

UCIMUN 2025



UNICEF

Background Guide

By: Vanessa Van



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 33rd Annual UCIMUN Conference! My name is Vanessa Van, and I am delighted to be the Director of UNICEF this year. MUN has definitely played a significant role in my academic journey as I have been with this program since middle school. Throughout my educational journey, I have developed a passion for debate and research, exploring unfamiliar topics to deepen my understanding of current events. I have also had the privilege of chairing for multiple conferences throughout high school, as well as serving as an Assistant Director for the last UCI MUN conference, so I am thrilled to become a Director of a committee this year.

A little about me, I am currently a second-year student at UCI studying Biological Sciences. In my free time, I love going to the beach, crocheting, watching TV shows, and discovering new matcha places to try. Some of the hobbies I have pursued the longest include playing the piano and dancing, both of which I started when I was around five years old.

Our first committee topic, “Juvenile Injustice”, is highly relevant to current events, as admission rates into the juvenile justice system have been slowly increasing since the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, this means that more of them are becoming exposed to the cruel treatment in these facilities. Examples include abusive tactics, solitary confinement, and strip searches, all of which are detrimental to their development as youth. Additionally, the juvenile admission system also contains a significant amount of flaws, including disparities toward lower-income families, people of color, and the LGBTQ community.

Our second committee topic, “Social Service Inequalities for Immigrant Children” is also applicable to our world today, especially given the stark political divide that our country has regarding immigration. Children of immigrant families often suffer from the consequences of these unfair treatments, such as the lack of access to social services. As these social services should be considered natural human rights, in reality, children are being deprived of the right to food, medical services, therapy, transportation, and shelter.

I would also like to remind delegates to treat this Topic Synopsis simply as your starting point. Both of our committee’s topics are ongoing and constantly evolving so I highly encourage every single one of you to research these issues beyond the surface level.

I am so excited to see what you will accomplish during the committee and hope that through extensive research and collaboration with other delegates, we can leave our conference room with a new perspective to share with the community. Remember, I was also once in your shoes and I understand how this may be intimidating, so please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns. I’m looking forward to seeing everyone soon!

Best wishes,
Vanessa Van
Director, UNICEF 2025



Topic A: Juvenile Injustice

Introduction

With approximately 48,000 children under the age of 18 being arrested daily, it is clear that many individuals fall victim to the unfair treatment within the juvenile justice system (Prison Policy Initiative). The history of this justice system dates back to the passing of the Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1889, which granted permission for the establishment of the first juvenile court in Illinois and the United States as a whole. This act allowed the Supreme Court of Illinois to restructure the disciplinary consequences faced by juveniles under the age of 16, ensuring they would be charged in a separate court from adults.

The juvenile system was founded on the intention to rehabilitate rather than punish. It was created with the belief that children who committed crimes should be perceived as individuals who need assistance, not as criminals. Prior to the system's establishment, children were charged and punished as adults, resulting in situations where children as young as 12 years old were placed in the same prison cells as adults. People across the nation began to recognize the detrimental effect this treatment had on the development of children in prison, which caused widespread advocacy for the adoption of a separate juvenile justice system. The success of these advocacy efforts is evident today, with nearly 2,400 juvenile courts established across the United States today (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention).

However, although the intention behind the creation of the system was seemingly ideal, the juvenile court has proven to be far from flawless. Children within the juvenile system constantly face deprivation of their rights and overall inhumane treatment, stunting both their mental and physical development. As treatment varies from person to person based on factors



such as gender, sex, sexual orientation, and income, valid public concern has emerged regarding the future of the next generation.

Description

Early United Nations (UN) involvement in the juvenile justice system reforms begins with the 1985 United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, also known as “The Beijing Rules” (United Nations, 1985). The primary components of these guidelines were designed with the intention of prioritizing the best interests of the juvenile and their families, finding different methods to motivate children to pursue meaningful lives beyond the detention centers, maintaining equal and accessible opportunities, and urging member states to view the juvenile justice system as a fundamental part of their community. Since the implementation of these rules to the current day, the UN has continued its efforts to address inequities within the juvenile justice system. These efforts are particularly evident in the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), a committee dedicated to protecting children’s rights across the globe. Initiatives include collecting statistics regarding juveniles, promoting rehabilitative consequences that safeguard the childhood of young offenders, and offering other solutions rather than harsh detentions.

Financial burden on children and their families

Admission into the juvenile justice system comes at a cost, both metaphorically and literally. Families are often burdened with a wide range of fees and fines once their children are placed in a juvenile detention center, in order to cover the cost of services provided for the children. Often referred to as “child support” bills, these charges include the cost for incarceration, food, laundry, and placement services (Juvenile Law Center). Additionally, The



bills may also fluctuate to account for “youth administrative costs”, particularly if these juveniles are required to appear in court, which occurs frequently.

At first glance, these bills may seem reasonable, as children are allegedly provided with essential resources while spending time in these facilities. However, when considering the extremely high cost of incarceration, it becomes clear that significant societal economic inequities exist within the justice system. According to Senator Christopher Murphy, the state of Connecticut spends an average of \$134,000 every year to incarcerate one singular juvenile delinquent (Justice Policy). To put this into perspective, studies have shown that higher rates of youth crimes are found in places of poverty, as financial hardship may drive some children to commit crimes for survival. The discrepancy between these outrageously high costs of incarceration and the income demographics of detained juveniles highlights a system of economic injustice. Children often bear the consequences when their families cannot afford to pay the bills. Failure to meet financial obligations will result in longer imprisonment, extended incarceration, and fewer services provided. As defined by the Juvenile Law Center, the “income-based justice” inherent in the juvenile justice system unfairly keeps youth in poverty incarcerated for a longer period of time and deepens their entrenchment in the system, making it significantly harder for them to escape and reunite with their families.

Inhumane treatment in juvenile centers

When considering potential injustices within the juvenile justice system, the main concern for many is the inhumane treatment juveniles often endure. In 1889, when the first juvenile court was established, its primary goal was to shift the public’s perspective: children committing crimes were not viewed as criminals, but rather as individuals silently calling out for



help. The system aimed to rehabilitate, provide necessary services, and offer them a chance to grow into responsible young adults while supporting them through their struggles. However, when examining the treatment juveniles face in detention centers today, it appears that these centers are failing to uphold this original purpose and achieving the opposite. According to the Juvenile Law Center (JLC), some juveniles are placed into rooms that are approximately seven by ten feet in size for up to twenty-two to twenty-four hours per day. During this confinement period, these children are denied interaction with others and have no access to any of their personal belongings. Considering that juvenile detention centers are intended for minors, all of which are still in the process of growing up, being isolated for the majority of the day with little to no human interaction inevitably has detrimental effects on their mental health and development. In a study conducted by the *American Journal of Public Health*, researchers decided to test the correlation between solitary confinement and acts of self-harm. After analyzing the medical records and statistics of the New York City jail, focusing on a sample population of Latino and White juveniles who were experiencing solitary confinement, it was concluded that 53.3% of them performed an act of self-harm, including potentially fatal acts. The findings indicated a significant association between the two objectives, leading to the argument that solitary confinement causes a mental toll on minors. In addition to confinement, other examples of punishment that children face in these centers include being pepper-sprayed and subjected to mandatory strip searches.

Beyond the actual inhumane treatment conducted by guards, the living situations and circumstances of the juveniles should not go unnoticed. According to the Nebraska Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee in 2020, children staying at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center were evacuated due to the dangerous and health-threatening condition of the



center. Mold, exposed wires, water damage, and inadequate structuring of the building are a few examples of what these young children were exposed to. After being treated inhumanely, it is without a doubt that even after leaving the detention centers, the mental and physical hardships these children face can have lasting, lifelong effects.

Ineffectiveness of charging children as adults

Once again, while the juvenile courts were first established with the intention of changing the perception of youth involved in crimes to be viewed as in need of help instead of criminals, there are exceptions, particularly depending on the type of crime committed by the child. There are certain rules instilled by some states that prohibit minors under the age of 16 from being tried as adults, such as Proposition 57 in California (Gabriela Guraiib Law). Being barred from adult trials allows minors to have an opportunity to create a better life for themselves once they are released from the detention centers. In fact, a great number of juvenile cases are hidden upon request once the individual turns 21 and has completed probation.

However, in other states where propositions such as the one in California do not exist, there are cases where minors as young as 10 years old can be tried in adult courts. This often occurs when there are more grave crimes including rape and murder. Even when rules are present to prevent minors from being tried as adults, there remains a gap for children between the ages of 16 and 18 years old, where judges decide on a case-by-case basis whether to try the minor as an adult. The issue with this approach is that oftentimes, the justice system will take the race of the juvenile into consideration when making the decision. For example, in California, 88% of the juveniles who were tried as adults were people of color in 2015 (Human Impact Partners). This



bias in the system perpetuates stereotypes and further pushes youth of color down the juvenile path.

Bloc Positions

European Bloc

Since the original juvenile court system originated in the United States, much of the early practices in Europe for dealing with youth crime were based on the practices in the Chicago juvenile court in Illinois. Using the American court system as a guideline, European countries began to shift and make changes to better align their opinions and views on how delinquents should be treated and disciplined. One example of this shift is the trend of prioritizing educational and mental health services (Britannica). Additionally, some European nations have also taken action to allow juveniles over the age of 18 to still be tried in the same courts as minors (Columbia University).

North American Bloc

With the United States being the origin of the first juvenile justice court, the North American bloc has had a long history regarding its involvement in this issue. Countries in this bloc have recognized that the lack of maturity in adolescents involved in crimes should be considered when disciplining them. Many of the detention centers are rooted in the goal of promoting respect for cultural differences among youth, as well as urging them to respect societal values (Government of Canada).

African Bloc

Some countries in the Africa Bloc have based their juvenile justice system on the British model, rather than the one in the United States. Similarly to the Asian bloc, the system is also



built around traditional and cultural values. Rules have been set in place to prevent children from being tried as adults, and to uphold their wellbeing and mental health (African Union). However, similarly to the North American Bloc, flaws in the system have resulted in many children becoming incarcerated alongside adults.

Asian Bloc

A large portion of the juvenile justice system in the Asian bloc is heavily influenced by the United States, along with traditional and familial values. Asian nations highlight that disciplinary actions for juveniles reside in the responsibility of parents and schools. There are also differences found in ages of responsibility. While this bloc generally follows the United States in setting the age of responsibility at 18, some countries have also instilled the idea that responsibility should begin as early as 14 years old (Britannica).

Committee Goals

Considering the significant amount of children being incarcerated each day, it is more important than ever to start shedding light upon the inhumane treatment that juveniles face in the juvenile justice system. The deprivation of natural human rights from these children is causing life-long harmful effects, which they will carry with them even after they leave the centers, provoking the development of numerous mental health issues. This committee aims to refocus the juvenile justice system on its core values, as it is evident that many of its current actions do not align with the original intentions behind the creation of juvenile courts. We are dedicated to maintaining the best interest of all youth in the justice system, and thus, urge you to consider diversity when debating. In order for the debate to flow smoothly and for all delegates to achieve



the common goal of creating the most effective solutions possible, we would also like to emphasize the importance of prioritizing collaboration over competition.

Research Questions

1. In committee, should we work towards pushing the juvenile justice system back to its original core value of prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment? Or should the goals of the juvenile justice system be revisited and rewritten to adapt to current events?
2. How have racial stereotypes and economic inequalities contributed to many of the injustices in juvenile courts?
3. Should the rules and guidelines followed by juvenile detention centers take into account the gender of the juveniles incarcerated? In other words, should a girls' detention center be different from a boys' detention center?
4. Is there a specific region of the world that we should focus on the most to reform the justice system?
5. How can an even balance be made in the juvenile justice system so that while youth are facing more humane treatment, they are still receiving effective and humane disciplinary actions?



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Topic B: Social Service Inequalities for Immigrant Children

Introduction

Statistics from the past couple of years have shown approximately 46 million immigrants in the United States today, making up about 15% of the entire population (Migration Policy Institute). Comparing this percentage to the 10 million immigrants recorded in the 1970s, it is apparent that immigration has and will continue to experience rapid growth. The history of immigration in the United States underwent a significant change in 1965 with the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Prior to this act, immigration to the country was limited by the previous Immigration Act of 1924, which imposed quotas that aimed at limiting immigrants stemming from “Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Southern and Eastern Europe” (Migration Policy Institute). Priority was given to Individuals coming from Western and Northern Europe. The 1965 act abolished these discriminatory quotas by introducing a preference system that prioritized highly skillful individuals and those with family relationships to U.S. residents, granting them a higher chance of admission. . Johnson believed that this reform would benefit the country by attracting “those who can contribute most to this country - to its growth, to its strength, to its spirit” (LBJ Presidential Library).

With the increase of immigrants in the country, it is unsurprising that there have been changes in the population of immigrant children. The population of immigrant children has starkly increased since 1990, growing from 29 million to approximately 40.9 million in 2020 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). Despite the rising number of immigrant children populating the country, there has been a lack of care and action taken to accommodate them.



At face value, many people would consider the right to access high-quality education and transportation to be basic needs for children who are in their early developmental stages. However, these are examples of resources that immigrant children often struggle to receive daily. Another example is healthcare and counseling, which are frequently limited to children whose families have Medicaid--a benefit that can take a long time to obtain during the immigration process. This lack of social services, along with the oppression that they face, poses a significant threat to their ability to develop mentally and physically.

While about 5.9% of immigrant adults struggle with psychological distress, an alarming 10.1% of immigrant children are constantly faced with feelings of being anxious or depressed (Think Global Health). In response to these challenges, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), with the mission that all children should be treated equally regardless of their origin, has taken action to combat the inequality that immigrant children face by providing humanitarian aid in refugee camps (UNICEF). More importantly, these individuals are children first, before being identified as immigrants. With this in consideration, it is vital to protect their upbringing to ensure a brighter future for the next generation, which will make up a large portion of our population.

Description

In relation to recent global events, many children along with their families have fled their home countries in an attempt to seek a better life. Whether they are children in Gaza or Ukraine, these migrant children, though separated by geographical differences, are united by shared struggles that UNICEF recognizes as a threat to their futures. Guided by the ideology that "[w]hether children on the move are migrants, refugees or internally displaced, they are all children first" (UNICEF), the organization has placed its efforts on providing humanitarian aid to



protect the well-being and safety of these youth. An example of this aid is the enforcement of Blue Dot centers, where immigrants can receive basic needs such as water and hygiene products, as well as education, health, and mental health services. Another example is the implementation of UNICEF Child-Friendly Spaces in Ukraine, where children are offered a safe environment to play and rest.

Deprivation of Important Benefit Programs

Every year, millions of Americans depend on government assistance and aid in the form of benefit programs to fund and meet their basic needs. In April 2023, approximately 41.9 million individuals received aid through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly recognized and referred to as food stamps (Pew Research Center). This program is designed to help individuals, particularly families in need of economic assistance to afford and purchase groceries. However, although many immigrant families fit the criteria for such assistance, not all of them receive the benefits they are otherwise eligible for. Even when children of unauthorized immigrant parents are U.S. citizens, they may still be barred from receiving the benefits that their counterparts receive. Other examples similar to SNAP from which immigrant children are often excluded include the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) (Urban Institute). Since the amount of aid provided by these programs is based upon the number of eligible and authorized citizens in their household, children of unauthorized immigrant parents often receive reduced benefits. As a result, immigrant children along with their families are unfairly provided with less aid than they should be receiving.



Another obstacle limiting the benefit programs that children receive is the deportation of their parents. The relocation of their parents results in instability regarding their guardianship and housing, which affects their eligibility to meet the requirements for the programs. In addition, when families are unjustly separated due to reasons such as deportation, the unofficial guardian with whom immigrant children stay may not be eligible to apply for the child's benefits because their guardianship is not legally recognized. Yet, the issue extends beyond scenarios involving children of deported parents. According to the Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, many adult immigrants reported choosing not to enroll in benefit programs for which they are eligible, despite being aware of the available assistance (Urban Institute). This reluctance is often rooted in fear of having their green card application denied due to the public charge rule. The public charge rule suggests that immigrants may be denied citizenship if they are perceived to rely heavily on government financial aid. With this fear deterring immigrants back from applying to these programs, these individuals and their families continue to face financial struggles, significantly hindering their quality of life.

Inaccessibility of Counseling Services

Among the heart-wrenching cries at the border is the voice of a six-year-old Salvadoran child who had just been separated from her mother by Border Patrol. She cries and pleads to the people around her to call her aunt, in hopes of being able to reunite with a family member. Meanwhile, Border Patrol agents were reportedly mocking the innocent children's cries for their mother and father. One agent even remarked about "missing a conductor" for the "orchestra" of cries that they were hearing (ProPublica). This example is just one of thousands of inhumane acts and instances of cruel treatment that immigrant adults and children endure as they attempt to



cross the border in search of a brighter future. Unfortunately, experiencing such trauma at an early age does not come without consequences as immigrant children and children of immigrants often deal with mental and psychological struggles later in life.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, immigrant children are more likely to “develop symptoms of anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress”, whether it may be during the “traumatic separations during the process of migration”, or even long afterward (American Academy of Pediatrics). These mental struggles may also arise as children witness and experience the financial burdens that their families are undergoing, along with the pressures imposed upon them by their parents to flourish in their new home for which their families sacrificed everything. Despite being more vulnerable than their white counterparts, many immigrant children lack access to mental health services. This lack of services is due to factors such as the unavailability of affordable resources near their housing situations and linguistic and cultural barriers (Urban Institute). Additionally, the deprivation of major benefit programs contributes to the inaccessibility of counseling services. For instance, in some cases within Los Angeles, counseling services cannot be given without Medicaid. Consequently, without access to these essential services, children are left to deal with mental struggles alone, which affects their ability to perform well in both academic and personal aspects of their lives.

Obstacles children face in the education system

Many selfless immigrant parents are driven by a similar aspiration of seeking better educational and occupational opportunities for their family when leaving their home country behind. However, in the process, they often sacrifice their own education. Statistics have shown that immigrant parents of young children are about four times more likely to lack a high school



diploma compared to native-born parents. (Migration Policy Institute). However, when looking at how much parental support affects the performance of students, it is apparent that the education that immigrant parents sacrificed also affects the education that their children receive.

One example of how children are affected is the language barrier within the education system. Many schools lack adequate interpreters to facilitate effective communication between parents and school staff. This language barrier often prevents parents from fully understanding conversations with school counselors and teachers, making it difficult for them to stay informed about their child's academic progress. The language barrier issue became more heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic when remote learning took place. Parents who already struggled to communicate face-to-face encountered even greater challenges trying to navigate digital communication with schools. Another obstacle that immigrant children face in their educational journey is, including the potential presence of xenophobia in their communities. Xenophobia can significantly affect the quality of education children receive, as they may become vulnerable to bullying from their peers, or, in some cases, discriminatory behavior from instructors. Moreover, since immigrant families are more likely to live in impoverished areas and face financial struggles due to the lack of governmental aid, their children become more likely to be enrolled in underfunded, lower-quality schools (Giving Compass). Without meaningful efforts to improve the education system and address these barriers, immigrant children are unfairly disadvantaged, limiting their ability to achieve the better life their parents envisioned. **Bloc Positions**

European Bloc

Unlike some countries, European nations do not grant automatic citizenship to individuals born on their national territory (The Guardian). As a result, even if a child of



undocumented parents were born on European soil they are still treated similarly to their peers who were born outside of Europe. In other words, they face the same unjust and inhuman treatment. Several unauthorized immigrant children are treated as extensions of their parents, perceived as “luggages”, and are dehumanized by EU migration policies. However, there have been efforts to address and replace the discriminatory treatment faced by these children. Initiatives such as the Child Rights Strategy and the Migration and Asylum Pact. all children are treated equally, regardless of their citizenship status (The Guardian).

North American Bloc

In North America, where immigration rates have continuously increased over the past few decades, immigrants now make up a significant portion of the population. However, many welfare programs in North American nations failed to include adequate support for immigrant families, particularly regarding financial aid for basic necessities such as food. Nevertheless, some social service workers in this region have begun adopting goals to promote inclusivity and diversity in the populations they help and serve (Sage Journals).

African Bloc

African immigrants moving to nations such as the United States often face harsher conditions compared to other immigrant groups. These unfair treatments are largely driven by anti-Black racism, which has led to higher rates of citizenship denial. Discrimination against immigrants from this bloc has deep historical roots, dating back to policies like the Emergency Quota Act of 1921. Under this act, only a few thousand African immigrants were permitted entry into the United States, compared to the 50,000 immigrants coming from Europe (Young Center).

Asian Bloc



Many Asian immigrants, after leaving their home country behind, are offered job opportunities that pose significant threats and risks to their health. These jobs often require them to work in harsh conditions while struggling to earn enough to support their families (National Library of Medicine). However, it is not only immigrant adults who may be subjected to dangerous work environments, as child immigrants may also be forced to participate in child labor.

Committee Goals

Given that we live in a country where immigration is steadily increasing and now constitutes a large portion of our population, it is crucial to address the social service injustices and inequalities faced by our immigrant communities. The lack of access to quality education, proper healthcare and counseling services, alongside the inadequate funding for their basic needs will inevitably hinder the quality of life for immigrant children.

During the committee, I encouraged delegates to be driven by the same ideology that UNICEF has used in regard to immigrant children: “[w]hether children on the move are migrants, refugees or internally displaced, they are all children first”. Furthermore, because immigration is such a prevalent issue, this may be a sensitive topic for many of our delegates. Whether immigration resonates with you personally, as someone who knows an immigrant, is a child of immigrant parents, or is an immigrant yourself, it is vital that we maintain respect for one another. As we work toward finding the best solutions to combat these social service injustices for immigrant children, we would like to emphasize the importance of being respectful, open-minded, and working collaboratively with one another.



Research Questions

1. How have immigrant children with different racial backgrounds experienced disparities in social service injustices? In other words, does the racial background of an immigrant child change how social service treats them?
2. In committee, should we focus more on increasing the quantity or quality of social services accessible to immigrant children?
3. How can immigrant children and their families be encouraged to apply for major benefit programs that they are eligible for, especially when there is a fear that receiving aid may jeopardize their citizenship application?
4. Should providing a proper education for immigrant parents also be considered when working to improve the quality of education their children receive?
5. Is there a way to overcome legislative barriers that prevent families from accessing appropriate healthcare and basic necessities?



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