

BILSEMMUN'26

SOCHUM

Study Guide

Under Secretary General

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BILSEMMUN'26 SOCHUM STUDY GUIDE

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1. Letter from the Secretary-General

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pride and genuine excitement that I welcome you to BILSEM-MUN 2026. As Secretary-General, I have the honour of opening the doors of this conference to each of you whether you are stepping into a committee room for the very first time or returning as a seasoned diplomat.

Model United Nations is far more than a simulation. It is a space where ideas are tested, where the courage to speak meets the discipline to listen, and where young people discover that the world's hardest problems are rarely solved by a single voice. Over these days you will negotiate, you will disagree, you will compromise, and I hope you will surprise yourselves with what you are capable of.

This study guide is your starting point, not your finish line. Read it closely, question it, and then go further: study your country's position, understand the perspectives you will meet across the table, and arrive ready not merely to defend an argument but to build something with the people around you. The most memorable moments in any committee come from delegates who prepared deeply and then dared to think on their feet.

To our committee directors and the entire BILSEM-MUN team, thank you for the countless hours that make a conference like this possible. And to you, our delegates: this conference is yours. Fill it with sharp debate, bold ideas, and the kind of diplomacy that reminds us why we gather here in the first place.

I look forward to meeting you all and to the gavel that begins it all.

Warm regards,

Emir Mücteba Özsiğınan

Secretary-General, BILSEM-MUN 2026

2. Letter from the Under Secretary-General

Hello, my name is Melody, it is my distinct honor to welcome you to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee for this session on Addressing Child Labor and the Denial of Children's Rights to Education and Protection. This agenda invites you to engage with one of the most urgent human rights challenges facing the international community today. Millions of children around the world continue to be denied the safety, education, and protection to which they are entitled, making this issue both deeply important and highly relevant to the work of SOCHUM.

As delegates, you will be asked to consider not only the immediate realities of child labor, but also the wider conditions that allow it to persist, including poverty, conflict, displacement, weak institutions, and lack of access to quality education. This topic calls for thoughtful discussion, careful research, and a genuine commitment to understanding the diverse challenges faced by children across different regions of the world. I encourage each of you to approach this committee with both seriousness and empathy, and to work toward solutions that are practical, cooperative, and grounded in the principles of human dignity and international responsibility.

I am confident that this committee will demonstrate professionalism, respect, and meaningful engagement throughout our sessions. I look forward to hearing your ideas and seeing the depth of your preparation.

And for my final words, I would like to thank our dear academic assistant Duru BIYIKLIOĞLU she's amazing and she wrote most of the study guide so much thanks and gratitude to her. And a special note from her to you dear delegates!

Greetings dear delegates, I am Duru Bıyıklıođlu as my pookie USG Melody mentioned upwards. I will serve as your academic assistant in this simulation of SOCHUM. As we are recreating a general assembly committee, we tried to form this study guide as comprehensive and as easily understandable as we can. I cannot wait to meet you all. I hope we will have a great time in the following 3 days. Last but not least, thanks a million times to my dear USG Melody for being such a sweet person.

And finally wish you all the best in your preparation and in the sessions ahead. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email:

zafermelody@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Melody Zafer

3. Introduction to the Committee: SOCHUM

SOCHUM is the third Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations. The abbreviation stands for "Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee". Discussions on questions about the advancement of women, the protection of children, indigenous issues, the treatment of refugees, the promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of

racism and racial discrimination, and the right to self-determination are being conducted. The committee also addresses important social development questions such as issues related to youth, family, ageing, persons with disabilities, crime prevention, criminal justice, and international drug control. In this simulation of SOCHUM, the delegates are going to discuss the agenda item "Addressing Child Labor and the Denial of Children's Rights Access to Education and Protection".

4. Introduction to the Agenda Item: *Addressing Child Labor and the Denial of Children's Rights Access to Education and Protection*

To commence with, child labor means "the type of work that deprives children from their childhood, education and protection while making them bear enormous psychological burden". It refers to the work that;

- is mentally, physically, socially and deteriorating for children,
- interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave the school prematurely, or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

Being born with equal rights, every child has the right to receive education, be protected and live their childhood. However, living in the 21st century, child labor unfortunately still remains to be a crucial topic to be handled thoroughly. The latest global estimates declare that 138 million children around the world are engaged in child labor, with over a third of them (54 million) working in hazardous conditions in agriculture, mining, domestic labor, and other sectors. There are a variety of root causes that compel children to work in such severe conditions. Below the 5th part of this study guide ("Root Causes of Child Labor"), the root causes are elucidated in detail.

Children who work in severe labor are automatically deprived of their educational rights as they work in the school hours instead of going to the school with their peers and receive education. This situation creates an environment of inequality between minors whilst impacting children's cognitional and personal growth adversely. In addition to that, people under 18 are considered children nearly all over the globe, which means that they should be protected by their parents or legal guardian both in mental, financial, psychological and physical terms. On the contrary, as children in grueling work fields are deprived of their right of protection, being subjected to several hardships at an early age.

5. Historical Background of Child Labor and Past Conventions

Child labor has existed throughout human history and was once considered a normal part of childhood in many societies. For centuries, children contributed to family economies by assisting with agricultural work, household tasks, and traditional crafts. In pre-industrial societies, such work was generally conducted under family supervision and was often viewed as a means of teaching practical skills necessary for adulthood. However, the nature and scale of child labor changed dramatically with industrialization.

The rise of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries marked a turning point in the history of child labor. As factories expanded across Europe (particularly in the United Kingdom) and North America, children became a major source of cheap labor. Employers often preferred hiring children because they could be paid lower wages, were easier to control, and could perform tasks in confined spaces within factories and mines.

Growing public concern over the exploitation of children led to the emergence of labor reform movements during the 19th century. Social activists, journalists, and reformers documented the harsh realities faced by working children, prompting governments to introduce legislation aimed at regulating child employment. The United Kingdom was among the first countries to enact such laws, including the Factory Acts, which gradually restricted working hours and established minimum age requirements for employment.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, compulsory education laws became increasingly common. Governments recognized that universal education was essential for economic development and social progress. As school attendance became mandatory in many countries, child labor rates declined significantly in industrialized nations. However, the problem remained widespread in many colonial territories and developing regions, where poverty and limited educational opportunities continued to drive child labor.

The international community began addressing child labor as a global issue following the establishment of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919. One of the organization's primary objectives was the protection of workers, including children, through the creation of international labor standards. Throughout the 20th century, the ILO adopted numerous conventions establishing minimum employment ages and prohibiting hazardous work for children.

A major milestone occurred in 1989 with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which recognized children's right to protection from economic exploitation and guaranteed their right to education. The Convention became the most widely

ratified human rights treaty in history and provided a comprehensive framework for safeguarding children's welfare.

Further progress was achieved through ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment and ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, adopted in 1973 and 1999 respectively. Convention No. 182 specifically targeted slavery, trafficking, forced labor, the use of children in armed conflict, and other dangerous forms of exploitation. These instruments strengthened international efforts to eliminate child labor and protect vulnerable children worldwide.

Despite substantial improvements over the past century, child labor remains a significant global challenge. Economic inequality, armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, lack of educational access, and persistent poverty continue to force millions of children into labor. Today, child labor is recognized not merely as an economic issue but as a violation of fundamental human rights that directly impacts children's health, development, education, and future opportunities.

6. Root Causes of Child Labor

6.1 Financial Strains and Poverty

Families living in poverty often struggle to meet basic needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and education. Under these circumstances, children may be viewed as economic contributors whose labor is necessary for household survival. Financial pressures can stem from various sources, including unemployment, low wages, economic instability, debt, rising living costs, and inadequate social protection systems. In many low-income communities, children work in agriculture, manufacturing, domestic service, street vending, and other informal sectors to supplement household income. Poverty not only encourages child labor but also limits access to educational opportunities. Even when primary education is officially free, indirect expenses such as uniforms, transportation, school supplies, and examination fees can create barriers for low-income families. Consequently, many parents face difficult decisions between investing in their children's education and meeting immediate economic needs.

6.2 Armed Conflicts and Humanitarian Crises

Armed conflicts and wars are among the most devastating drivers of child labor. Conflict situations often destroy schools, disrupt educational systems, weaken state institutions, and undermine economic stability. As a result, children living in conflict-affected regions are at a heightened risk of exploitation and forced labor. Displacement caused by war frequently leaves families without stable sources of income or access to basic services. Refugee and internally displaced children often face significant barriers to education, making them more susceptible to entering the labor market. In many cases, children are compelled to work in informal sectors to support their families' survival. Beyond economic exploitation, armed conflicts may expose children to some of the worst forms of child labor, including forced recruitment by armed groups, trafficking, and hazardous work. Children may be used as combatants, messengers, porters, or in other support roles that place them in dangerous situations.

6.3 Lack of Access to Quality Education

The relationship between child labor and education is cyclical. Child labor limits educational attainment, while limited educational opportunities increase the likelihood of child labor. Children who leave school prematurely often remain trapped in low-skilled and low-paying employment throughout adulthood, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty. Education is widely recognized as one of the most effective tools for preventing child labor. In many parts of the world, children face barriers such as insufficient school infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, long travel distances to schools, and hidden educational costs. When education is inaccessible or perceived as low in quality, families may question the value of keeping children in school. As a result, children may enter the workforce at an early age, particularly when immediate economic benefits appear more tangible than future educational outcomes. Even when children are enrolled in school, poor educational conditions can contribute to absenteeism and eventual dropout.

6.4 Climate Shocks and Agricultural Disruption

Agriculture remains the largest sector employing child labor globally, particularly in developing countries. Many rural households depend heavily on agricultural production for both income and food security. However, agricultural livelihoods are increasingly threatened by climate change and environmental degradation. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, floods, desertification, and extreme weather events can significantly reduce crop yields and

household incomes. When agricultural shocks occur, families often face severe economic hardship and may resort to child labor as a coping mechanism. Children may be withdrawn from school to assist with farming activities, livestock management, or income-generating work. Furthermore, climate change can exacerbate food insecurity, forcing households to prioritize immediate survival over long-term investments in education.

7. Correlation Between Child Labor and Children's Access to Education

Child labor and children's access to education are deeply and significantly interconnected. Education is recognized as a fundamental human right under international law; however, millions of children are still deprived of quality schooling due to economic, social, and political circumstances that force them into labor. The lack of educational opportunities often increases the likelihood of child labor, while child labor itself creates barriers to educational attainment, forming a cycle that is difficult to break.

Children engaged in labor frequently face challenges in attending school regularly. Long working hours, physically demanding conditions, and the need to contribute to household income often prevent them from enrolling in school or completing their education. Even when working children are able to attend classes, exhaustion and irregular attendance can negatively affect their academic performance, leading to higher dropout rates. As a result, many child laborers receive only limited education, reducing their future employment prospects and increasing the risk that they will remain trapped in poverty.

At the same time, inadequate access to education can be a major driver of child labor. In many developing regions, schools may be inaccessible due to distance, insufficient infrastructure, a lack of qualified teachers, or associated costs such as transportation, uniforms, and learning materials. Families facing financial hardship may perceive education as an unaffordable investment and instead rely on their children's labor to supplement household income. In such circumstances, child labor becomes a coping mechanism for economic survival rather than a voluntary choice.

The impact of child labor on education extends beyond individual children and affects broader societal development. A population with lower educational attainment often experiences reduced economic productivity, slower social progress, and limited opportunities for innovation. Conversely, increasing access to quality education has been proven to reduce

child labor rates by equipping children with skills and knowledge that improve their long-term prospects. Educational programs, conditional cash transfer schemes, school meal initiatives, and scholarship opportunities have demonstrated success in encouraging school attendance and reducing child labor in various countries.

8. Regional Studies

8.1 Africa

Africa experiences the highest prevalence of child labor globally. Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa face widespread poverty, rapid population growth, limited educational infrastructure, and recurring humanitarian crises. As a result, millions of children are involved in economic activities, particularly in agriculture, which accounts for the majority of child labor cases in the region.

Children commonly work on family farms, plantations, and livestock operations, producing crops such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, and tea. In some areas, children are also employed in artisanal mining, domestic work, and informal urban economies. Armed conflicts, political instability, climate-related disasters, and displacement further exacerbate the problem by disrupting educational systems and household livelihoods.

Despite these challenges, many African governments have strengthened legal frameworks and collaborated with international organizations to improve school enrollment and child protection systems. Nevertheless, enforcement remains difficult due to limited institutional capacity and economic dependence on informal labor.

8.2 Asia

Asia contains the largest absolute number of child laborers due to its large population. Child labor is particularly prevalent in parts of South Asia and Southeast Asia, where poverty, inequality, and gaps in educational access continue to affect millions of families.

Children in Asia are frequently employed in agriculture, textile production, manufacturing, construction, fishing industries, and domestic work. In some regions, children contribute to family-owned businesses or work in informal sectors that are difficult for governments to regulate. Migrant populations and vulnerable communities are often disproportionately affected.

Significant progress has been achieved in recent decades. Countries such as China, Vietnam, and Thailand have witnessed substantial reductions in child labor through economic growth, educational investments, and labor law reforms. However, challenges persist in countries facing economic hardship, natural disasters, or political instability. The COVID-19 pandemic also increased the risk of child labor by placing additional financial pressure on households across the region.

8.3 South America

South America has experienced notable improvements in combating child labor, yet it remains a concern in several countries. Poverty, rural inequality, and economic instability continue to push some children into work, particularly in agricultural and informal sectors.

Many child laborers in South America work in farming, livestock production, street vending, mining, and domestic services. Indigenous and rural communities often face greater risks due to limited access to quality education and public services. In certain areas, children are involved in hazardous activities such as mining operations and the harvesting of agricultural products.

Governments throughout the region have implemented social protection programs, conditional cash transfer initiatives, and educational support policies that have significantly reduced child labor rates. Countries such as Brazil and Chile have been recognized for successful efforts to increase school attendance and strengthen child welfare systems. Nevertheless, economic crises and inflation periodically threaten these gains and can increase household reliance on child labor.

8.4 North America

Compared to many other regions, North America reports relatively low levels of child labor. Strong legal protections, compulsory education systems, and effective labor inspection mechanisms have contributed to reducing exploitative child labor practices.

However, child labor has not been completely eliminated. In both the United States and parts of Mexico, concerns remain regarding children working in agriculture, family businesses, and certain informal sectors. Migrant children and undocumented minors may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to legal and economic insecurity.

Recent discussions in North America have focused on strengthening labor inspections, protecting migrant children, and ensuring that young workers are not exposed to hazardous conditions. While the scale of the problem is smaller than in many developing regions, policymakers continue to monitor labor practices to prevent exploitation and ensure compliance with international standards.

8.5 Europe

Europe generally maintains some of the lowest rates of child labor in the world due to comprehensive labor regulations, high school enrollment rates, and strong social welfare systems. Most European countries have strict laws governing the minimum working age and the conditions under which adolescents may engage in part-time employment.

Nevertheless, child labor concerns still exist in certain contexts. Vulnerable groups, including migrant children, refugees, and members of marginalized communities, may face greater risks of exploitation. Informal labor, seasonal agricultural work, and criminal exploitation remain areas of concern for authorities.

The arrival of refugee populations from conflict-affected regions has highlighted the need for stronger child protection mechanisms. European institutions and national governments continue to emphasize inclusive education, social integration, and labor law enforcement as key strategies for preventing child labor and safeguarding children's rights.

8.6 Oceania

Oceania presents a mixed picture regarding child labor. Developed countries such as Australia and New Zealand maintain strong legal protections and high educational participation rates, resulting in relatively low levels of child labor. Young people may engage in part-time work, but such employment is generally regulated and designed to complement educational activities.

In contrast, several Pacific Island nations face challenges related to poverty, geographic isolation, limited educational infrastructure, and vulnerability to climate change. In some communities, children contribute to family-based agriculture, fishing, and informal economic activities. While these activities are often culturally embedded and not always classified as exploitative labor, they can sometimes interfere with schooling and child development.

Climate-related disasters and economic vulnerability pose additional risks to children throughout the Pacific region. International organizations and regional governments have increasingly focused on improving educational access, strengthening child protection systems, and enhancing resilience to environmental challenges.

9. The Role of Governments and NGO's

Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are among the most important actors in the global effort to eliminate child labor and protect children's rights. Governments are responsible for establishing legal frameworks that set minimum working ages, prohibit hazardous labor, and guarantee access to education in accordance with international conventions. They also play a key role in funding schools, training teachers, improving educational infrastructure, conducting labor inspections, and enforcing penalties against employers who exploit children. Additionally, governments can reduce the economic pressures that drive child labor by implementing social protection measures such as cash transfer programs, healthcare services, food assistance, and financial support for low-income families.

NGOs complement governmental efforts by working directly with vulnerable communities and providing services that may not be easily accessible through public institutions. Many NGOs operate educational initiatives, after-school programs, literacy campaigns, and scholarship schemes that help children remain in or return to school. They also monitor human rights violations, document cases of exploitation, provide legal assistance to affected children, and offer psychological and social support to victims of abuse. Beyond direct intervention, NGOs contribute to research, data collection, and public awareness campaigns that highlight the long-term consequences of child labor on children's development, health, and future opportunities.

11. Questions to be Answered

1. What are the primary causes of child labor in different regions of the world?
2. How does child labor affect children's access to education and overall development?

3. What role does poverty play in perpetuating child labor?
4. How do armed conflicts and humanitarian crises contribute to the increase of child labor?
5. What are the most common forms of child labor, and which sectors employ the largest number of child laborers?
6. How effective have international agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 been in combating child labor?
7. What barriers prevent children from accessing quality education in vulnerable communities?
8. How can governments strengthen the enforcement of child labor laws and child protection mechanisms?
9. What measures can be taken to support families economically and reduce their reliance on child labor?
10. How can educational systems be improved to encourage school attendance and reduce dropout rates?
11. What role should NGOs, civil society organizations, and local communities play in addressing child labor?

12. How does climate change and environmental disruption increase the risk of child labor, particularly in agricultural sectors?
13. What challenges do migrant, refugee, and displaced children face regarding labor exploitation and access to education?
14. How can international cooperation and partnerships strengthen global efforts to eliminate child labor?
15. What innovative and sustainable solutions can Member States implement to ensure the protection of children's rights while addressing the root causes of child labor?

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