwide were women.

problem, especially in Argentina, Colombia, and Peru. This mismatch comes from gaps that form long before young people enter the job market. For example, nine in ten children in developing countries cannot read with comprehension by age ten. This impacts job readiness years later.³² The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation Development (OECD) has claimed that improving education and training quality is one of the most important ways to reduce youth unemployment over time.³³ Thus, these gaps must be addressed.

Another structural cause of youth unemployment is how the labor market is split between formal and informal work. Formal jobs typically provide written contracts, legal protections, insurance, and stable wages. Informal jobs do not typically provide workers with contracts, social security, or legal protection. Young people are more likely to start in the informal economy because they have fewer skills or experience.³⁴ Formal employers tend to prefer experienced workers, but formal jobs are harder to get without networks or established skills. Though holding an informal job is not the same as being unemployed, the two are closely tied. Informal work is often what young people fall into when formal jobs are unavailable. Informal work rarely builds the experience needed to move into more formal jobs. It also leaves young workers without the protections that would help them if they lost that job entirely.

In 2025, the ILO estimated that 50.8 percent of workers aged 15 to 29 worldwide held informal jobs.³⁵ However, the amount of informal workers in developing and developed countries is very different. In high-income countries, only about 12 percent of young workers are informal. In low-

and lower-middle-income countries, this figure reaches nearly 86 percent.³⁶ Instead of being a temporary position before formal work, many young people stay as informal workers. In low- and lower-middle income countries, two out of three workers aged 25 to 29 were found to still be in insecure work like temporary jobs or self-employment.³⁷ A 2022 study of Mexico's youth labor market found that higher wages reduced a young worker's odds of ending up as an informal worker, but higher education did not.³⁸ Young Mexicans with a university education were not less likely to be an informal worker than those with only secondary education. This suggests that informal work reflects a shortage of formal jobs rather than a shortage of qualified workers.

Discrimination is another cause of youth unemployment. Young people may face discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, race, disability, class, income, or where they live. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) found that during the hiring process, people with names or addresses linked to marginalized groups get fewer opportunities to interview than people with the same resume from more "accepted" backgrounds.³⁹ This shows that discrimination can impact a young person, even before they are interviewed for a job.

Gender discrimination is another barrier. In 2025, the global NEET rate for young women reached 27.4 percent, more than double the rate for young men.⁴⁰ Additionally, over two-thirds of NEET youth worldwide are women.⁴¹ In recent years, this gap has only widened. Much of it traces back to unpaid care work. In Latin America, young women classified as NEET spend between

In Latin America, young women classified as NEET spend between 40 and 75 hours a week on unpaid caregiving

40 and 75 hours a week on unpaid caregiving, compared to 9 to 16 hours for young men.⁴² This kind of discrimination, whether in hiring decisions or in the assumptions built into who is expected to work, leads to some young people having fewer opportunities to gain their first job, build experience, and develop professional networks. Strong anti-discrimination rules, mentoring, and outreach to marginalized groups should be part of any youth employment plan.⁴³

Finally, the digital divide is another cause of youth unemployment. Access to computers, reliable internet, and digital training is more important as the labor market increasingly requires it. Young people from rural areas, marginalized neighborhoods, and developing countries often lack this access. This means they may not have the skills they need for jobs that use this new technology.⁴⁴ A UNESCO study found that 91 percent of schools in Europe and North America have media and informational learning in their school curricula, while in Africa only nine of 54 countries included it.⁴⁵ However, this gap extends beyond the classroom and into the job search. Around 40 percent of job seekers worldwide find work through online platforms. Yet, nearly three billion people do not have internet access.⁴⁶ This locks many youth out of the channels where jobs are being posted today.

These structural causes rarely operate alone. A young person without digital access is also more likely to lack formal schooling opportunities, face discrimination in hiring, and to end up informally employed as a result. Addressing youth unemployment requires recognizing how deeply these causes impact one another.

SUCCESSSES AND LIMITATIONS OF POLICIES AGAINST YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Governments have spent decades preparing young people for jobs, without making sure enough jobs actually exist for them to fill. At the global level, the UN has done many things to help youth unemployment. In 1995, the UN World

Programme of Action for Youth recognized youth unemployment as a major concern.⁴⁷ In 2001, the UN, ILO, and World Bank created the Youth Unemployment Network (YEN).⁴⁸ It focuses on key areas that impact youth employment the most, like education and training. The ILO also has set rules for economies around the world to ensure workers' safety and stability, including for youth workers.⁴⁹

Regional bodies also play an important role in helping youth employment. This includes the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).⁵⁰ Similar to the ILO or World Bank, these organizations provide research, policy guidance, and support to regional governments. For example, in 2012, the ECLAC and ILO published research and suggestions together on youth unemployment recovery after the 2008 global financial crisis.⁵¹

A 2023 ILO study looked at youth employment policies from almost three decades of records. It found that education and training has been the main focus of youth policy since the 1990s. About six in ten policy documents from the 1990s through 2017 focused on improving vocational training.⁵² Today, almost every country with a youth employment plan still includes some kind of education or training program. However, one thing has been mostly ignored. Policies that actually create jobs for young people, like wage subsidies, tax breaks, or bigger economic planning, have gotten far less attention. The same ILO study found that fewer than one in ten policy documents from the 1990s and 2000s dealt with the problem from this approach.⁵³ It is still the weakest area in national strategies today. This creates a different kind of mismatch than the one discussed earlier. Governments have spent decades preparing young people for jobs, without making sure enough jobs actually exist for them to fill. Still, on the side governments have focused on, some systems have worked far better than others.

One success story is Germany's dual vocational



Culinary students at OSZ Gastgewerbe in Germany participate in a hands-on seminar

Credit: OSZ Gastgewerbe

education and training system. In this system, young people combine classroom learning at a vocational school with paid training at a company.⁵⁴ These students usually spend three to four days a week in a workplace. This helps them combine their theoretical school instruction with practical skills and experience. The training follows the national standards set which are developed by employers, trade unions, and government officials. This is to make sure student education matches the changing labor market's needs.⁵⁵ This system is viewed as a successful way of supporting school-to-work transitions, which is a major issue for youth unemployment.

Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland also have successful systems that combine school-based education with workplace training.⁵⁶ These systems usually lead to easier moves from school to work, lower youth unemployment, and higher employer satisfaction. But attempts to copy the model in other countries have sometimes failed when employers were not strongly involved or when schools did not have enough capacity to manage these programs.⁵⁷

In Latin America, governments have tested wage

subsidies and “first job” programs to make it cheaper for employers to hire young people with no experience. For example, Colombia and Chile have used systems that pay part of young first-time workers’ wages for a limited time.⁵⁸ This helps firms give young people a chance they might not otherwise get. Studies find that while these programs can raise youth employment in the short term, the effects often fade once the subsidy ends, unless other measures also tackle the skills gap and discrimination in hiring.⁵⁹

In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, informal work is very common. In these regions, many ideas focus on helping young people start and grow their own small businesses instead of placing them in existing formal jobs. These programs often provide young people with training, mentoring, and small loans so they can build businesses outside the formal sector. A clear example is the Youth Employment in Agriculture Program (YEAP) in Ghana. It has supported thousands of young people interested in agriculture with access to business training, land, finance, and markets. This helped create jobs in the region’s informal and semiformal sectors. Similar youthfocused agriculture

business initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa show that combining skills, mentoring, and affordable finance can raise earnings and job quality even outside the formal sector.⁶⁰

However, other efforts have failed. Large public works programs can create jobs quickly. But, they rarely teach useful skills. Training programs not tied to real employer demand also run into problems. They teach skills firms are not looking for, which means young people finish the program with a certificate but not necessarily a job. In the UK, long-term youth unemployment rose by 124 percent in just three years, showing what happens when financial support is not matched with a clear, lasting path into stable work.⁶¹ Programs like these repeat the larger gap in youth unemployment policy. Effort goes into preparing young people, but not enough goes into making sure real jobs are waiting for them on the other side. Taken together, these examples show that no single policy model works everywhere. What succeeds in one country depends on local labor markets, institutions, and whether supply-side effort is matched with real demand, not just replicated from somewhere else.

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Youth unemployment is not only an economic problem. It also affects many parts of social life, raising hard questions about equality and fairness. It also makes people think about the kind of future they want to build. These wider effects make youth unemployment an issue that can influence individual well-being, political stability, and long-term economic growth.⁶²

Youth unemployment can have many long-term effects, shaping one's income and career paths. One study of 700,000 workers in Germany found that for each additional day of unemployment during the first eight years of one's career, the risk of staying unemployed

increased unemployment in the following 16 years by half a day.⁶³ Youth unemployment also affects young people's sense of well-being. The ILO reports that young people experiencing unemployment face concerns about stability, financial independence, and social mobility.⁶⁴ The psychological impact of repeated rejection, unstable employment, and long months of job searching can be burdensome. These effects are especially severe for adolescents and young adults who are still forming their identity and sense of selfworth. When young people start to believe that they are not needed or valued in the labor market, they may stop taking part in their communities.⁶⁵ They may also lose the sense of purpose that comes from regular work, negatively impacting their mental health.⁶⁶

At a social level, high youth unemployment undermines social cohesion and political stability. When large numbers of young people feel excluded from economic or political life, their trust in institutions falls. The risk of social unrest then rises. The Arab Spring of 2010 and 2011 is often cited as an example of this. The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has identified youth unemployment, inequality, and exclusion as important factors that were connected to social unrest in the Middle East during these protests.⁶⁷ In many other countries, high youth unemployment and political exclusion have often encouraged mass public frustration and unrest.⁶⁸

Before the Arab Spring, high youth unemployment was linked to social unrest across the Middle East.⁶⁹ But the unrest that followed did not simply resolve the underlying problem of youth unemployment; it deepened it. Protests, conflicts, and frequent changes in government scared away investors, disrupted schools and training programs, and damaged businesses' property.⁷⁰ Throughout the region, youth unemployment rose in the years after the protests.⁷¹ The result is a cycle that is difficult to break. Unemployment can feed unrest, and unrest makes the conditions needed to create jobs harder to sustain. The ESCWA has pointed

to this pattern in its own analysis of the region, arguing that investing in youth employment cannot be separated from the broader goal of building peaceful, stable societies.⁷²

Additionally, there is a big economic cost to youth unemployment. This cost appears at both national and global levels. When young people cannot work, countries lose potential output, innovation, and tax revenue. Governments may also face higher costs for services that help the unemployed. Over time, this can slow economic growth, especially when unemployment lasts for long periods, and young people cannot gain the skills that would have helped their local economies.⁷³ The PwC Youth Employment Index 2025 estimates that reducing regional gaps in youth employment alone could boost GDP by between GBP 13 and 26 billion per year in the UK.⁷⁴ This shows how even small improvements can have large economic gains. Global youth unemployment represents a large waste of human potential that impacts individuals, families, institutions, and governments, and this must be addressed.

Youth unemployment also affects genders unevenly. Generally, young women face more barriers in the labor market than young men. IMF

research shows that in the average developing economy, the inactivity rate for young women is almost twice that of young men. Nearly 30 percent of young women are not working or in school.⁷⁵ The result is that youth unemployment's impacts last longer for young women than for young men. This also becomes a cycle. Without income or independent work, young women have less power to challenge the social expectations that keep them out of the labor market in the first place, leaving the same barriers in place for the next generation of young women.

Taken together, these consequences rarely stay contained to one area of a young person's life. Lost income becomes lost independence. Social exclusion becomes political instability, which may result in fewer available jobs. Also, gender inequality becomes a barrier passed down to the next generation. Each cost feeds the next, which is why youth unemployment is a growing problem that affects economies, institutions, and households.



Young Tanzanian woman who turned to self-employment through tailoring after struggling to find sustainable work.

Credit: Abarzil

Current Status

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GLOBAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

The COVID19 pandemic transformed global youth employment. Young people were affected first and hardest, especially as many worked in sectors most exposed to shutdowns. These include hospitality, retail, tourism, and other service jobs that depend on faceto face contact.⁷⁶ As a result, many young people lost income early in their careers. They lost the chance to build experience, savings, and professional networks, harming their ability to find future jobs.

The pandemic also negatively impacted the education-to-work transition. The ILO found that more than 70 percent of young people reported their education or training had been disrupted by school closures and remote learning.⁷⁷ In other words, they were unable to experience years of valuable educational and job opportunities to gain important qualifications and skills.

Recent data show that students who fell behind during the pandemic are still feeling the consequences today. They are more likely to delay graduation or leave school early. They also tend to enter the labor market with weaker skills than they would have had under normal conditions.⁷⁸ A 2023 survey of more than 1,600 young people found that 72 percent reported gaps in education and career skills caused by the pandemic, while only one in five felt they had fully recovered. These patterns suggest that the pandemic's shock to education continues to

shape youth employment outcomes.⁷⁹

The crisis also made existing inequalities worse, as young women were more likely to leave paid work and take on more unpaid care responsibilities at home. This was especially true in households that faced school closures and where family support systems were weak. More specifically, an ILO survey showed that young women faced employment losses, more stress and uncertainty, and reduced access to training and rights protections. In other words, the shock was not just economic; it was also social and gendered.⁸⁰

Regional differences have become even more important in the postpandemic period. In the AsiaPacific region, many young workers remain in informal jobs like street vending and small-scale manufacturing. These jobs usually lie under the radar of the formal employment market, so youth are more sensitive to economic shocks. Across the Middle East and South Asia, labor markets were weakened even more by the pandemic.⁸¹ For example, during India's first COVID-19 lockdown, about 104 million informal workers were affected, since many of them lacked income or employment security.⁸² However, youth were hit especially hard. In India, the youth unemployment rate increased from 21 percent to 36 percent from April 2020 to June 2020.⁸³ In Jordan, the unemployment rate also increased because of the pandemic. However, the youth unemployment rate was most affected, reaching 50 percent.⁸⁴

In Europe, young people also faced strong setbacks. Before the pandemic, EU youth

In India, the youth unemployment rate increased from 21 percent to 36 percent from April 2020 to June 2020.

unemployment was about 14.9 percent in January 2020, but had increased to roughly 17.6 percent. This rise was serious, but did not reach the high levels across the Middle East and South Asia. A major reason was job-retention policy. European countries made extensive use of furlough, wage subsidies, and short-time work programs. Across OECD economies, job-retention programs supported roughly 60 million jobs at the peak of the crisis. This allowed firms to cut hours rather than limit employment altogether.⁸⁵

These patterns show that the pandemic did not affect youth populations in the same way. Instead, it deepened older regional divides. Some young people now have stronger support systems. Others still have almost none. Countries with strong job-retention systems were better able to maintain connections between workers and employers. However, countries with large informal sectors and weaker social protection systems were unable to support young workers with income recovery. The pandemic ultimately exposed the fragility of youth labor markets. It also showed that recovery depends on institutions, not just growth. An OECD analysis found that countries with stronger job retention during the pandemic were those who focused on keeping young people connected to work or training during the crisis.⁸⁶ They also had more effective active labor market policies and public employment services.

The ILO reached a similar conclusion in its review of policy responses. It emphasized that temporary income support, online training, and targeted youth measures were useful only when they were paired with broader systems. These systems must be able to protect transitions from school to work.⁸⁷ Where those systems were weak, young people were far more likely to fall into inactivity. They were also more likely to face longterm unemployment or informal work.

COVID19 has shown that youth employment does not recover quickly after a shock. It has also widened the gap in young people's ability to recover from disruption. Some entered labor

markets with strong employment protections, training systems, and public institutions. Others entered informal economies with weak social protection. These disrupted transitions into adulthood and work had long-lasting effects on young people's ability to recover and bounce back into an ever-changing market after the pandemic.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND EXISTING POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Government policy also shapes youth unemployment. Young people do not always enter the labor market equally. Some benefit from strong education systems, professional networks, and financial support. Others face weak education systems, discrimination, or unstable local labor markets. Thus, governments must address whether enough jobs are created, if young people have the skills needed to obtain those jobs, and whether particular groups face barriers that must be addressed through more opportunities.

This is reflected in current international policy frameworks. For example, the OECD Youth Policy Toolkit says that governments should not treat youth employment as a separate issue.⁸⁸ Instead, education, job training, health, social support, and employment policies should work together. The OECD also encourages different government departments to work with one another so that young people do not get lost between school, training, and work. Today, the ILO supports a similar approach. It recommends combining job training, apprenticeships, employment services, support for young businesses, and worker protections.⁸⁹ These goals prove that youth unemployment cannot be solved by labor departments alone. Schools, employers, local governments, and social services also have an important role.

Programs that combine different types of support can be more useful than programs that offer only one service. For example, young

Vocational training in Marrakech illustrating practical skills development and pathways to employment.

Credit: U.S. Embassy Morocco



people may need job training, work experience, career advice, and financial support at the same time. In October 2025, Kenya did this by launching its National Youth Opportunities Towards Advancement (NYOTA) project. This is a World Bank-backed project that targets youth unemployment. It focuses on three areas: on-the-job experience (OJE), recognition of prior learning (RPL), and business support. OJE creates apprenticeships for youth to build skills and prepare for the job market, targeting about 90,000 youth in Kenya. RPL also certifies informal workers' skills, like artisans and master craftsmen. This helps youth get noticed by formal work employers, targeting about 20,000 youth in the region. Finally, NYOTA's business support focus provides youth who want to start or expand a small business with KES 50,000. As of October 2025, over one million youth in Kenya applied for this funding. This shows that many youth are willing to learn skills needed to become formal workers – they just need to be given the right resources. NYOTA also focuses on providing these resources to refugee youth, demonstrating the importance of expanding support programs to marginalized groups.⁹⁰ Thus, NYOTA proves how a large program can support young people

in many ways instead of focusing only on one problem.

In February 2026, the World Bank also launched the Skills for Economic Transformation and Jobs Program in Eastern and Southern Africa (SET4Jobs). SET4Jobs looks to work with private companies in the energy, healthcare, and manufacturing sectors to create training programs for skills needed in these sectors.⁹¹ The program also works with the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCA) to improve education and training. This shows the importance of different groups working together to reduce youth unemployment. With this program, 18 million youth are expected to be provided with better skills and education throughout Eastern and Southern Africa by 2034.⁹²

Other countries have created more short-term policies to reduce youth unemployment. Today, Haiti offers cash-for-work projects that young people can do. With funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Economic and Social Assistance Fund (FAES), this program provides temporary jobs and

develops young people's skills to prepare for the workforce. With this program, youth get paid to work on projects that help their communities, like rebuilding a bridge after a natural disaster.⁹³ They learn skills like construction and painting while also building on less technical skills like teamwork. Some participants reported being able to find new jobs after gaining skills in their cash-for-work project.⁹⁴ However, while this helps youth earn money and gain skills in the short-term, this program reinforces the growth of informal work in developing countries. Thus, while focusing on short-term solutions is important, governments must also focus on long-term solutions that prepare youth to be formal workers.

Moreover, recent regional reports show why youth unemployment policies that work in one region may not work everywhere. The ESCWA has pointed to problems with how policies are organized. In many countries, responsibility for young people has been placed mainly in one government ministry. It often does not have much coordination with schools, labor agencies, businesses, and other important groups. Therefore, government policies must focus on connecting different groups to work together, like how the World Bank's SET4Jobs also partners with the IUCA to provide both funding and educational expertise in its policies.⁹⁵ ESCWA also argues that young people are sometimes treated as one group, even though young women, low-income youth, and young people with disabilities can face very different barriers.⁹⁶ Thus, government policies must also focus on providing solutions for marginalized communities, just as NYOTA works directly with refugee youth through its initiatives.⁹⁷

However, implementation remains a central issue in many countries. Weak delivery systems, low budgets, and poor coordination can keep those ideas from reaching the young people who need them most. The ILO similarly recommends combining employment services, skills development, and social protection so that young people can receive support at different

stages of the transition from school to work. A young person may first need help finishing school, then career guidance or training, followed by help finding a job. Another person may need child care, transportation, or financial assistance before they can participate in a program. In that sense, government initiative is often understood not as a single program, but as a system of action. The strongest youth unemployment systems connect education, employment services, social protection, local governments, and employers. The stronger that system is, the more likely it is that youth unemployment can be reduced in a lasting way.⁹⁸

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ENTRY-LEVEL WORK

Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are changing youth employment. They are reshaping the kinds of first jobs that young people usually rely on to enter the labor market. For many years, entry-level work served as the first step into adult life. It gave young workers a chance to learn routines, build confidence, and gain experience before moving into better positions. Today, that first step is less stable than it used to be. PwC's Youth Employment Index 2025 shows that youth employment patterns are being affected not only by economic inactivity, but also by the spread of AI in the workplace and by sharp differences in how countries prepare young people for work.⁹⁹

The key problem is not that technology eliminates every job at once. The bigger issue is that it removes or changes the routine tasks that young people are often hired to do first. Retail, customer service, administration, logistics, and simple office tasks are all areas where companies can now automate part of the work.¹⁰⁰ This means that many young people now need more education and more digital skills just to reach the same starting line that earlier generations reached more easily.¹⁰¹

The 2025 Youth Employment Index also warns that youth unemployment and inactivity are

rising in some advanced economies, including the UK, where the report finds the steepest decline in the Group of Seven (G7). The G7 refers to the informal forum of the world's seven largest advanced economies: the United States, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan. Although it has no formal legal power, the G7's political weight makes it a key benchmark for comparing performance among leading industrialized nations.¹⁰² The report notes that AI is not the only reason for this decline in the UK, but it is part of the broader shift. One of its most important findings is that the labor market challenge is moving from vacancy shortages to talent shortages. In other words, the issue is no longer only whether jobs exist. It is also whether young people have the training, confidence, and digital fluency to compete for them against AI.¹⁰³

This shift is especially important for young people who are already far from the labor market. Youth Futures Foundation's 2025 Outlook shows that many young people are not simply unemployed; they are inactive, disconnected, or moving between school, work, and support systems without stability.¹⁰⁴ That means technology can deepen exclusion if governments assume that online platforms or new software will solve the problem on their own. Young people who do not have good internet access, strong schools, or access to devices will struggle to benefit from digital growth. The OECD's work on digital skills and digital inclusion makes the same point, access to technology is now part of access to opportunity.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, Deloitte's 2026 Gen Z and Millennial Survey found that many young workers

already use AI in their daily work and often see it as a tool that can improve speed, learning, and creativity. Over half of the people in the survey used AI for day-to-day tasks. But that optimism has limits. Many also said they want stability, financial security, and clear support from employers.¹⁰⁶ This matters because it shows that young people are not rejecting technology. They are asking for a labor market where technology helps them move forward instead of pushing them out.

The OECD City Network on Jobs and Skills emphasizes that digital inclusion is not just a national issue. The ability to access and understand technology is also a regional issue because local governments often manage training centers, libraries, transit access, and community services.¹⁰⁷ If a city lacks affordable internet, public access to devices, or short-term training opportunities, then young people can be impacted and lose opportunities to learn and pursue jobs. Digital policy and youth employment policy overlap. A young person who cannot access a device, a course, or a network is not just missing technology; they are missing a pathway into a job or career.

Thus, the future of entry-level work will depend on whether governments, employers, and training systems move at the same speed as technology. The UN SDG Media Zone framed this challenge in 2026 as a transition problem. It argued that if automation removes some first jobs, states must build new bridges into work. It warned against assuming that the market will replace those jobs automatically. These changes could be addressed through public-private training

Access to technology is now part of access to opportunity.

partnerships focused on helping young people entering digital sectors. The UN SDG Media Zone also suggested that labor market policy must protect people who fall behind during the transition. It cautioned against treating them as temporary losers in a healthy market.¹⁰⁸

The core lesson is simple. Automation and AI is not automatically good or bad for youth employment. Its impact depends on who can use it, who can learn from it, and who is left behind when entry-level work changes. If countries invest in digital inclusion, practical training, and fair access to the first job, automation can open new paths for young people. If they do not, it can impact opportunities for work and skill learning, ultimately harming each new generation of youth workers.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

Youth unemployment is not caused by one single failure and therefore cannot be solved with one single policy. Countries differ in the structure of their economies, the kinds of jobs they offer, and the barriers young people face when trying to enter work. Hence, there is not a solution that will work for everyone the same way.

One major point of division is the type of labor market a country has. In some countries, many young people work in agriculture, family businesses, or informal jobs. In others, young people enter large manufacturing industries or service-based economies. However, digital skills, automation, and temporary work can influence any of these labor markets.¹⁰⁹ The ILO reports that service-based jobs have been the largest source of employment for the youth since 2008. Agriculture also contributes to a large amount of youth employment, specifically in lower-income regions.¹¹⁰ Countries with large informal economies may support policies that give youth workers access to education, training, new

markets, and digital tools. Other governments may place more importance on expanding formal employment and enforcing labor protections. The debate is not only about how many jobs young people have but also about what kind of work and resources they can access.

A second point of division is whether governments should focus first on creating more jobs or improving the skills of young workers. The ILO has found that young people in low- and middle-income countries face high unemployment rates. Even as education levels are rising, economies are not creating enough jobs to match the growing number of graduates.¹¹¹ Some countries will argue that resources and efforts should be directed towards creating and expanding available jobs for the youth. While other countries may argue that creating opportunities to gain skills is just as important as creating more jobs. These countries will want to use resources and funds to support vocational training, education opportunities, and stronger links between schools and employers.

Many countries also have different opinions on how youth unemployment should be addressed between public governments and the private sector. The World Bank has emphasized that creating jobs requires both public investment in education and infrastructure, and a business environment that allows private firms to expand and hire.¹¹² While governments control education systems, labor laws, and many employment programs, it is private employers who ultimately create most jobs. Some countries may support stronger government spending on training, wage subsidies, and public employment programs. While others may prefer policies that reduce barriers for businesses, encourage private investment, or give employers more control over training. This point of division becomes even more important as technology continues to change markets and the skills that employers need.¹¹³

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL-INFORMAL ECONOMIES

This bloc includes countries where agriculture, seasonal work, and informal labor provide many of the jobs available to young workers. In these states, youth unemployment is often tied to rural poverty, low productivity, and weak infrastructure. It is not only about the number of jobs available. It is also about whether those jobs provide stable incomes, legal protections, and opportunities to improve standard of living.

In many of these economies, large numbers of young people work on small farms, family businesses, or informal services. Their income is often low and irregular. They may have no written contract, no social protection, and no clear path to higher productivity. An ILO analysis shows that in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, most young workers are in informal or vulnerable employment. This makes them very sensitive to shocks such as droughts, price changes, or conflicts.¹¹⁴

This bloc is likely to argue for rural development for youth employment policy. They will focus on vocational training linked to local economic activities, better roads and transportation, access

to electricity and internet, agricultural finance, and support for small businesses. Example states could include Kenya, India, Bangladesh, Ghana, Nigeria, and Honduras. These countries have different economies, but each has a large informal or rural employment sector.¹¹⁵

These countries are likely to argue that youth employment policy should not focus only on formal employment. They may also resist policies that place large financial or administrative requirements on governments that have limited resources. The Bangladesh Economic Acceleration and Resilience for NEET (EARN) Project is a good example for this bloc. The EARN project helped 900,000 rural young people gain skills, find employment, or start businesses. The project provided vocational training, entrepreneurship support, financing, and alternative education. They specifically focused on youth classified as NEET, and also workers who were female.¹¹⁶

MANUFACTURING AND INDUSTRIAL TRANSITION ECONOMIES

This bloc includes countries where manufacturing, construction, and other industrial

Participant taking part in a practical deep-learning session at IndabaX Uganda 2024.

Credit: Denis kasozi



sectors form most of the employment sector. These economies can provide young people with a path into formal work, but technological change is changing the skills employers need. Young workers may enter industries where routine tasks are becoming automated. Other jobs may require technical, digital, or problem-solving skills. The ILO identifies skills mismatches as an important challenge for countries in this bloc. The transition from education to employment is a critical step for youth in these countries.¹¹⁷

Countries in this bloc are likely to support technical education, vocational support, and stronger partnerships between employers and schools. They may also support wage subsidies, market expansion, and other incentives to encourage companies to hire and train more young workers. The ILO's 2024 research found that skills training has strong effects on youth employment in higher-income countries, while combined active labor market programs can improve employment and wages across different income groups.¹¹⁸

Apprenticeships provide an important pathway for countries in this bloc. The ILO identifies quality apprenticeships as a way to help young people move from education into employment while helping employers match with interested and future employees. ILO Recommendation No. 208 on Quality Apprenticeships, adopted in 2023, calls for stronger apprenticeship systems that provide young people with skills, work experience, and protections.¹¹⁹

Countries that could fit in this bloc include China, Mexico, Brazil, Viet Nam, South Africa, and Turkey. These countries will favor policies for technical schools, apprenticeships, employer-funded training, and partnerships between governments and businesses. They will also be concerned about keeping youth workers in formal employment as industries adopt new technologies and compete in global markets.¹²⁰ A major point of disagreement within this bloc will be how governments should respond to automation. Some states may want to protect

existing industrial jobs, while others may want to focus on helping workers gain new skills. The ILO's approach supports both goals. Employment policies should promote job creation while also preparing workers for green and digital transitions.¹²¹

SERVICE-SECTOR AND DIGITAL ECONOMIES

This bloc includes countries where services make up most of the employment and where digital technology is changing how people work. These economies include jobs in retail, finance, health care, tourism, transportation, education, and technology. The ILO reports that transforming service industries have become the largest source of youth employment in recent years.¹²²

The main concern for countries in this bloc will be helping young workers to get the skills and experience needed to help them gain employment. Youth workers are commonly at a disadvantage since they lack prior experience that employers are looking for. The ILO recommends better links between education and training, work-based learning, career guidance, and labor market programs for disadvantaged youth.¹²³

Digitalization creates both opportunities and risks for this bloc. Online platforms can create new ways for young people to find work, start businesses, or work across borders. However, digitalization can also replace some work positions and increase inequality between workers who have strong digital skills compared to those who do not. The ILO strongly suggests combining digital development with policies that promote job creation, social connection, and protection against job displacement.¹²⁴ The ILO's Youth Employment Action Plan provides broader frameworks that can be used to find ways to combine skills development with labor and social protections.¹²⁵

Example states include the United States, the

UK, Japan, Singapore, Chile, Colombia, and the Philippines. These countries share large service sectors and growing digital economies. They often emphasize digital inclusion, partnerships, and flexible career pathways for young workers. Countries in this bloc may avoid policies that prevent innovation or make it too expensive for businesses to hire young workers. They are also less likely to be concerned with protections for younger people in temporary or informal work.¹²⁶ The OECD's Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People was adopted by all OECD countries in 2022. The recommendation calls for government-wide youth strategies that connect skills, education, employment, and public services.¹²⁷ This provides a useful model for countries that want to connect digital skills and employment with broader support for young people.

Committee Mission

The Commission for Social Development (CSocD) is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It advises the United Nations on major issues related to social development. Its work focuses on social policy, poverty reduction, social collaboration, full-employment, and decent work. The Commission also examines how social and economic policies affect vulnerable and marginalized groups.¹²⁸ These priorities make youth unemployment a natural issue for the Commission. Unemployment can limit young people's access to income, education, social participation, and economic independence. The 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action is an important framework that guides the Commission.¹²⁹

Youth unemployment connects directly to several areas already addressed by CSocD. A young person's ability to find work can depend on access to education, job training, social protection, transportation, digital resources, and equal opportunities. These barriers can be even

greater for young women, people with disabilities, rural youth, and young people working in the informal economy. The Commission has previously considered youth policies, employment, social protections, inequality, and social inclusion as connected areas of social development rather than separate issues.¹³⁰

The Commission lacks the ability to control governments, create jobs, or replace regional or local policymakers. Instead, CSocD can encourage governments to develop inclusive employment policies, share successful approaches, and identify gaps that prevent young people from entering stable work. The Commission can also make recommendations to ECOSOC and bring social development concerns into wider UN discussions.¹³¹ The UN has already treated youth employment as an issue that requires cooperation across different groups and sectors. In 2006, ECOSOC encouraged governments to create national youth employment plans with local youth groups, employers, workers, and schools.¹³² In 2008, ECOSOC also called for policies that help young people, including those in rural areas, to prepare for and find productive work.¹³³

Solutions should consider the transition from school to work, access to training, social protection, informal employment, and barriers faced by disadvantaged groups. At the same time, it is important to note that countries face different challenges. A policy that works for one country or a bloc of countries, may not work for others. CSocD can set common goals and encourage countries to share ideas, but country governments carry out and decide the policies. The goal of the Commission is to develop practical and inclusive recommendations that help governments reduce youth exclusion from the labor market. These recommendations should support the wider UN goals of social inclusion, decent work, and social progress.¹³⁴ The key to understanding youth unemployment is viewing it as more than a labor employment issue, but as a social development issue. In CSocD, delegates should work together to identify where

individuals, institutions, and governments fail to support youth workers. However, focusing on what has improved youth pay, skills, training, and opportunities will ultimately help youth to take part in social and economic life.

TOPIC B

CSOCD | NHSMUN 2027

Strengthening Social Protection Systems



Introduction

Social protection systems refer to policies and programs that help people facing old age, job loss, illness, disability, or a family crisis. These systems include pensions, healthcare access, unemployment aid, and economic support for families in crisis. In 1948, the United Nations declared that this kind of support is not a privilege. It is a basic human right, guaranteed under Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹³⁵ Today, more than 4.1 billion people around the world live without any form of social protection. When a crisis occurs, such as losing a job or having a medical emergency, the lack of government support can cause instability or poverty. This social gap is a daily reality for billions of families, and is the focus of this topic.¹³⁶

The scale of this problem touches nearly every part of the world, though it looks different in each place. In high-income countries with aging populations, the challenge is financial. Fewer young workers must now support a growing number of older people. In developing countries, the challenge is structural. More than half of the global workforce operates in the informal economy, meaning they hold no legal contract and pay no formal taxes. These workers fall into what experts call the “missing middle.” They earn too much to qualify for poverty aid, but they hold no formal job that would provide them with access to state insurance.¹³⁷ In countries facing war, natural disasters, or economic collapse, the challenge is survival itself. Safety nets disappear entirely, leaving families and workers to care for themselves.

This problem has grown more urgent. The global COVID pandemic of 2020 forced governments to spend enormous sums of money to keep their citizens stable and safe. That spending, combined with interrupted supply chains, caused the worst wave of global inflation in over forty years.¹³⁸ Rising prices have quietly drained the value of existing aid programs. A family receiving the same amount of money from the government now buys less food, less medicine, and less fuel than it did a few years ago. At the same time, rising interest rates have made it harder for developing countries to borrow resources, forcing many governments to cut public spending

at the exact moment their citizens need help the most.¹³⁹

This is a complicated issue because every action carries a cost. Expanding aid to informal workers and aging populations requires funding that many governments do not currently have. During past global financial crises, international financiers required governments to adopt austerity. Austerity is the practice of cutting public spending quickly to pay off national debt. This forced many governments to cut hospital budgets and delay pensions just as national unemployment was rising. These cases show that funding social protection and managing national budgets are in direct tension, with no option that avoids cost entirely.¹⁴⁰

History shows a repeating pattern in how nations decide to protect their citizens. Time and again, governments have expanded social protection only after concluding that the cost of inaction was greater than the cost of protecting people. Yet, this support expansion has rarely been complete, and many programs have left entire groups without coverage.¹⁴¹ This same tension, between the cost of protecting people and the cost of leaving them out, remains unsolved today and is at the center of this issue. The decisions made between the international community, governments, public organizations, and private actors will determine the outcome of this issue and the social programs available for future generations.

History and Description of the Issue

PAST SUPPORT FOR LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS

World War II and the Holocaust brought terrible crimes and instability to the world. To stop this from happening again, the United Nations stepped in. They created a document called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Adopted in 1948, this declaration changed how governments treat their citizens. Most importantly, it stated that social security is not a luxury that only a few people can have. Instead, it is a basic human right that every single person should have. Article 22 of the UDHR specifically states that every person has a right to social security.¹⁴² This means governments must make sure that people can live with dignity throughout their lives. This is especially important for vulnerable groups who may need extra support. This includes older adults, people with disabilities, and children. However, getting the world to agree on this rule took hundreds of years of debate.

Historically, governments did not believe that

it was their job to help low-income citizens. If a family could not afford food, they had to rely on churches, wealthy neighbors, or local charities. However, there were a few early exceptions. Ancient Rome, for instance, gave out free grain to its people in extreme need in a program called the “Cura Annonae.” Leaders did this mostly to prevent hungry crowds from starting riots. Yet, this program did not last. Throughout the Middle Ages, religious groups often provided almost all the relief for sick and struggling families in Rome.¹⁴³

As nations grew, political leaders began to view poverty as a personal failure instead of an economic problem of the nation. They worried that giving people free help would make them lazy and more dependent on the government.¹⁴⁴ Thus, England passed the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834.¹⁴⁵ The government stopped giving money to families in need. Instead, it forced people who could not support themselves financially to move into workhouses. People were forced to work exhausting hours in terrible conditions. They were also separated from their families and given low-quality food. The government made the workhouses miserable on purpose. They wanted people to only ask for help

Young boys working in a shoe factory

Credit: National Archives in The Hague



if they were truly desperate. This harsh system showed the common public belief that welfare programs would drain the country's budget while discouraging hard work.¹⁴⁶

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Industrial Revolution changed everything. Millions of people left their small farms and moved to crowded cities to work in factories. When workers got hurt by dangerous machines or became too old to work, they had no savings to fall back on. The old system of local charity simply could not handle millions of struggling factory workers. The number of people facing hardship in the city significantly increased. In Victorian London, social researchers like Charles Booth decided to study this crisis. Booth walked through struggling neighborhoods and created famous city maps using different colors to show where the most vulnerable people lived. His study proved a key point: people faced financial struggles mostly because of low pay, sickness, and old age, not because they were lazy.¹⁴⁷

Governments began to realize that they needed to step in. In the 1880s, Germany became the first country to create a national social safety net. Social safety nets are policies and programs that help individuals and families manage extreme and unpredictable changes. This might include poverty or inequality, and a social safety net would help them, such as job search support.¹⁴⁸ Chancellor Otto von Bismarck created health insurance and old-age pensions for German workers. This made sure that people could remain healthy and have a steady income as they got older and could not work anymore. He wanted to keep the working class happy and stop socialist groups from starting a revolt.¹⁴⁹ Supporting people in need became a smart way to keep the nation safe and stable. Governments began to see the benefits of statewide social protection systems.

The Great Depression further showed that poverty could happen to anyone as a result of a broken economy. In the 1930s, the global economy crashed, wiping out savings and jobs

worldwide. Millions of hard-working, middle-class families suddenly lost their homes. Governments had to take action. In the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt started the New Deal. This plan created the Social Security Act of 1935, which gave money to the elderly and the unemployed. While progress was being made, early welfare systems were often unfair.¹⁵⁰ Lawmakers excluded farmers and domestic workers from receiving these benefits. Because racial minority groups and women mostly held these jobs, they were left unprotected. Governments needed to consider who would be qualified for this support.

More and more countries began to see the need for strong social security programs. In 1942, the United Kingdom published a famous plan called the Beveridge Report. This report aimed to fight major social issues like disease and hardship to build a better post-war society. It created a huge welfare system, including free healthcare for all citizens. Following World War II, this model expanded around the globe. As developing nations in Latin America and Asia grew, they tried to build similar safety nets to protect their people. For example, countries like Argentina and India set up state pensions and food programs.¹⁵¹ However, these states often struggled to fund these plans. This showed that governments needed to design effective social protection programs and also needed to be able to pay for it.

In 1966, the United Nations took a major step to protect at-risk groups. The General Assembly adopted a key treaty called the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).¹⁵² This new pact went further than the UDHR because it became a strict law for the countries that signed it. The treaty made it an active responsibility of states to provide healthcare, education, and social security. However, it also caused debate over how social aid should be used, and when to make it universal or targeted.¹⁵³ Universal systems give aid to every single citizen as a basic right. They would receive help no matter how much they earn. Yet, this also

requires more government funds. In contrast, targeted systems only help specific people. Resources are directed to focus on citizens facing deep financial struggles.¹⁵⁴ Balancing these two methods became a main focus for decades to come for groups like the World Bank, whose core goal is to ease global hardship.¹⁵⁵

Looking back at these historical events, it is clear that governments always face a major dilemma when it comes to social protection systems. On one hand, many leaders believe that robust safety nets are a basic human right. They argue that governments must provide food, funds, and healthcare to all vulnerable groups to stop poverty. On the other hand, many financial experts worry about economic strain. They argue that large welfare systems cost too much money and increase national debt. They also fear that too much help can make citizens dependent on state assistance. Therefore, modern nations face a delicate balance. They must decide how to distribute their limited resources to protect citizens in need while also keeping the economy stable in the long term.

LABOR RIGHTS AND UNEMPLOYMENT PROTECTION

Labor rights act as a protection for workers. They are the rules for how companies treat and pay their employees. Without these regulations, a sudden economic shift can cause major harm to workers. When markets change or factories close, thousands of workers and families are affected and can face hardship. Global leaders and government programs focus on fair wages,

safe conditions, and jobless benefits to avoid this hardship. These tools help keep society stable.¹⁵⁶

During the rise of modern factories, workers had very few legal protections. In the 19th century, it was common for adults and even young children to work 14 to 16 hours a day in dangerous environments for extremely low wages. If a worker complained, they were immediately fired. This lack of balance led to the rise of labor unions, which were groups of workers joining together to demand better treatment.¹⁵⁷

One of the earliest global worker battles was for the “eight-hour workday”: eight hours for work, eight hours for leisure time, eight hours for rest. Labor movements in countries like Australia and the United States organized massive strikes to demand this balanced schedule. The strikes proved successful. In 1919, the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention was adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO).¹⁵⁸ This limited the hours of work in industrial areas to a maximum of eight hours a day.

Alongside working hours, nations began creating laws to regulate workers’ pay. New Zealand became a pioneer by passing the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, which helped set fair baseline pay for workers.¹⁵⁹ Minimum wage laws established the lowest rate that employers must legally pay their workers. The goal of a minimum wage is to act as a safety net to ensure workers are not exploited. It also helps guarantee that anyone who works a full-time job can earn enough to afford basic necessities like food and housing. Countries struggle to balance this rule. When the government raises the minimum wage

In the 19th century, it was common for adults and even young children to work 14 to 16 hours a day in dangerous environments for extremely low wages.

too high, businesses will have higher costs. Since businesses likely want to offset these costs, they may choose to cut some workers. This situation, if seen across many businesses, can cause a rise in unemployment. At the same time, if the government does not adjust the minimum wage for a long time, inflation, or a gradual rise in prices, can mean that a worker's salary is not worth as much. For example, the US last increased the minimum wage in 2009 to USD 7.25 per hour.¹⁶⁰ Yet, USD 7.25 now cannot buy as much as USD 7.25 in 2009. Thus, governments must consider how they can best protect their citizens when setting and adjusting the minimum wage.

While ensuring fair wages is important, there are circumstances when sudden economic crises can cause people to lose their jobs completely. In these situations, jobless protections become vital. Unemployment insurance is a system where workers and employers contribute to a national fund, often through taxes. If a worker loses their job through no fault of their own, the government steps in. The fund can provide temporary financial support as people search for a new position. The UK introduced one of the first national required jobless insurance plans through the National Insurance Act.¹⁶¹ Later, during the Great Depression, the United States included unemployment aid in its Social Security Act.¹⁶² These systems act as economic shock absorbers. When a crisis hits, unemployment benefits prevent families from losing their homes. They also keep the economy moving because citizens can still afford to buy groceries and necessities.

However, maintaining these systems is very hard during long economic slumps. If millions of people lose their jobs at the same time, the national fund can quickly run out of resources. Governments then face a tough choice. They must either borrow massive amounts of national debt to fund the program or cut the amount of help, leaving families unprotected.¹⁶³

While advanced economies built complex

unemployment systems, developing nations faced a completely different reality. In many countries, people often do not work for traditional companies with legal contracts. Instead, they work in informal economies. This means that they work in jobs that are not registered by the government. This includes street vendors, small farmers, and home workers. In countries like India and Nigeria, a huge part of the workforce is informal.¹⁶⁴ These workers do not pay a part of their wages to national unemployment funds. Because of this, they are also unable to benefit from standard state safety nets. This can leave them without a backup plan if a crisis occurs.

To fix this major gap, some countries have tried new ideas. India created a huge rural job program in 2005 known as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). It promised at least one hundred days of paid physical work each year to rural households who need it. Especially during droughts or bad harvest seasons, this project helps keep incomes steady in agricultural areas.¹⁶⁵ In Latin America, countries like Brazil extended social security benefits to farm workers. This step ensures that they can get access to medical care and pensions, even without formal corporate contracts.¹⁶⁶

Ultimately, the evolution of labor protections reveals an ongoing global challenge. On the one hand, supporters say that strong workplace rules, fair pay, and jobless benefits are basic rights. These rights prevent unfair treatment in the workplace and reduce inequality.¹⁶⁷ They argue that a truly healthy economy depends on healthy, secure workers. On the other hand, economic experts warn against heavy regulation. They suggest that strict labor laws and the requirement of worker benefits can make it too expensive for companies to operate. These extra costs might limit job creation and even deter international investment. As modern nations look to the future, they face the hard task of bridging this gap. The international community must figure out how to expand safety nets and protect informal workers. At the same time, they must make sure that these new rules do not extend

too far and harm overall economic stability.¹⁶⁸ Striking this careful balance remains a primary challenge for leaders worldwide.

GAPS IN INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

As established by Article 22 of the UDHR, social security remains a basic human right. However, putting this right into practice has revealed important challenges around the world. Over 4 billion people still lack social protection.¹⁶⁹ This means that there is a large gap between what international goals hope to achieve and the reality for many individuals. When faced with job loss, sickness, or old age, billions of families still do not have a safety net. Without this institutional support, they are at risk of falling into extreme poverty.

One of the biggest gaps in this global system is the “missing middle.” Traditional welfare systems usually focus on two main groups. They give free assistance to people living in extreme poverty, and they offer state insurance to formal employees with company jobs.¹⁷⁰ However, over 2 billion workers worldwide do not fit into either group because they work in the informal economy. This is a major issue in most of the

developing world. In countries like Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Nigeria, India, and the Philippines, millions work as street vendors or day laborers. Because their governments do not classify them as “extremely vulnerable,” they rarely qualify for aid. At the same time, without formal contracts, they are left out of required state programs.¹⁷¹

Most of them also cannot pay for voluntary pensions.¹⁷² A voluntary pension is a private retirement fund where a person must save their own money without any financial help from an employer.¹⁷³ This lack of a safety net leaves many people at risk of sudden and great financial harm. An example of this occurred in India during the 2016 cash crisis. In India, over 80 percent of workers operate in the informal economy and rely entirely on daily cash.¹⁷⁴ When the government suddenly canceled the country’s most used cash notes overnight to fight corruption, millions of street vendors and day laborers lost their income instantly. Because they lacked formal contracts, they received no unemployment benefits and no state support. Without any social protection, millions of unregistered families fell directly into severe poverty.¹⁷⁵

There are also other major global gaps in social protection systems. These gaps cause a huge

Aleppo after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck in 2023

Credit: Salem Mohammadi



imbalance that affects the global economy. For example, there is a deep divide between high-income and low-income countries. In high-income countries like Norway or Germany, nearly 100 percent of citizens get social benefits. In contrast, less than 17 percent of people in low-income countries receive any support.¹⁷⁶ This divide does not just harm the most vulnerable countries, it also hurts the global economy. When entire countries lack safety nets, local crises can quickly become global emergencies. A lack of social support can push people to migrate. Families that cannot survive natural disasters or high prices at home cross borders to find stability. This puts heavy strain on the welfare systems of nearby countries.¹⁷⁷ In Venezuela, the total collapse of local safety nets and basic services has forced over 7 million people to flee. This heavily burdens the welfare programs of nearby host countries like Colombia and Peru.¹⁷⁸

In addition to geographic divides, deep economic gaps impact some groups unevenly, such as women. Many women often pause their careers because they do most of the work at home and for childcare.¹⁷⁹ However, steady payments from formal jobs is typically a requirement to qualify for standard pension systems. This means that millions of women are punished by the system and cannot save for retirement or qualify for other types of aid like most men can. Furthermore, when they do enter the paid workforce, they often take part-time jobs to balance these tasks. This also means that they earn less. As a direct result, there is an alarming financial gap between men and women in old age. Around the world, women receive pensions

that are on average 26 percent lower than men's.¹⁸⁰ Older women are therefore far more likely to face poverty because the current welfare system is not designed to handle pauses in career paths.

While gender and geography are major factors, there are less obvious gaps that often go unnoticed. One of these modern challenges is digital exclusion. Many governments are now moving welfare programs online to improve their systems and reduce fraud risk. They now require citizens to use smartphones, biometric IDs, or formal bank accounts to get cash transfers. While this technology aims to streamline the system, it creates a new barrier for vulnerable groups. Older adults, rural residents, and minorities often lack internet access or digital skills. As a result, a system designed to help them ends up leaving them out.¹⁸¹

Finally, the heavy weight of foreign debt also poses a challenge. Many low-income countries borrow from foreign banks in times of emergency or to support basic initial development.¹⁸² They then owe large sums of financial resources to these banks. Because of this, they are forced to spend funds on debt payments instead of directly on their citizens, such as building hospitals or social programs. In nations like Sri Lanka and Zambia, the government spends much more on paying debt than on healthcare, schools, and welfare combined.¹⁸³ This completely blocks the government's ability to help its people. Even if countries want to protect those in need, their resources are tied to foreign loans, leaving their citizens without a safety net.

Around the world, women receive pensions that are on average 26 percent lower than men's.

Looking ahead, international organizations suggest that the debate over social protection could expand beyond short-term, single-purpose programs. Agencies like the ILO note that current policies often leave behind informal workers, women, and entire developing countries. To address this, global reports highlight the idea of separating social protection from formal company jobs.¹⁸⁴ Instead, these institutions propose that long-term global stability relies on safety nets that are universal, fair, and adapted to today's workforce.

DISRUPTIONS TO NATIONAL SAFETY NETS DURING CRISES

A social safety net is only as strong as its weakest link. During stable periods, countries can pay pensions and fund clinics. However, a major crisis tests these structures. History shows that when a massive shock occurs, national welfare frameworks frequently break down. When citizens need help the most, the state faces sudden constraints or loses its capacity to act. This leaves vulnerable groups completely exposed. Ultimately, a crisis shows exactly where the gaps in social protection hide and how well

the system was built in the first place.¹⁸⁵

To understand why these systems fail during a crisis, we must first look at the purpose of social protection. A strong safety net is not about managing money or resources, but about protecting human welfare. The ILO states that a solid system must be built on a “lifecycle approach.” This means that the state supports a person from birth to old age, ensuring child nutrition, a decent income for adults, and pensions for the elderly. If one of these stages fails, a person's life can be significantly impacted. Furthermore, every country must guarantee a “Social Protection Floor.” This is a minimum level of welfare that ensures individuals have access to food, healthcare, and shelter.¹⁸⁶ It protects these as an absolute human right. The ultimate goal of this system is to preserve social cohesion and stability.

When a government ignores these essential pillars, the price is often paid in lives. This type of tragedy was clear in 2023, when massive earthquakes destroyed parts of Turkey and Syria. The true failure of the social system in this crisis was not the loss of infrastructure and funds, but the inability of the state to show up as a caregiver. In the ruined zones, municipal

A vendor in Mexico that is part of the informal economy

Credit: Val.superstar



workers were the only ones who knew where the most vulnerable citizens lived, such as elderly living alone or children in need. When these local networks collapsed, the central state was left completely blind to who needed urgent help. The lack of civil preparation caused a deadly rescue crisis. Thousands of victims did not die from the earthquake itself. They died trapped under the rubble waiting for rescuers who took days to arrive. They died of hypothermia in the streets because there were no social shelters ready. The system collapsed completely, abandoning desperate survivors when they needed help the most.¹⁸⁷

Health crises reveal other gaps in social safety nets, such as a country's national data systems. In the past, welfare programs were built only for people with formal jobs. Thus, when a public health emergency forced a strict lockdown, this old design failed. During the 2020 global pandemic, governments needed everyone to stay home to stop the virus. For registered employees, the state could easily use official tax records to identify individuals and send emergency funds. However, informal workers like street vendors were not registered in these databases. The government simply did not have the digital data to find them or send them quick aid. Without emergency funds, unregistered people faced the choice of needing to leave their homes to earn money and survive. This risked breaking the quarantine and making the disease spread faster. The crisis proved that gaps in data collection can easily ruin a country's entire health strategy during a crisis.¹⁸⁸

While health emergencies expose missing data, economic shocks test the actual resources of a welfare system. In theory, social programs are meant to act as a safety buffer. Government aid should grow when regular businesses struggle and workers lose their jobs. However, major financial crashes have broken this rule. In 2008, a huge banking failure caused a global market crash. Suddenly, global banks collapsed, businesses closed, and millions lost their jobs. This also meant that countries saw

a massive drop in tax income.¹⁸⁹ Needing to get emergency loans from global banks, these nations had to adopt strict austerity policies. To protect the economy, governments cut public budgets, delayed pensions, and stopped social programs. However, this worsened the crisis even more. As people were losing their jobs and needed a safety net the most, the state took the funding away. This history suggests that welfare programs need protected emergency savings to survive.¹⁹⁰

Conflict and war is another example of a crisis that can affect national safety nets. When a conflict occurs, it can destroy both the people's livelihoods and the government institutions responsible for helping them. Government offices may close or be destroyed, workers may flee, and public funds are often redirected towards military spending. Many workers and civilians tend to flee or become refugees in another country, causing them to lose access to any social programs they once had. The war in Ukraine demonstrates this type of crisis very clearly. The ILO found that the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has caused major disruptions to employment, incomes, and the country's social protection systems. Because many Ukrainians have become displaced and fled the country, they may not be able to access social protection systems that still remain in Ukraine or in the countries they now live in.¹⁹¹ Conflict and war crises often create a group of people who desperately need social protection, but it becomes extremely hard for governments and support to reach them.

Social safety nets are tested not by how well they function during stable times, but by how well they respond when normal systems break down. Earthquakes can destroy local institutions. Pandemics can expose gaps in national databases. Financial crashes can drain government resources. Conflicts can displace entire populations. These crises reveal that having a social protection system is not enough. Countries also need systems that quickly expand coverage, identify new vulnerable populations, maintain funding, and continue to

deliver assistance in tough times. The World Bank has increasingly promoted “adaptive social protection” systems that can respond to climate, disaster, and conflict-related shocks.¹⁹² Moving forward, countries must consider creating and improving social safety nets so that they are strong enough to survive and function during crises.

Current Status

POST-PANDEMIC INFLATION AND WELFARE FINANCING CHALLENGES

In 2020, the world faced a massive crisis when the COVID pandemic forced entire countries to close their borders. Governments worldwide handed out emergency fund programs to stop businesses from collapsing and families from starving. However, this plan created a dangerous side effect once the healthcare crisis ended. The quick increase in government funds given to families and businesses, combined with interrupted economies, caused the worst wave of global inflation seen in over forty years. This post-pandemic price shock pushed 71 million people into extreme poverty in less than a year.¹⁹³ Today, these high prices have caused massive issues for social safety nets. Supporting the basic needs of vulnerable families now requires a lot more resources and money.

These higher prices directly impact daily life by damaging the actual value of government help. When the price of food and fuel increases, a monthly check from the state loses its power

to protect a family. For example, in Ghana, the government runs a welfare program called the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP). Even though vulnerable families continued to get their regular cash transfers, a historic inflation rate of over 40 percent meant they could only buy half of their usual groceries with the same amount of money.¹⁹⁴ This situation demonstrates that cash assistance loses its strength when market inflation overcomes the purchasing power of the local currency. As a result, millions of people who receive state aid are still sliding back into hunger because their money cannot buy basic nutrition like it used to.¹⁹⁵

This price drop in what families can afford is tied to global financial decisions. Prices began to rise all over the world. Because of this, central banks around the world, such as the United States Federal Reserve or the European Central Bank, quickly raised their interest rates.¹⁹⁶ This choice was made to stabilize their own markets. However, it created a severe financial strain across developing nations. Many vulnerable countries had borrowed a lot of foreign resources to fund their pandemic relief plans. Because global interest rates went up, the cost of paying back these international loans jumped instantly. Reports from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) show that countries like Pakistan and Kenya must spend over half of their national budget to pay back debt from the pandemic.¹⁹⁷

These debts force governments to make significant budget cuts, a practice called “austerity.” For example, Argentina faced severe economic trouble that forced the government to

This post-pandemic price shock pushed 71 million people into extreme poverty in less than a year.

cut public transportation and energy subsidies. This choice caused the cost of public transit to increase by over 100 percent in just one month. Nearly 75 percent of urban workers in areas like Buenos Aires rely on trains and buses for their daily activities. Because of this, the price jump hit household budgets immediately. Low-wage workers were forced to spend up to a third of their daily earnings just to get to work. To pay for this extra cost, many families had to reduce their spending on healthcare and fresh food. As a result, the national poverty rate climbed sharply. This increased the number of people below the national poverty line to almost 60 percent.¹⁹⁸ These connected crises prove that when a state strips away public support because of finances during a pandemic, it harms the physical well-being, nutrition, and health of its citizens even after the pandemic ends.

The loss of price protection creates a severe hunger crisis in many parts of the world. Many countries depend on government aid to keep daily food cheap for workers. This help is necessary because local wages are often too low to match global market prices. However, when state funds run low, these vital programs break down completely. For instance, Tunisia faced a severe lack of foreign reserves. The government could not pay outside suppliers for imported grain, causing state stores to lose half of their basic goods like milk and sugar.¹⁹⁹ A similar crisis hit Nigeria after the pandemic when the state stopped its fuel subsidies. Gas prices tripled almost overnight, which made the transport of food much more expensive. As a result, the cost of market staples like rice and vegetables increased in price, out of reach for normal families.²⁰⁰ When families cannot get proper nutrition, it causes severe malnutrition, lowers energy levels, and weakens the immune system against diseases.²⁰¹ These examples demonstrate how one crisis can spread multiple problems across entire regions, turning national budget choices into a daily struggle to eat.

In countries with older populations, retirement support programs now take up over 12 percent

of the total economy.²⁰² This high cost hurts budgets across many continents, creating spending crises in European countries like France and Italy, as well as Latin American countries like Brazil. For example, laws in Spain require retirement checks to rise automatically whenever inflation increases, which happened during and after the pandemic. In just one year, this rule forced the state to spend an extra 10 billion euros simply to match rising prices.²⁰³ This massive shift produces a dispute over other public funds. When governments pour billions into retirement plans, they often cut funding for public schools and youth employment programs.²⁰⁴ Research has shown that when public spending on the elderly increases, spending on youth programs for education or employment decreases.²⁰⁵ When a crisis like a pandemic occurs, this forces governments to make tough decisions on how to distribute public funds and programs for many years after.

Global financial decisions shape the daily well-being of individuals. These economic changes determine how normal families access food, health care, and stable work. When public funds face heavy pressure, such as the global COVID pandemic, the stability of their citizens is impacted by the decisions of financial institutions and governments. Keeping public protection programs ongoing and active is important to protect human health both during and after crises.

EXPANDING INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS FOR INFORMAL LABORERS AND DAY WORKERS

For decades, safety nets only reached people with official jobs. A steady paycheck lets the government track what people need and when to give them long-term care. But as industries cut costs and markets change, millions of people lose steady income. To survive, many workers pursue other forms of employment. This includes street vending, small businesses, and home services. Today, informal labor constitutes



A street vendor in Indonesia

Credit: Deerpeter

about 60 percent of the world's workforce.²⁰⁶ Governments built their systems for registered workers. Because of this, these families are left completely outside the public safety net.

This lack of government recognition can put informal workers at risk. In Peru, informal labor makes up 73 percent of the workforce. Most of these workers have no health insurance, no paid sick leave, and no safety rules. For example, many market vendors in the capital of Lima have expressed difficulty caring for themselves when they get sick. They can lose a day's pay when they get sick, which they badly need. Or they can work while sick, but be in pain. Studies show that this lack of medical care turns small health problems into permanent injuries. Because of this, the breadwinners in these families often live shorter, harder lives.²⁰⁷

The lack of retirement systems also hurts older workers. In Kenya, the informal economy employs more than 83 percent of all workers.²⁰⁸ These workers do not have access to pension plans. They also cannot join national retirement funds. Because of this, elderly workers in cities like Nairobi cannot afford to stop working. This is

true even when their bodies are in pain or their eyesight is failing.²⁰⁹ Surveys show that many older citizens must keep doing hard physical work into their seventies. They do this to be able to afford basic food, housing, or medical supplies.

Some countries are building digital tools to solve this problem. India, for example, launched the e-Shram portal. It has registered more than 290 million informal workers. This system connects day workers to basic accident insurance. It also links them to social security programs. With this data, the government can track job changes. It can also send emergency aid quickly during a crisis. The system also lets workers save small amounts of money on good days. This flexible saving helps protect families when a sudden economic drop hits.²¹⁰

Other governments have chosen a different path. Instead of building new systems, they made the existing system cheaper and easier to join. Since 2009, self-employed workers in Brazil can register as an "Individual Microentrepreneur," or MEI. This program combines taxes, business registration, and social security into one small monthly payment.²¹¹ In return for a low fee, a

street vendor gets the same pension rights as a formal worker. They also gain sick leave and maternity benefits, along with a legal business ID that can open the door to bank loans.²¹² Millions of Brazilians have used this program to leave the informal economy. However, researchers found that most of these small businesses stay small. This suggests the program works better as a bridge into social protection than as a way to grow a business or expand one's career.²¹³

Indonesia took a different approach, built around insurance instead of registration. They created an agency called BPJS Ketenagakerjaan for their informal workers, including fishermen, farmers, and street vendors. The system provides coverage for workplace accidents, life insurance, and old-age savings.²¹⁴ To make this easier to afford, the government cut the monthly premium in half in 2025. It also trained trusted community members to explain the program to their neighbors, a method modeled on a similar system used in Japan. Still, only a small share of Indonesia's informal workers have enrolled so far. Some workers still do not know that the program exists or do not trust the government with their money.²¹⁵

Like all social protection systems, these creative programs come at a cost. Some programs, like India's e-Shram portal, run mostly on government funding. Others, like Indonesia's subsidized program, mix worker contributions with state support to keep costs low. Reports on this issue note that governments face a real trade-off. General taxation can fund broader coverage, but it competes with other budget priorities like health and education. Worker contributions keep

costs off the state budget, but they exclude the most vulnerable workers who struggle to pay even a small fee.²¹⁶ This tension shapes which model a country can choose, not just which model works best on paper. Either way, in any social protection program, governments and institutions must always balance between making the support accessible, affordable, and fair. While digital registration and lower premiums support vulnerable groups and informal workers, other forms of direct, non-contributory support may be needed as well.

Expanding these benefits to unregistered workers is vital for global stability. Giving workers access to health security and basic retirement options protects the most vulnerable from falling into poverty. When informal laborers gain real protection, local markets grow stronger against price shocks. This baseline of stability protects public health and helps prevent social collapse during financial emergencies or public crises. By protecting informal workers, countries build a stronger path toward long-term human welfare.

FUNDING PENSIONS FOR AGING POPULATIONS

For generations, demographic structures remained balanced. Young workers outnumbered older populations. This dynamic kept pension funds stable for decades, as younger workers helped create national revenue to cover these retiree programs. However, global shifts have altered this balance completely. Life expectancy is rising steadily due to medical progress. In 1950, the average global life span was 46 years. Today,

*In 1950, the average global life span was 46 years.
Today, that figure exceeds 73 years.*

that figure exceeds 73 years.²¹⁷ At the same time, birth rates have dropped rapidly across many continents. High living costs and urban life discourage couples from having large families. Changing career goals also causes birth rates to fall worldwide. This increase in age and decrease in younger populations forces a small workforce to support many retirees.²¹⁸ Without enough young workers to support the tax base, public protection networks face an uncertain future.²¹⁹

The financial structure of a pension system determines how strongly population aging affects future generations. Many countries use a “pay-as-you-go” system. This means workers contribute a part of their income to provide financial benefits to current retirees. This model depends on the relationship between the number of workers adding to the fund and the number of retirees receiving the benefits. As populations age and birth rates decline, this system becomes harder to maintain.²²⁰ Governments then face difficult choices. They can increase pension contributions from worker incomes, reduce benefits to retirees, raise the retirement age, or use other forms of revenue.²²¹ The ILO emphasizes the need to balance financial sustainability with proper pension planning to

make sure that governments can maintain these systems while fully caring for their older adult populations.²²²

This demographic change creates a divide between different global regions. In Europe, large welfare plans face significant risks. These systems depend on steady growth. Today, as families choose to have fewer children, the active workforce shrinks. European pension funds rely strictly on local workers. Therefore, this birth deficit creates a severe strain on the continent. Countries like France and Italy face severe budget issues. Data shows that public retirement costs absorb a huge part of state funds.²²³ In contrast, other regions maintain high fertility rates and high birth rates. They still have a large young workforce. Parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East experience steady population growth.²²⁴

Many states are slowly raising the legal retirement age to match modern life spans. For instance, France shifted its retirement age from 62 to 64 to reduce state costs.²²⁵ Furthermore, Sweden uses a flexible system. Citizens place small amounts into personal accounts to build private wealth.²²⁶ In East Asia, Japan addressed the concern of a shrinking workforce by shifting

A photo of the residents of an elder care facility

Credit: JONESDANIEL T



to factory automation. These machines keep industrial production high without needing young laborers.²²⁷ These diverse steps protect retirement networks when birth rates drop.

A second challenge that affects retirement pensions is older adults who spent their working years in the informal economy. This issue creates a massive funding gap for developing nations. Millions of street vendors, domestic workers, and day laborers work without official contracts. Because they never pay regular taxes into official retirement pools, they reach old age with zero legal coverage or savings. In Peru and Colombia, over half of all elders live without any state pension help.²²⁸ This wide gap turns a regular labor problem into a lasting cost for the state. To resolve this crisis, some governments are building free basic pensions. For example, Bolivia created the Renta Dignidad program to prevent widespread elder poverty.²²⁹ This plan provides a direct monthly payout to all senior citizens regardless of their past jobs. Instead of taxing their employee paychecks, the system uses taxes from oil and gas purchases to guarantee a basic income for vulnerable elders. This model shows how taxes can protect informal workers. It opens new funding channels outside of regular job taxes.²³⁰

Many countries completely lack an organized pension program. In these areas, public offices have no infrastructure to run retirement funds or distribute resources. As a result, older people face poverty or must continue to work to survive.²³¹ For instance, studies in rural parts of East Africa show thousands of elders working into their late seventies.²³² To fix this, international groups have helped states launch elderly pension programs. Bangladesh expanded its elderly assistance plan to deliver resources directly to millions of impoverished seniors.²³³ Similarly, Kenya uses mobile banking networks to send retirement aid directly to rural elders. These targeted cash transfers help support older adults without needing a complex state office to oversee them.

Solid social security systems protect people when they leave the workforce, but maintaining these pension systems becomes increasingly difficult as populations age. This protection is vital because old age often brings financial struggles and costs that are no longer covered by an individual's job. By ensuring this basic income, the system allows older individuals to rest and enjoy their retirement after several years of hard work. This individual security strengthens the stability of the entire community. Stable retirement systems add to the overall shared well-being of society. However, how countries adapt these programs to fit their populations, labor markets, and economies will look different worldwide.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

When it comes to social protection, many programs and systems overlap between countries. Many countries group themselves based on similar economic challenges they face. Understanding these different groups requires looking at major points of division among them. These points of division often show the issues a government must consider and how they might come to a decision about what social protection systems they provide.

The first major point of division is how jobs are structured and how programs are funded. In high-income countries, most citizens have formal jobs with contracts. They pay regular taxes, which helps the government pay for pensions and healthcare. However, in vulnerable regions, many people work in informal jobs without contracts. Because these workers do not pay income taxes, governments cannot fund large welfare systems. This creates a split between nations that can fund their own social programs and those that must rely on external aid to help their citizens.²³⁴

The second point of division is the age of the

population, which changes what governments must focus on. Countries with low birth rates have older populations. These countries must spend their resources on pensions and care for the elderly. On the other hand, countries with high birth rates have many young people. Their budgets must focus on schools, child poverty, and creating jobs for young workers. This split divides countries that need to protect older citizens from those that must create new opportunities for the youth.²³⁵

The final point of division is the strength of a government during a crisis. Some states have strong systems, structured data, and financial reserves to handle disasters on their own. When a crisis comes, they can quickly send money to help their people. In contrast, vulnerable countries facing war, economic collapse, or natural disasters struggle to provide basic services. They often rely on external aid and international groups just to help people in crisis. This separates countries that can plan for the future from states that focus on immediate survival.²³⁶

HIGH-INCOME AND AGING ECONOMIES

A strong job market forms the foundation for stable social protection systems. High-income countries usually have most of their workers in the formal job market. This system lets governments collect regular income taxes from workers and businesses. They use this money to pay for welfare programs like public healthcare, unemployment insurance, and pensions. These systems have functioned well for a long time,

giving citizens a good quality of life. People do not worry about losing their jobs or getting sick because the state usually helps them when necessary. However, these countries now face a major economic crisis because their populations are getting older. At the same time, birth rates are dropping significantly. This shift means fewer young people work and pay taxes, but more retired citizens still need their pension money.²³⁷

In Japan, the government faces financial strain because the elderly population grows much faster than the active workforce. More than a quarter of the population of Japan is over 65 years old, and schools are closing due to a lack of children.²³⁸ This imbalance forces tough choices like cutting pensions sizes or raising taxes on the younger workers who support the system. When pensions are expensive, governments must take money away from other areas like infrastructure or education. This situation causes national debt to rise and leaves other systems like healthcare publicly underfunded. Smaller younger generations simply cannot pay for the needs of the larger older generations. Countries in this group prioritize policy change that adapts their existing welfare systems to an aging workforce. Their primary goal is to preserve their traditional safety nets while keeping budgets stable for the future.

Portugal, Austria, and Switzerland face this same problem. These countries usually try to fix their current systems instead of replacing them. Portugal now guarantees a minimum pension for retirees who did not have steady formal jobs their whole lives. This helps stop poverty at an old age without changing the whole system.²³⁹

More than a quarter of the population of Japan is over 65 years old, and schools are closing due to a lack of children.

Austria raised its early retirement age and made the rules stricter. This slows down pension costs while keeping the same basic system in place.²⁴⁰ Switzerland combines three types of pensions: a state pension, a required work pension, and personal savings. Experts rank this system as one of the best in the world at keeping older people out of poverty.²⁴¹ Countries in this bloc will likely support ideas like raising retirement ages slowly, guaranteeing minimum pensions, and combining several pension types together. They are less likely to support big or new social programs, or programs that lower participant requirements since their pension programs are already under stress.

EMERGING AND INFORMAL ECONOMIES

Informal jobs completely change how developing states plan their social aid. Other countries have a workforce that works mostly within the informal job market. Because they do not earn formal salaries, they do not pay regular income taxes. Their employers do not contribute to national social security funds either. This situation leaves governments with a very small amount of tax resources. As a result, it is hard to fund welfare programs. This reality creates a social divide. Millions of vulnerable people receive small welfare checks. At the same time, the small number of people who have formal jobs receive private and public benefits. This gap creates an uneven social safety net across the population. Government programs usually support the most vulnerable homes. Formal jobs provide social security. However, informal workers often receive no private or public support. This group represents the missing middle. They face high financial risks and depend almost entirely on themselves.²⁴²

Governments in these countries often lack the large budgets needed to fund welfare systems. Therefore, the main challenge is finding ways to protect people without hurting economic growth. In India, over 80 percent of the workforce operates in this informal market.²⁴³

The government cannot track their income through tax systems. This happens because most payments happen in cash. Many workers prefer to stay informal. They do this because registering a business is too expensive and complex. To help the situation, some countries in this position use digital networks to send direct assistance to unregistered families.²⁴⁴ However, these measures usually act as temporary fixes instead of permanent solutions. Consequently, the challenge is how to bring informal workers into the formal system. Governments must do this without pushing away small businesses with strict rules. They must also avoid leaving citizens without help.

Other countries in this bloc include Bangladesh, Colombia, Peru, Kenya, and Ghana. Just like India, they all struggle with informal jobs that do not fit into a normal tax-based system.²⁴⁵ These countries usually support programs that reach informal and rural workers directly, instead of using formal payroll systems. In Kenya, about 83 percent of workers are informal. The government started a savings program called KNEST. It uses mobile money so people can save small, flexible amounts instead of paying fixed monthly fees.²⁴⁶ Colombia and Peru both grew their pension programs to reach older citizens who never had formal jobs.²⁴⁷ Countries in this bloc will likely support mobile technology, basic free pension benefits, and flexible savings plans. They are less likely to support strict rules that force informal workers to register formally. Such rules could push them further into hiding or supporting themselves independently instead.

FRAGILE AND CRISIS-AFFECTED ECONOMIES

Severe national conflicts and crises completely change how social aid works. In these cases, normal government tasks become almost impossible. This breakdown happens when countries suffer from huge shocks. These shocks might include civil wars, natural disasters, or economic collapses.²⁴⁸ Under these conditions,

public offices close down or are destroyed. The state loses its basic power to manage the country.

Without a functional government, authorities cannot collect taxes. They cannot manage public budgets, or give out welfare benefits. Standard safety nets like state pensions or jobless checks disappear. This leaves the population without any help. When the state fails entirely, citizens are left on their own. They must find their own necessities to survive, such as food, water, shelter, and safety.

In Haiti, continuous political crises and devastating earthquakes show this harsh reality. Local offices lack computers, staff, and resources. They cannot run basic public services or food programs.²⁴⁹ Therefore, these areas often rely on UN agencies, foreign aid, and international charity groups. These organizations hand out food, clean water, and emergency medicine. The immediate priority is not planning long-term economic reforms or building modern pension systems. Instead, they must focus on daily survival through foreign aid networks. These networks build temporary centers to keep people alive.

Burundi, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) also fit in this bloc. In Burundi, food shortages, a falling currency, and numerous refugees fleeing violence in the nearby DRC have overwhelmed the government. Because of this, the World Food Programme and other international groups do much of the work that the state cannot.²⁵⁰ The DRC has been dealing with decades of armed conflict, which has displaced millions of people inside the country. Nearly 15 million people in the DRC are expected to need humanitarian help in 2026. The government cannot deliver basic services in large parts of the country, so aid groups step in instead.²⁵¹ Zimbabwe faces a different kind of collapse, caused by hyperinflation and repeated droughts. About 60 percent of the population lives on less than USD 3.65 a day. The government's cash and food programs only reach a small number of

people in need, leaving most vulnerable citizens dependent on NGOs.²⁵² Countries in this bloc will likely support fast humanitarian aid, debt relief, and international funding for basic services. They are less likely to support long-term pensions or labor reforms, since their governments do not currently have the resources or ability to run them.

Committee Mission

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) set up the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) in 1946. At first, it was called the Social Commission. Its main goal was to advise on social policy and handle issues not covered by other specialized UN groups. Since the 1995 World Summit in Copenhagen, the Commission has led the agreements and goals that were outlined in the Copenhagen agreement, such as expanding employment and reducing poverty. Most recently, CSocD held the 2025 Second World Summit in Doha. Each year, its 46 member states gather in New York to pick a priority theme and guide global social policy and development concerns.²⁵³

This mandate places the Commission in a unique position on social protection. The Commission particularly promotes social policies regarding poverty reduction, advancing social integration, and ensuring full jobs and decent work for everyone.²⁵⁴ However, the Commission does not control national budgets. It cannot force a government to fund a pension system or expand a welfare program. Instead, its power comes from setting international standards and building agreements between countries. It turns shared principles, such as the right to social security in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, into practical guidance. Governments can then adapt these ideas to fit their own needs.²⁵⁵

The Commission and its participating countries hope to align with the goals of the committee by shaping solutions to the issues they discuss.

A strong response must build on partnerships and recommendations that UN groups and governments can use. It should learn from real policies tested around the world, while considering current applications of the issue and future problems that might arise. Taking these lessons, understandings, and predictions, creates clear guidelines that the world can act on. CSocD exists because countries knew, decades ago, that no country can solve social and developmental issues alone. That responsibility is just as urgent today. It requires research, care, collaboration, and attention to every side of the issue in every context.²⁵⁶

Research and Preparation Questions

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

TOPIC A

- 1 How do labor market structures shape the way different countries experience youth unemployment, and why do the same policies work well in some states but fail in others?
- 2 What role do informal work, rural labor markets, and weak infrastructure play in limiting young people's access to decent employment?
- 3 How should governments balance traditional job training with entrepreneurship support, seed capital, and digital inclusion when designing youth employment policy?
- 4 Why has automation changed the meaning of entry-level work, and how can countries protect young workers during that transition?
- 5 Which policies have been more effective in helping young women, rural youth, and other excluded groups move into stable work?
- 6 How can CSocD shape a global response to youth unemployment while still respecting the very different needs of member states?

TOPIC B

- 1 How can governments make their social welfare systems more resilient against unexpected crises? What specific mechanisms can be established to ensure emergency aids reach all citizens, funding unregistered and vulnerable populations?
- 2 How can governments keep their public pension systems financially sustainable over time? What strategies can countries implement to guarantee a dignified old age without forcing major budget cuts?
- 3 How can social protection systems be redesigned to include informal workers?
- 4 Which social protection programs (such as public healthcare, unemployment insurance, elderly pensions) does your country prioritize the most and why? What key gaps still exist in your national safety net?
- 5 How does your country fund its national social programs? What is its stance on foreign debt?
- 6 When providing social assistance, does your government defend offering benefits to all citizens equally as a basic right or directing limited resources strictly to those in extreme need?
- 7 What specific laws, national programs, or policy reforms is your government currently implementing to improve and modernize its social protection system? How effective have these actions been in reaching vulnerable groups, and what major challenges is your country actively trying to overcome right now?

Important Documents

TOPIC A

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Karol Nicole Cázares González is an International Relations student at Universidad Anáhuac México whose interests center on governance, social policy, Latin American politics, and multilateral cooperation. She currently serves as Director of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) at NHSMUN 2027, after previously serving as Assistant Director for the UN Environment Assembly, where her research focused on environmental governance and the environmental implications of artificial intelligence. She is also an intern with the Mexico Program at the Inter-American Dialogue, where she engages with policy issues related to Mexico, US-Mexico relations, and the broader region. Previously, as Executive Partnerships Coordinator at The American Society of Mexico, she worked on high-level diplomatic and public affairs initiatives, bringing together government officials, embassies, civil society, and private-sector leaders. Nicole has also supported the Women Economic Forum Mexico on a pro bono basis and has published work on democratic institutions, political economy, and Latin American affairs in *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica* and *Anáhuac Global Review*. Her work in *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica* was published with the support of the Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales (COMEXI), an independent, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the analysis and discussion of international affairs and Mexico's engagement with the world. Across her academic, professional, and Model UN experiences, she is particularly interested in how institutions and public policy shape people's access to opportunity, representation, and social mobility.

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Nicole Dos Santos is currently pursuing a degree in industrial engineering at Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas, Venezuela. She began her Model United Nations career in 2024 as a delegate in the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at NHSMUN, and has since gone on to serve as an Assistant Director for NHSMUN in 2026 before joining the staff of the Commission for Social Development as Director. Beyond NHSMUN, she has served as Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime committee at Instituto Andes Model United Nations. Her interest in social protection systems extends beyond the conference room: following the earthquake that struck Venezuela, she actively volunteered at collection centers in Caracas, helping distribute medical supplies, clothing, and food to communities affected in La Guaira.

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