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## United Nations Children’s Fund Background Guide 2024

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# NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2024 National Model United Nations Conference in Washington, DC (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This year's staff is: Director Kaylyn B. Atkins and Assistant Director Bryant Larson. Kaylyn holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Studies from Manhattan College and currently works in the Division of State Counsel at the Office of the New York State Attorney General. She is also a 2024-25 Law Fellow through the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation at Loyola Law School Los Angeles. Bryant is currently working at the Public Health Institute as a Data Analyst and Overdose Prevention Coordinator, as well as at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as a Financial Capabilities Fellow. He recently graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, and will be working at the White House starting Fall 2024.

The topics under discussion for UNICEF are:

1. Addressing the Impact of Malnutrition on Infants and Children
2. Protecting Children with Disabilities against Discrimination

UNICEF is the primary entity within the United Nations system that aims to protect the rights of children worldwide, especially those who are most disadvantaged, and ensure the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). UNICEF works to address a wide range of topics regarding children, such as health and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, quality education, social policy, and emergency response to further the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) (2015). To simulate this committee, delegates should review UNICEF's mandate and understand its critical role in advocating for children's rights as human rights and providing humanitarian and developmental aid.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a [position paper](#). Guidelines are available in the [NMUN Position Paper Guide](#).

The [NMUN website](#) has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:

1. The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which include the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretary-General Alliyah Edwards at [usgalliyah.dc@nmun.org](mailto:usgalliyah.dc@nmun.org) or Secretary-General Chris Duggan at [secgen.dc@nmun.org](mailto:secgen.dc@nmun.org).

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,  
Kaylyn B. Atkins, Director  
Bryant Larson, Assistant Director



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## Committee Overview

### **Introduction**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was established on 11 December 1946 as a specialized agency of the United Nations to deliver emergency food and health care to children and mothers affected by World War II.<sup>1</sup> However, the goal of UNICEF has since developed to meet the long-term needs of children and women worldwide.<sup>2</sup> UNICEF has ensured the reduction of child mortality and the provision of children with essential services of clean water, sanitation, and immunization and continues to strive for a happy, healthy, fulfilling life for every child, everywhere.<sup>3</sup> Operating in over 190 countries and territories, UNICEF fights to provide vital resources to children and families in dire need.<sup>4</sup> The committee also covers child protection, education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene.<sup>5</sup> Through partnerships with governments, non-governmental organizations, and community groups, UNICEF aims to build a world where every child can grow and thrive in peace and reach their full potential.<sup>6</sup>

### **Mandate, Functions, and Powers**

UNICEF's mandate focuses on advocating for children's rights globally, ensuring their basic needs and opportunities.<sup>7</sup> Guided by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), UNICEF supports vulnerable children affected by conflicts, natural disasters, poverty, and social exclusion.<sup>8</sup> UNICEF also looks to combat violence, exploitation, and abuse by enhancing child protection systems and promoting social change.<sup>9</sup> UNICEF is a critical responder in crises, providing life-saving support and psychological assistance.<sup>10</sup> By combating harmful practices and holding governments accountable, UNICEF fosters enduring positive changes aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring every child can thrive in a supportive environment.<sup>11</sup>

- **UNICEF will generally:** humanitarian aid, safe shelter, nutrition, and education while working on long-term community rebuilding and strengthening; policy advocacy, influencing national and international policies for children's welfare, and operational activities addressing health, education, and nutrition; child welfare capacity support for states; response in times of crisis.<sup>12</sup>
- **UNICEF will not generally:** create or dictate national policies; unilaterally direct Member States, NGOs, other UN Agencies, and stakeholders to act.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *What we do*. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *The United Nations Children's Fund*. 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Membership*. 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *Paris Agreement*. 2015.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCC)*. 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Agenda for Humanity. *Agenda for Humanity*. 2024.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2015; United Nations Children's Fund. *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCC)*. 2024.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of UNICEF*. 2021.



UNICEF also looks to provide emergency food and healthcare, promotes health, education, and nutrition, reduces child mortality, and ensures access to clean water, sanitation, and immunization.<sup>14</sup> The organization supports vulnerable children in conflict zones and natural disasters, advocates for children's rights, and works to prevent violence, exploitation, and abuse.<sup>15</sup> UNICEF's operational and strategic functions address immediate necessities while also encouraging long-term societal transformations.<sup>16</sup> The organization's approach integrates direct interventions with advocacy, capacity building, and systemic reforms, all aimed at fostering environments conducive to children's thriving.<sup>17</sup>

### **Governance, Funding, and Structure**

UNICEF is a United Nations agency providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.<sup>18</sup> UNICEF's governance is overseen by an Executive Board that implements policies, approves programs, and oversees administrative and financial plans.<sup>19</sup> The Executive Board meets annually in regular sessions and periodically in special sessions to evaluate progress, approve plans and budgets, and make decisions on administrative and financial matters.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the board ensures that UNICEF adheres to its mandate effectively and efficiently.<sup>21</sup> The board, which is comprised of 36 members elected by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), reflects a broad geographical diversity and ensures that UNICEF's responses are globally inclusive and effective.<sup>22</sup>

Voluntary contributions from governments are the primary source of UNICEF's financial resources, but private-sector fundraising and partnerships have become increasingly common.<sup>23</sup> This includes significant contributions from global corporations, civil society, and more than six million individual donors worldwide.<sup>24</sup> These contributions also provide substantial financial support through the UNICEF National Committees, which are present in 33 industrialized states.<sup>25</sup> These funds also allow UNICEF to maintain flexibility and respond quickly to emergencies and the ongoing needs of children worldwide.<sup>26</sup> From a few initial programs focused mainly on Europe, UNICEF now operates in more than 190 countries and territories.<sup>27</sup> UNICEF's headquarters in New York directs an extensive field network of seven regional and country offices.<sup>28</sup> These offices adapt UNICEF's global strategies to local contexts.<sup>29</sup> The decentralized nature of its operations, established in the 1950s, enables it to deliver timely and context-specific help to where it most needs it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCC)*. 2024.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of UNICEF*. 2021.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Funding*. 2024.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Implementing and monitoring*, 2024.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Membership*. 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Functions and organization of UNICEF Executive Board*. 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Membership*. 2024.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Funding Overview*. 2022.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Annual Report 2021*. 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council. *Functions and organization of UNICEF Executive Board*. 2021.

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Membership*. 2024.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



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# 1. Addressing the Impact of Malnutrition on Infants and Children

## Introduction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defines underweight as a condition where a child is "too light for their height," overweight as a condition where a child is "too heavy for their height," and micronutrient deficiencies as a situation where a child lacks "key vitamins and minerals."<sup>31</sup> According to Children International, 45 million youth under the age of five are underweight, over 39 million are overweight, and another 300 million experience micronutrient deficiencies.<sup>32</sup> These trends are particularly alarming, given that malnourishment perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality by stunting children's growth, weakening their immune systems, and hampering their intellectual development.<sup>33</sup> Mindful of these challenges, the United Nations considers good nutrition essential for a child's ability to lead a fulfilling life, as children who receive adequate nutrition are more capable of learning, engaging in play, and actively participating in their communities.<sup>34</sup>

While the current number of children affected by hunger and malnourishment in the world is caused by several factors, including desertification and rising food costs, war plays an outsized role.<sup>35</sup> World Vision notes that armed conflict deprives 112 million youth of essential daily vitamins, nutrients, and minerals necessary for basic bodily functions each year.<sup>36</sup> This is because armed conflict disrupts food production and distribution, resulting in food shortages, political unrest, and further conflict, which limit parents' ability to provide adequate nutrition for themselves and their children.<sup>37</sup> Displacement exacerbates these challenges by hindering adults' access to essential services and economic opportunities that would have otherwise ensured their children's access to viable food sources.<sup>38</sup> To address this, UNICEF works with Member States worldwide to help strengthen laws and policies that improve children's access to medical care, hygiene kits, potable water, and sanitation services.<sup>39</sup> UNICEF also combats malnutrition rates among young children by collaborating with partners to deliver food to youth in the areas of the world most impacted by conflict.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to conflict, child malnutrition is prevalent in rural communities, where over 80% of the world's low-income citizens, or 575 million individuals, currently reside.<sup>41</sup> These communities face significant barriers in accessing essential resources such as land, water, seeds, and fertilizers, as well as markets, information, and technology.<sup>42</sup> This lack of access to productive resources not only reduces agricultural productivity but also compromises the right to food for many individuals and households in rural areas.<sup>43</sup> Without access to these resources, rural families struggle to produce enough food for their children and

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<sup>31</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Child Malnutrition*. 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Children International. *Global Poverty and Hunger*. 2023.

<sup>33</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Young People Suffer Food Insecurity, Increasing Conflicts, Ramped Up Violence, Delegates Stress as Third Committee Discusses Children's Rights (GA/SHC/4348)*. 2022.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Nutrition*. 2022.

<sup>35</sup> United Nations, Sustainable Development Group. *Breaking the Vicious Cycle of Hunger and Conflict*. 2021; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations et al. *Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity: June to November 2023 Outlook*. 2023.

<sup>36</sup> National Institute of Health. *Childhood Exposure to Armed Conflict and Nutritional Health Outcomes in Nigeria*. 2023; World Vision. *How Armed Conflict Impacts Children*. 2023.

<sup>37</sup> World Food Programme. *Global Report on Food Crises*. 2020; World Vision. *How Armed Conflict Impacts Children*. 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Children's Fund USA. *Children in War and Conflict*. 2022.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations Children's Fund USA. *Food Crises Response*. 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *The Right to Adequate Food*. 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.





generate the necessary income to purchase the food they need.<sup>44</sup> As a result, nearly 50% of all children under five years old in rural areas continue to be affected by malnutrition.<sup>45</sup>

In Indigenous communities, the prevalence of malnourishment is more pronounced due to historical marginalization, land displacement, and limited access to resources and opportunities.<sup>46</sup> Combined with their limited access to medical care, Indigenous people experience higher levels of infant mortality and child malnutrition than their non-native counterparts.<sup>47</sup> UNICEF collaborates with local governments to construct national healthcare offices and rural healthcare infrastructure, providing maternal, neonatal, and child healthcare services to groups that face difficulties in accessing such support.<sup>48</sup> In cases where the construction of new healthcare facilities is not affordable, UNICEF dispatches mobile health teams to remote areas or provides families with humanitarian cash transfers.<sup>49</sup>

### ***International and Regional Framework***

The international community has long recognized the imperative of tackling food insecurity and malnutrition among children through collaborative efforts and global cooperation.<sup>50</sup> Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948) established that everyone should have access to an adequate standard of living, including food and medical care, regardless of their country of origin.<sup>51</sup> In 1966, the General Assembly adopted the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) (1966), emphasizing the importance of ensuring access to nutritious food and taking steps to guarantee this right, especially for vulnerable populations.<sup>52</sup> In 1974, the World Food Conference adopted the *Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition* (1974), emphasizing that economic disparities and historical injustices, not resource scarcity, deprive many of the right to adequate food.<sup>53</sup> Thus, they highlighted the importance of prioritizing food production and sustainable agriculture and fostering equitable distribution within and between nations through collaborative action by Member States.<sup>54</sup>

In 1989, the General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989), which seeks to address malnutrition among all children, including Indigenous populations, through nutrition education and greater access to healthcare.<sup>55</sup> In alignment with Articles 2 and 24 of the CRC, the *Rome Declaration on World Food Security* (1996) emphasizes the need for sustainable agricultural development and improved access to food to achieve long-term food security for children in rural communities.<sup>56</sup> This document also highlights the importance of enhancing agricultural productivity, promoting rural development, and ensuring equitable access to resources for smallholder farmers in developing nations,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Health*. 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Inter-Agency Support Group. *The Health of Indigenous Peoples*. 2014; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Health*. 2018.

<sup>48</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Building Infrastructure for the Health of Children and Communities*. 2023.

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Children's Fund USA. *UNICEF Mobile Health Teams Reach Children in Need in Rural Afghanistan*. 2022.

<sup>50</sup> United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Food*. 2023.

<sup>51</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948; United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *History of the Declaration*. N.d.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*. 1966.

<sup>53</sup> World Food Conference. *Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition*. 1974.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

<sup>56</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Rome Declaration and the World Food Summit Plan of Action*. 1996.



such as Indigenous groups.<sup>57</sup> In 1998, UNICEF introduced the *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)*, a set of guidelines that UNICEF follows in its humanitarian work to ensure the protection and well-being of children affected by emergencies.<sup>58</sup> These commitments include upholding the CRC, ensuring the safety of all children, and promoting international cooperation among Member States.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food* (2004) provide practical guidance for states in implementing policies and programs to ensure access to adequate and nutritious food for all individuals.<sup>60</sup> These guidelines emphasize the importance of adopting a human rights-based approach to food security and promoting international cooperation to address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in keeping with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), and 3 (good health and well-being).<sup>61</sup> For example, Target 1.4 of SDG 1 urges Member States to ensure everyone has access to natural resources.<sup>62</sup> Also, Target 2.3 of SDG 2 emphasizes the importance of doubling the agricultural productivity of small-scale food producers by connecting them to global markets, providing them with financial services, and ensuring their equitable access to land and property.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Target 3.2 of SDG 3 calls upon the global community to reduce the rate of preventable youth fatalities to no more than 25 per 1,000 live births every year.<sup>64</sup>

In General Assembly resolution 60/165 (2005) on "The Right to Food," Member States urge one another to end hunger by addressing gender inequality and discrimination within their borders, recognizing that girls are twice as likely as boys to die from hunger-related diseases.<sup>65</sup> The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)* (2007) provides a framework for ensuring the well-being of Indigenous children in society.<sup>66</sup> In particular, the UNDRIP proclaims the right of Indigenous people to control their land, territory, and natural resources to maintain traditional food systems essential for children's nutritional needs.<sup>67</sup> In 2018, the United Nations demonstrated its commitment to addressing conflict-induced food insecurity and malnutrition among children.<sup>68</sup> For example, in Security Council resolution 2417 (2018) on "The Protection of Civilians," Member States emphasize the importance of respecting humanitarian principles and allowing unimpeded access to relief aid.<sup>69</sup> Regarding ensuring children's access to nutritious food in rural communities, Member States underscore the importance of investing in rural development and forming international partnerships to address issues related to desertification and land degradation.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the United Nations urges states to address the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Scope of CCC's*. 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food*. 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid; United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

<sup>62</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *End Poverty in All Its Forms Everywhere*. 2023.

<sup>63</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture*. 2023.

<sup>64</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-being for All at All Ages*. 2023.

<sup>65</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *The Right to Food (A/RES/60/165)*. 2005.

<sup>66</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Food*. 2023.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations, Security Council. *Protection of Civilians (S/RES/2417)*. 2018.

<sup>70</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Agriculture Development, Food Security, and Nutrition (A/RES/77/186)*. 2022.



underlying factors preventing Indigenous children from fully enjoying their right to food in line with the UNDRIP, such as extreme poverty, environmental degradation, and ecosystem contamination.<sup>71</sup>

In a publication titled *The Future of Food* (2021), the World Bank highlighted a series of actions for Member States to take to end the cycle of conflict and food insecurity.<sup>72</sup> For example, it recommended that Member States implement early warning systems to prevent food crises and increase transparency in food distribution programs by involving vulnerable populations in the decision-making process.<sup>73</sup> In 2023, the Security Council affirmed these initiatives by adopting Presidential Statement 2023/4, which highlighted the impact of armed conflict on food security, such as displacement and the destruction of food stocks.<sup>74</sup> In the same document, the Security Council emphasized the importance of complying with the *Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols*.<sup>75</sup> These conventions and protocols considered the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, set forth binding obligations for parties to armed conflicts.<sup>76</sup> For example, under international law, states can neither starve civilians nor prevent them from accessing essential humanitarian assistance.<sup>77</sup>

Moreover, UNICEF's *Strategic Plan (2022–2025)* underscores its commitment to advancing children's rights globally, as outlined in the CRC and guided by the CCCs.<sup>78</sup> According to UNICEF, this plan is particularly timely given the threats around the world to children's safety, which are currently at their most severe in decades.<sup>79</sup> The *Strategic Plan* aims to strengthen primary healthcare systems, address deep inequalities in access to essential health and nutrition services, promote child-centered food systems, and advocate for changes in discriminatory laws, policies, and social practices.<sup>80</sup> It was created to guide UNICEF's actions and initiatives during the 2022–2025 period to ensure a comprehensive and effective response to the evolving challenges children face worldwide.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Role of the International System***

UNICEF is at the forefront of combating youth malnutrition in all countries and regions around the world.<sup>82</sup> UNICEF provides critical support for children impacted by conflict through its Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism (IRRM).<sup>83</sup> This initiative, which has been launched in countries such as Yemen and South Sudan since 2014, works with a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to get food and water to those in need.<sup>84</sup> The IRRM conducts mass screenings for children under five, administers treatment for severe malnutrition, implements vitamin A supplementation campaigns, and advocates for healthy feeding practices.<sup>85</sup> In rural areas, where access to healthcare services is often limited, UNICEF supplements the work conducted through IRRM with its Community-based Management of Acute

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<sup>71</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *The Right to Food (A/RES/61/163)*. 2007; United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295)*. 2007.

<sup>72</sup> World Bank Group. *The Future of Food: Building Stronger Food Systems in Fragility, Conflict, and Violence Settings*. 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> United Nations, Security Council. *Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2023/4)*. 2023.

<sup>75</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross. *The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols*. 2014.

<sup>76</sup> United Nations, Security Council. *Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2023/4)*. 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025*. 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF, For Every Child*. 2023.

<sup>83</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism (IRRM)*. 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



Malnutrition (CMAM) program.<sup>86</sup> Many NGOs and Member States have used this initiative, which relies on a decentralized approach to help communities in need and provide for society's most vulnerable.<sup>87</sup> Over the years, CMAM has sought to reduce child mortality rates by having healthcare workers screen children for malnutrition, provide nutrient supplements, and offer counseling on breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices.<sup>88</sup> Since its inception in 2006, CMAM has been a vital part of UNICEF's efforts to address SDGs 2 and 3.<sup>89</sup> By providing timely, accessible, and appropriate care for malnourished youth, CMAM has helped children receiving treatment for wasting be "51% more likely to achieve nutritional recovery" compared to those in standard care groups.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) works with more than 100 Member States to guarantee that all school-age children can access nutritious meals so they are prepared and eager to learn.<sup>91</sup> For example, in 2022, more than 400 million children benefited from school feeding programs.<sup>92</sup> Although this figure is higher than the number of children reached before the pandemic by 30 million, WFP notes that progress has been least effective in developing countries due to a reduction in financial support from developed Member States.<sup>93</sup> To overcome these challenges, officials from WFP have taught local populations how to diversify their assets and start small businesses.<sup>94</sup> They have also provided individuals with cash-based transfers and emergency kits to prevent the deterioration of food security.<sup>95</sup> Through WFP's humanitarian cash-based transfers, the United Nations allocated \$3.3 billion to 50 million individuals in low-income countries, providing them with the flexibility to spend money based on their needs.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, in the first half of 2023, WFP's emergency response services provided nutrition supplements to more than 11 million children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers.<sup>97</sup>

In 2021, FAO launched the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems Programme.<sup>98</sup> This initiative, which aims to support Indigenous communities in maintaining and enhancing their food systems, recognizes that traditional crops, livestock, and food processing techniques are crucial for sustaining future generations.<sup>99</sup> As a result, this program prioritizes agricultural sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and safeguarding Indigenous knowledge on food production.<sup>100</sup> Apart from the educational component, FAO also collaborates with governmental bodies, Indigenous groups, and various stakeholders to promote policies and legal structures that safeguard the rights of Indigenous people to their ancestral lands, territories, and resources.<sup>101</sup> This assistance often entails promoting programs that bolster Indigenous food systems and addressing the hurdles they encounter, including issues like land ownership, market accessibility, and adapting to climate change.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *CMAM Evaluation Management Response Plan and Evaluation Report*. 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> World Vision. *Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM)*. 2012.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> World Food Programme. *School Meals*. 2023.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> World Food Programme. *Cash Transfers*. 2022.

<sup>97</sup> World Food Programme. *WFP at a Glance*. 2024.

<sup>98</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems: Insights on Sustainability and Resilience from the Front Line of Climate Change*. 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems: Insights on Sustainability and Resilience from the Front Line of Climate Change*. 2021.



In addition to addressing health issues among children aged five and under through programs created by international agencies, regional bodies have sought to improve youth nutrition rates.<sup>103</sup> For instance, the Community of Latin American Caribbean States (CELAC) outlined a plan of action alongside FAO in 2015 to promote sustainable agricultural production and improve access to food for all.<sup>104</sup> This document, referred to as the *CELAC Plan for Food and Nutrition Security and the Eradication of Hunger 2025*, advocates for creating food systems that can withstand events such as natural disasters, war, and climate change.<sup>105</sup> In 2021, the African Union (AU) and FAO created the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAAPD) to address food and nutrition insecurity through the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, the formation of partnerships with farmers and agribusinesses, and the allocation of at least 10% of national budgets towards agricultural and rural development.<sup>106</sup> The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also launched the *ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS)* framework in 2021 to ensure long-term food security and nutritional well-being for rural residents through increased and sustainable food production.<sup>107</sup> In 2023, the AU collaborated with WFP to address the root causes of conflict, improve institutional capacity to prevent armed conflict, and leverage collective resources to promote peace and food security.<sup>108</sup> To achieve this vision, they seek to expand efforts in early warning, conflict prevention, and mediation, as well as enhance advocacy on the connection between conflict and food security.<sup>109</sup> Through this joint initiative, the AU and WFP also aim to mitigate the impact of conflict on food security and nutrition, particularly among children, by implementing emergency food assistance and nutrition programs in conflict-affected areas.<sup>110</sup>

### **Food Insecurity & Conflict**

According to the Security Council, approximately 2 billion people- equivalent to one-quarter of humanity- reside in areas affected by armed conflict.<sup>111</sup> Of those living in conflict-affected nations, over 220 million people suffer from food insecurity.<sup>112</sup> The Security Council also notes that over 60% of the world's most undernourished people are concentrated in ten countries: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Pakistan, Haiti, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>113</sup> Citizens of these countries face heightened challenges in accessing food due to factors such as displacement, forced starvation, and the destruction of infrastructure.<sup>114</sup> While armed conflict affects individuals of all ages, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) reports that youth under five are disproportionately impacted by instability and displacement due to their higher nutritional requirements and rapid physical and cognitive development.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, the report highlights that children under five have developing immune systems, making them more susceptible to

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<sup>103</sup> World Food Programme. *Africa Day Comment: WFP and the African Union Work to End Hunger and Food Insecurity*. 2023.

<sup>104</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *The CELAC Plan for Food and Nutrition Security and the Eradication of Hunger 2025: Executive Summary*. 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> African Union. *The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme*. 2021.

<sup>107</sup> Association of Southeast Asian States. *ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework and Strategic Plan of Action on Food Security (SPA-FS) 2021-2025*. 2020.

<sup>108</sup> World Food Programme. *Africa Day Comment: WFP and the African Union Work to End Hunger and Food Insecurity*. 2023.

<sup>109</sup> African Union. *The Nexus Between Food Security and Conflicts: AU and WFP Collaboration Will Address Root Causes of Conflicts*. 2023.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> United Nations, Office of Global Communications. *Sustainable Peace Cannot Be Built Where Rights of Women Are Ignored, Says Deputy Secretary-General at Security Council Open Debate*. 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Action Against Hunger. *More Than 85% Of People Facing Hunger Crises Live in Conflict-Affected Countries*. 2023.

<sup>113</sup> United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Lack of Grain Exports Driving Global Hunger to Famine Levels, as War in Ukraine Continues, Speakers Warn Security Council*. 2022.

<sup>114</sup> World Food Programme USA. *Conflict is the Primary Cause of Conflict Globally*. 2024.

<sup>115</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Youth and Armed Conflict*. 2011.



diseases that arise when food, water, and sanitation systems are disrupted or contaminated during conflict.<sup>116</sup>

As a result, UNICEF provided humanitarian cash transfers to families in Haiti to ensure their access to necessities in line with SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 10 (reduced inequalities).<sup>117</sup> Additionally, UNICEF increased its emergency nutrition response in the country by screening over 18,000 children for malnutrition and providing treatment for severe and moderate wasting.<sup>118</sup> In Yemen, UNICEF helped construct solar-powered wells and tanks to give over 9,000 residents access to clean drinking water, even amidst ongoing conflict.<sup>119</sup> In Afghanistan, UNICEF dispatched a mobile healthcare team consisting of a doctor, midwife, nutrition nurse, nutrition counselor, psychological counselor, and vaccinator to support pregnant women experiencing malnourishment, assist mothers having difficulty with breastfeeding, and ensure children are protected from preventable diseases by offering free vaccinations.<sup>120</sup> In 2022, UNICEF partnered with FAO, WFP, and the World Health Organization (WHO) to accelerate action on child undernutrition in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.<sup>121</sup> This collaboration involved high-level meetings to coordinate efforts and mobilize action among ministries, stakeholders, and regional offices.<sup>122</sup> Their joint initiative focused on improving nutrition analysis, developing policies for healthy diets, and investing in health services for mothers and children under five.<sup>123</sup> They also provided emergency food assistance and nutrition programs in conflict-affected areas and advocated for increased resources to address the undernutrition crisis, particularly affecting rural and Indigenous communities.<sup>124</sup>

Nevertheless, the World Bank notes that the number of stunted children in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa grew by 2 million between 2021 and 2022, and the number of overweight children globally increased by 4 million over the past 20 years.<sup>125</sup> UNICEF attributes these trends to funding gaps, bureaucratic impediments, and threats to humanitarian workers' lives.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, while the United Nations system has attempted to increase its support for the growing number of malnourished children in the world, ongoing conflict and violence pose significant risks to humanitarian workers and hinder their ability to reach vulnerable children with food aid.<sup>127</sup>

### ***Child Malnutrition in Indigenous and Rural Communities***

According to FAO's *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World Report 2023*, the rate of rural children experiencing stunting and wasting is 13.6% and 2.8% higher, respectively, than urban children of the same age group.<sup>128</sup> UNICEF highlights that this difference is largely because rural families heavily depend on livestock, farming, and aquaculture for their livelihoods and food supply.<sup>129</sup> Despite this reliance on agriculture, rural families often lack adequate training, tools, and resources, making them more vulnerable to severe weather patterns that damage arable land and produce unpredictable

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Haiti Humanitarian Situation Report*. 2024.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Transforming the Lives of 9,000 Residents with Safe and Sustainable Water Sources*. 2023.

<sup>120</sup> United Nations Children's Fund USA. *UNICEF Mobile Health Teams Reach Children in Need in Rural Afghanistan*. 2022.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> World Bank Group. *New Data Exposes Alarming Child Malnutrition Trends*. 2023.

<sup>126</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Nutrition*. 2022.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*. 2023.

<sup>129</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UN Report: World Hunger Surges After Multiple Crises*. 2023.



conditions for harvesting crops.<sup>130</sup> Coupled with rural families' limited finances and lack of access to healthcare services, rural children are more adversely affected than their urban counterparts by issues related to child stunting and wasting.<sup>131</sup>

In Indigenous communities, rates of child malnutrition are even more pronounced.<sup>132</sup> According to the World Bank, they account for 5% of the world's population but constitute 15% of the extremely poor - and a third of the world's rural poor.<sup>133</sup> Thus, UN DESA notes that Indigenous communities have no other choice but to sustain themselves through the cultivation of crops, the hunting of animals, and the rearing of livestock.<sup>134</sup> Despite their strong dependence on the land for survival, systemic discrimination has led to the loss of their lands and natural resources.<sup>135</sup> Consequently, these factors have exacerbated food insecurity among this group and affected their ability to provide culturally appropriate nourishment for their children.<sup>136</sup>

In response, the United Nations system has launched numerous programs designed to address the needs of rural and Indigenous communities.<sup>137</sup> For example, WFP launched the Farm to Market Alliance in 2015, which aims to promote crop diversification and expand farmers' business opportunities by connecting them to the global supply chain.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, WFP started the Home-Grown School Feeding program, which directly sources school meals from local producers.<sup>139</sup> In Colombia, FAO provided Indigenous families with seeds to farm crops such as corn, beans, and cassava, as well as grass and fodder for animal consumption, along with three-month food kits.<sup>140</sup>

Despite these initiatives, youth malnutrition rates remain high in rural and Indigenous communities.<sup>141</sup> While these programs can extend children's life expectancies and reduce the barriers that these communities often face in achieving a stable food intake, several challenges persist.<sup>142</sup> The most significant challenges include a lack of support from policymakers, limited access to healthcare services in rural communities, restricted access to technology, and the harmful effects of climate change.<sup>143</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The persistence of child malnutrition, exacerbated by armed conflict, systemic discrimination, and environmental challenges, remains a significant global concern despite ongoing efforts by the United Nations and its agencies.<sup>144</sup> While initiatives such as the IRRM and CMAM have provided essential support in conflict-affected and rural areas, substantial challenges remain, including financial shortfalls, administrative obstacles, and risks to the safety of humanitarian personnel.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, Indigenous communities continue to face systemic discrimination and land loss, hindering their ability to provide

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Health*. 2018.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> World Bank Group. *Indigenous Peoples*. 2023.

<sup>134</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Health*. 2018; World Bank Group. *Indigenous Peoples*. 2023.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF, For Every Child*. 2023.

<sup>138</sup> World Food Programme. *Farm to Market Alliance*. 2024.

<sup>139</sup> World Food Programme. *School Feeding Programme*. 2024.

<sup>140</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Sowing Resilience: How Colombia's Indigenous Peoples Adapt to Climate Change*. 2023.

<sup>141</sup> Inter-Agency Support Group. *The Health of Indigenous Peoples*. 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Nutrition*. 2022.

<sup>145</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Integrated Rapid Response Mechanism (IRRM)*. 2019; United Nations Children's Fund. *CMAM Evaluation Management Response Plan and Evaluation Report*. 2021.



culturally relevant nourishment for their children.<sup>146</sup> Addressing these challenges requires sustained international cooperation, increased investment in rural development, and the protection of Indigenous peoples' rights to their ancestral lands and resources.<sup>147</sup>

### ***Future Research***

When conducting research, delegates should consider the following important questions: How can the United Nations work with governments to safeguard the rights of Indigenous communities? How can Member States strengthen technological infrastructure in rural communities to aid smallholder farmers? How can the United Nations work to ensure that food systems are not destroyed during conflict? How can the United Nations better protect the rights and safety of displaced people? How can the United Nations better reach and educate pregnant women and mothers on neonatal care and nutrition, even in hard-to-reach areas?

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<sup>146</sup> Inter-Agency Support Group. *The Health of Indigenous Peoples*. 2014.

<sup>147</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Nutrition*. 2022.





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## 2. Protecting Children with Disabilities against Discrimination

*“Disability is part of the diversity of human experience: Functional limitations manifest in the life cycle of every one of us. The extent to which children with disabilities are able to lead happy lives depends on our own willingness to confront barriers to change.”<sup>148</sup>*

### **Introduction**

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), nearly 1 in 10 of all children (240 million children globally), live with a disability and are among the most marginalized in society.<sup>149</sup> As stated in Article 1 of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol (CRPD)* (2006), a disability is defined as “a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment” that, when coupled with environmental challenges, affects a person’s equitable participation in society.<sup>150</sup> Children with disabilities face multiple barriers that impact their quality of life, such as schools and transportation systems that are inaccessible to wheelchair users or those with other physical disabilities.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, communication barriers, such as the absence of Braille learning materials or a sign language interpreter, and attitudinal barriers like stereotyping and bullying, all pose significant difficulty for children with disabilities to fully engage within their communities.<sup>152</sup> All of these obstacles are rooted in stigma and discrimination based on a concept called ableism, or a system of attitudes and beliefs that devalue children with disabilities on the basis that certain appearances, abilities, and behaviors are necessary for a fulfilling life.<sup>153</sup> As a result, UNICEF reported in 2022 that children with disabilities are 41% more likely to feel discriminated against as opposed to their peers without disabilities.<sup>154</sup> These forms of discrimination are exacerbated for girls, poor, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and migrant children with disabilities, as well as children with multiple disabilities.<sup>155</sup>

UNICEF’s work is grounded in a human rights-based approach, which recognizes that accessibility and disability-inclusive efforts are fundamental for children with disabilities to fully participate and have happy and independent lives.<sup>156</sup> One of the most constant barriers that children with disabilities face is exclusion in schools, making them more likely to be absent from school or to have never attended school at all.<sup>157</sup> While this applies across all education levels, UNICEF reports that rates consistently increase during secondary school, especially for those with multiple disabilities, with 59% of children aged 15-17 years with one or more severe disabilities out of school.<sup>158</sup> Therefore, UNICEF supports inclusive education, which requires providing all children with a supportive and accommodating environment to learn the skills they need to grow and lead fulfilling lives, regardless of their physical, behavioral, neurological, and cognitive abilities.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, children with disabilities are highly vulnerable to malnutrition, disease, abandonment, and violence during crises.<sup>160</sup> As such, UNICEF also advocates for the protection of

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<sup>148</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Children with disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>149</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. 2022. p. 18.

<sup>150</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106)*. 2006.

<sup>151</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Children with disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Reducing stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities*. 2019. p. 1.

<sup>154</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022-2030*. 2022. p. 14.

<sup>155</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Children with disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Inclusive education*. N.d.

<sup>158</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. 2022. p. 71.

<sup>159</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Inclusive education*. N.d.

<sup>160</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *UNICEF in emergencies*. N.d.



children with disabilities in humanitarian emergencies, who are at risk of further discrimination during armed conflict and climate-related disasters.<sup>161</sup>

### ***International and Regional Framework***

The rights of persons with disabilities were first recognized in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948).<sup>162</sup> Article 7 of the UDHR states that all persons are safeguarded against any form of discrimination, and Article 25 outlines a child's right to a fair standard of living, including social protection and special care in the event of disability.<sup>163</sup> On 20 November 1989, the General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989), a universally instrumental document that details the rights of children and a Member States' responsibility in guaranteeing those rights.<sup>164</sup> Article 2 of the CRC affirms that children are protected from any kind of discrimination, regardless of disability, while Article 23 emphasizes that children with disabilities need special assistance, in addition to education and other opportunities, to ensure their fullest potential.<sup>165</sup> The *General Recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women no. 18* (1991) acknowledges that women with disabilities experience double discrimination, which is exclusionary treatment based on both their sex and disability.<sup>166</sup> Women and girls with disabilities can also encounter discrimination based on additional intersecting identities, such as their race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age, marital status, and refugee status, leading to limited participation in society.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, the recommendation advocates for Member States to report on special measures taken to ensure women and girls with disabilities have equal access to education and social security.<sup>168</sup>

In 2006, the General Assembly adopted resolution 61/106 (2006), formally known as the CRPD, which was the most rapidly negotiated human rights treaty and representation of the United Nations' efforts to change the perception of persons with disabilities.<sup>169</sup> Three of the eight guiding principles of the CRPD highlight the importance of non-discrimination, accessibility, and emerging capacities of children with disabilities.<sup>170</sup> Article 7 further calls on States parties to always consider the best interests of children with disabilities in all decisions and to empower children with disabilities to advocate for themselves in decision-making matters.<sup>171</sup> Also, Article 24 of the CRPD addresses the right to an education for persons with disabilities and the significance of a quality and inclusive education system.<sup>172</sup> Several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) (2015) promote the rights of children with disabilities.<sup>173</sup> For example, targets 4.5 and 4.8 of SDG 4 (quality education) focus on equal access to education for persons with disabilities and the development of disability-sensitive, inclusive educational spaces.<sup>174</sup> Target 8.5 of SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) calls for access to work and equal pay for youth and adults with disabilities, and target 10.2 of

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<sup>161</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Children with disabilities in emergencies*. N.d.

<sup>162</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. 1948.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Global norms and standards: Women and girls with disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>167</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Women and girls with disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>168</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Global norms and standards: Women and girls with disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>169</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106)*. 2006.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.



SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) promotes the participation of all in society, regardless of disability.<sup>175</sup> Finally, targets 11.2 and 11.7 of SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) promote accessible transportation systems and public spaces for persons with disabilities.<sup>176</sup>

On 20 June 2019, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2475, the “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,” which was the first resolution to ever address the human rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict.<sup>177</sup> The resolution calls on Member States to effectively take steps to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on disability during conflict, as well as guarantee persons with disabilities have equitable access to justice and humanitarian assistance during armed conflict.<sup>178</sup> One of the policies and frameworks created in recent years to ensure the protection of children with disabilities is UNICEF’s *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs)* (2020).<sup>179</sup> The CCCs are UNICEF’s key policy on supporting children affected by humanitarian emergencies and provide timely humanitarian response and advocacy guidance to its personnel, governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders.<sup>180</sup> Additionally, the United Nations implemented its *Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)* in 2022 to strengthen its commitment to making the following four core areas of responsibility disability-inclusive: senior management and strategic planning, consulting with persons with disabilities in decision-making processes, supporting disability-inclusive programming, and improving organizational culture around disability inclusivity.<sup>181</sup> Further, UNICEF’s *Strategic Plan (2022-2025)* is the first of two consecutive frameworks that added disability as one of its cross-cutting priorities in programming.<sup>182</sup> Lastly, the *Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS)* (2022-2030) is UNICEF’s other central framework that promotes a “twin-track” approach to disability inclusion and encourages coordination across sectors on innovative programming, increased data and research, and inclusive policies and legal frameworks.<sup>183</sup> This approach uses two simultaneous strategies of ensuring that UNICEF’s policies, personnel practices, and programs are disability-inclusive while implementing disability-specific initiatives to address the needs and well-being of children with disabilities.<sup>184</sup>

### **Role of the International System**

UNICEF remains dedicated to ensuring that children with disabilities can exercise their rights without stigma, discrimination, and violence.<sup>185</sup> In 2013, UNICEF’s annual *State of the World’s Children* report highlighted the importance of moving children with disabilities from exclusion to inclusion through accessible resources like inclusive education and legal protections.<sup>186</sup> As a result, UNICEF currently supports governments in creating inclusive education systems through engaging with policymakers in advocacy efforts, organizing workshops and training sessions, and helping monitor the implementation of educational initiatives.<sup>187</sup> Building upon those efforts, UNICEF published its most extensive statistical analysis of children with disabilities in its *Seen, Counted, Included* report (2021), which features both

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2475 (2019), Ground-Breaking Text on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict*. 2019.

<sup>178</sup> United Nations, Security Council. *Protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/RES/2475)*. 2019.

<sup>179</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action*. 2020.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> United Nations, Executive Office of the Secretary-General. *UN Disability Inclusion Strategy*. 2022.

<sup>182</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025: Renewed ambition towards 2030*. 2022. p. 7.

<sup>183</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022-2030*. 2022. pp. 4-10.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>185</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund USA. *How UNICEF Fights to Protect the Rights of Children with Disabilities*. 2023.

<sup>186</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *The State of the World’s Children 2013: Children with Disabilities*. 2013. pp. 75-77.

<sup>187</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Inclusive education*. N.d.





global and regional data on children with disabilities and their families.<sup>188</sup> This report emphasized that children with disabilities experience significant exclusion, with 51% more likely to perceive themselves as unhappy and 20% less likely to be hopeful of a better life compared to children without disabilities.<sup>189</sup> Thus, inclusive and accurate data is critical to addressing disability-based discrimination and the need to actively involve persons with disabilities in every aspect of the data collection process.<sup>190</sup> Following the publication of DIPAS in 2022, UNICEF also committed to establishing a Global Disability Inclusion Programmes Technical Working Group, overseen by their global lead on disability, to monitor and report on disability-inclusive initiatives.<sup>191</sup> In addition, UNICEF plans to issue a *Global Research Agenda for children with disabilities* in 2024 that addresses areas requiring further research that will shape policies and lead to funding for disability-inclusive programming by UNICEF and partners like the International Disability Alliance.<sup>192</sup>

On 23 August 2021, the CRC and CRPD adopted a “Joint Statement on the Rights of Children with Disabilities,” that addresses the elimination of discrimination, neglect, and abuse, as well as the right to inclusive education.<sup>193</sup> Specifically, the Committees expressed concern that children with disabilities continue to be overlooked due to the lack of opportunities given to advocate for themselves and participate in decisions that affect them.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, they reminded Member States that ratified the CRC and CRPD of their commitment to children with disabilities and to combat all forms of discrimination through legal, educational, cultural, political, and other measures.<sup>195</sup> The Committees also emphasized the significance of inclusive education that adapts to the individual needs and abilities of each child and does not discriminate based on disability.<sup>196</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities is responsible for annually reporting to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly about disability rights issues and recommendations for strengthening protections for persons with disabilities.<sup>197</sup> Since the creation of the mandate in 2014, the Special Rapporteur has been instrumental in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities by engaging with United Nations entities and stakeholders at the national, regional, and international levels.<sup>198</sup> For example, the Special Rapporteur has drafted or assisted with 215 correspondences addressing violations against persons with disabilities, created 16 thematic studies and two vision reports for the Human Rights Council and General Assembly, and completed 12 country visits to evaluate the rights of persons with disabilities over the past decade.<sup>199</sup> In the 2024 annual report on “Rights of persons with disabilities,” the Special Rapporteur committed to prioritizing the inclusion of persons with disabilities who are more vulnerable to discrimination, such as those with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO)

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<sup>188</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. 2021.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p. 152.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>191</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund. *UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022-2030*. 2022. p. 86.

<sup>192</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund Office of Research-Innocenti. *Research and Evidence on Children with Disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>193</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Joint Statement on the Rights of Children with Disabilities*. 2021.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>197</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Mandate: Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>198</sup> United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Rights of persons with disabilities: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (A/HRC/55/56)*. 2024. p. 5.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.



and UNICEF released a Global Report in September 2023 recommending the removal of discriminatory barriers for children with developmental disabilities, including children with intellectual disabilities.<sup>201</sup>

In December 2023, the Special Rapporteur and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict collaborated on an event to raise awareness about children with disabilities in armed conflict, who are most vulnerable to discrimination and violence during crises.<sup>202</sup> The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), a partnership between United Nations entities such as UNICEF, WHO, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and others as well as governments and organizations of persons with disabilities, is a cross-collaborative effort to promote disability inclusion globally through a joint programming approach.<sup>203</sup> One of UNPRPD's cross-cutting approaches in its *Strategic Operational Framework (2020-2025)* includes promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities through training, gender analyses, and collecting sex- and disability-disaggregated data to combat intersectional discrimination.<sup>204</sup> Gathering data on both sex and disability can help identify gaps and highlight unique challenges faced by those who experience multiple, overlapping forms of marginalization when accessing programmatic, educational, and health services.<sup>205</sup> On a regional level, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) adopted the *Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2023-2032)*, which encourages gender-responsive disability policies to address barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities in the context of sexual and reproductive health.<sup>206</sup>

### ***Empowering Children with Disabilities through Inclusive Education***

Despite international recognition of the importance of education, children with disabilities continue to be disregarded in the development of education systems and policies.<sup>207</sup> According to UNICEF, approximately 50% of children with disabilities have never attended school in their lives.<sup>208</sup> Even in school, children with disabilities face a higher risk of dropping out than their peers due to discrimination, bullying, insufficiently trained educators, and inadequate learning materials.<sup>209</sup> The intersection of sex, gender, and disability can result in different obstacles for boys and girls with disabilities.<sup>210</sup> For instance, girls with disabilities encounter even greater barriers in education, as their schooling can be further disrupted if their school lacks accessible water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities during their menstruation cycle.<sup>211</sup>

The impact of non-inclusive education extends far beyond schooling, as children with disabilities are also denied access to school-based nutrition and immunization initiatives, at higher risk of abuse and violence

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<sup>201</sup> United Nations Children's Fund et al. *Global Report on Children with Developmental Disabilities*. 2023. p. 14.

<sup>202</sup> United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Rights of persons with disabilities: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (A/HRC/55/56)*. 2024. p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *About Us*. N.d.

<sup>204</sup> United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *Strategic Operational Framework 2020-2025*. 2020. p. 19.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>206</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. *Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023-2032 (ESCAP/APDDP/2022/3/Add.1)*. 2022. p. 4.

<sup>207</sup> United Nations Children's Fund Office of Research-Innocenti. *Research and Evidence on Children with Disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>208</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022-2030*. 2022. p. 14.

<sup>209</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. 2021. p. 62.

<sup>210</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022-2030*. 2022. p. 18.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.



out of school, and more likely to be institutionalized.<sup>212</sup> As a result, they are further excluded from society and are unlikely to benefit from the advantages of education as adults, such as increased employment opportunities or social and economic stability.<sup>213</sup> Guaranteeing the right to inclusive education for children with disabilities would provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to fully exercise their human rights.<sup>214</sup> The right to inclusive education for children with disabilities is guided by Articles 2, 23, and 28 of the CRC, which all emphasize the significance of accessibility in educational environments.<sup>215</sup> Article 24 of the CRPD also outlines the right to inclusive education for persons with disabilities through reasonable accommodations, individualized support, and accessible educational materials, free from disability-based discrimination.<sup>216</sup> However, the 2020 *Global Education Monitoring Report* stated that the definition of inclusive education is included in 68% of countries' policies, with only 16 countries explicitly referencing inclusive education in their general education laws.<sup>217</sup> Amending existing laws to ensure compliance with an inclusive education approach may conflict with a country's laws promoting segregated special education for students with disabilities, which prevents a shared understanding of what inclusivity means.<sup>218</sup>

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' (UNHCHR) 2019 annual report advocates for empowering children with disabilities through inclusive education and active participation in decision-making.<sup>219</sup> The report outlines the key components of implementing inclusive education, which include establishing non-discrimination laws and policies, gender equality measures, staff training, adequate resource allocation, and strengthened data.<sup>220</sup> The High Commissioner also notes that children with disabilities in humanitarian emergencies and armed conflict are particularly vulnerable to limited access to education, as well as essential needs such as food, water, and medicine, and recommends that states implement inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies and create safe learning environments.<sup>221</sup>

### ***Ensuring the Safety of Children with Disabilities in Humanitarian Emergencies***

During humanitarian emergencies, conflicts, and natural disasters, children with disabilities are the most vulnerable and marginalized group within their communities.<sup>222</sup> During crises, they often encounter increased challenges due to significant changes in their physical environment and lack of access to accessible facilities, transportation, healthcare, education, and other social services.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, girls with disabilities and those with intellectual disabilities face greater risks of discrimination, exploitation, and sexual abuse during and in the aftermath of disasters.<sup>224</sup> UNICEF identifies that three critical components that contribute to these barriers are: the lack of data regarding children with disabilities in humanitarian emergencies, the absence of accessible aid and resources for children with disabilities and their families, and the exclusion of children with disabilities in emergency preparedness response.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. 2021. p. 62.

<sup>213</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Fact Sheet: Children with Disabilities*. 2022. p. 30.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>215</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25)*. 1989.

<sup>216</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106)*. 2006.

<sup>217</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and Education: All means all*. 2020. pp. 14, 34.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

<sup>219</sup> United Nations, Human Rights Council. *Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/40/27)*. 2019. p. 2.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 12-13.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>222</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Children with disabilities in emergencies*. N.d.

<sup>223</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Fact Sheet: Children with Disabilities*. 2022. p. 51.

<sup>224</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Children with disabilities in emergencies*. N.d.

<sup>225</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Fact Sheet: Children with Disabilities*. 2022. pp. 51-52.



In times of humanitarian emergencies, children with disabilities are directly impacted by physical injuries and psychological trauma, but their health can also be indirectly affected and lead to malnutrition and chronic conditions.<sup>226</sup> During crises, lack of access to adequate nutrition, safe drinking water, and health services presents an immediate danger to a child's well-being.<sup>227</sup> This can result in a severe form of malnutrition known as wasting, in which a child's weight is critically low, leaving their immune system susceptible to various diseases.<sup>228</sup> Children with disabilities are also disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change and natural disasters due to food and water shortages as well as water- and vector-borne illnesses.<sup>229</sup> WHO reports that nearly 50% of newborn and under-five mortality occurs in humanitarian emergencies, emphasizing the critical need for increased resources, such as nutrients and medical care, to support the survival and development of children with disabilities impacted by these crises.<sup>230</sup> UNICEF's *Humanitarian Action for Children* is an annual appeal to Member States for support in providing 94 million children affected by humanitarian crises, including 9.3 million children with disabilities, with access to food, water, sanitation, and health care.<sup>231</sup>

Additionally, the scarcity of child-friendly and accessible disaster risk reduction guidance also diminishes a child with disabilities' capacity to make informed decisions and know to evacuate in climate-related emergencies.<sup>232</sup> Article 11 of the CRPD reminds Member States of their responsibility to take necessary steps to ensure the safety of children with disabilities during humanitarian emergencies.<sup>233</sup> Section 2.4.2 of the CCCs emphasizes the need to provide children with disabilities safe access to humanitarian programs and consider them when developing emergency plans.<sup>234</sup> During its 29th session, CRPD released a statement on "Social Protection and Persons with Disabilities in Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies, in the framework of the 75th anniversary of the UDHR," that outlined recommendations to protect children with disabilities through social protection systems, accessible communication methods, assistive technology, strengthened partnerships, and training programs.<sup>235</sup> One example would be UNDP Thailand's Inclusive Tsunami Preparedness Programme which works to diminish disparities among schoolchildren with disabilities during disaster preparedness training.<sup>236</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Children with disabilities encounter exclusion throughout their lives due to societal stigma, ableism, isolation, neglect, and more.<sup>237</sup> UNICEF acknowledges that children with disabilities face complex forms of discrimination, and has developed a multi-faceted solution to addressing this issue through DIPAS.<sup>238</sup> Children with disabilities are often forgotten in the design and implementation of educational systems and

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>227</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Maternal and child nutrition in humanitarian action*. N.d.

<sup>228</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Nutrition and care for children with wasting*. N.d.

<sup>229</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Fact Sheet: Children with Disabilities*. 2022. p. 53.

<sup>230</sup> World Health Organization. *Children in humanitarian settings*. N.d.

<sup>231</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Humanitarian Action for Children 2024 Overview*. 2023.

<sup>232</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Fact Sheet: Children with Disabilities*. 2022. p. 54.

<sup>233</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (A/RES/61/106)*. 2006.

<sup>234</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action*. 2020. p. 70.

<sup>235</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Statement on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Situations of Risk and Emergencies, in the framework of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 2023.

<sup>236</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *Leaving no child behind: how UNDP is promoting equality and resilience through its inclusive tsunami preparedness programme*. 2023.

<sup>237</sup> United Nations Children's Fund Office of Research-Innocenti. *Research and Evidence on Children with Disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>238</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022-2030*. 2022.



emergency response planning and programs.<sup>239</sup> When youth with disabilities have access to an inclusive education, they can gain the skills needed to secure employment and live independently, which also leads to achieving SDG 4.<sup>240</sup> The Secretary-General also recommends Member States strengthen their efforts toward disability-inclusive humanitarian action and guarantee safe access to services and resources.<sup>241</sup>

### **Further Research**

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: What does inclusive education mean to their Member State? How can Member States create easy-to-understand communication materials and resources for children with disabilities and their families? How can the international community ensure that children with disabilities are not left behind during humanitarian crises? How can collecting multiple forms of disaggregated data promote the rights of girls with disabilities? How can States facilitate safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid to children with disabilities in need of emergency assistance?

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<sup>239</sup> United Nations Children's Fund Office of Research-Innocenti. *Research and Evidence on Children with Disabilities*. N.d.

<sup>240</sup> United Nations Children's Fund. *UNICEF Fact Sheet: Children with Disabilities*. 2022. pp. 30-32.

<sup>241</sup> United Nations, General Assembly. *Status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto: protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies and easy-to-understand communication as an accessibility resource and tool for persons with disabilities: Report of the Secretary-General*. 2023.



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