

General Assembly Topic 1

Access to Higher Education

Higher education, defined as “education provided by universities, colleges, and other institutions that award academic degrees” following the end of secondary education (high school), helps improve the quality of life of many individuals.¹ Providing economic, physical, and social benefits, higher education is a pathway to better lives for many people.² For example, US college graduates made an average of 56% more than high school graduates in 2015;³ in addition, as the Postsecondary Education Opportunity Research Letter explains, the “lifetime income of families headed by individuals with a bachelor's degree will be about \$1.6 million more than the incomes of families headed by those with a high school diploma.”¹ College graduates are also more likely to live longer than those who did not attend college and are more likely to be more environmentally conscientious, “tolerant of diverse groups,” and catalysts for world peace.²

However, access to higher education can be hard to attain. As a 2017 report by UNESCO found, there is a large opportunity gap in higher education, with minorities, women, and poor populations at a disadvantage in particular. Discrimination against minorities and women in higher education is especially acute in developing countries, though it does also exist in developed countries. The education and opportunity gaps between the wealthy and the poor are growing, with approximately “20% of the world’s wealthiest students attending college for more than four years, compared to only 1% of the world’s poorest students.”⁴ In developed countries, there is a large pay gap between those with higher education and those who are not as educated - though “education and earnings are statistically linked in every known country,”⁵ which makes it very difficult for people who do not have access to higher education to rise out of poverty. In many developed countries, there are also more university graduates than there are jobs on the market for them, which forces many to take up temporary jobs outside of their fields (often service work).

Proponents of increasing access to higher education point to the benefits education has on a person’s economic prosperity, growth as a thinker and learner, and social success. While higher education may not seem to be much of an advantage during a recession, research shows that the higher educated are actually better off during a recession than those who do not have higher education.⁶ Opponents to increasing access argue that it is too costly and that there are not as many benefits to higher education as there may seem. For example, some have pointed out that about one in four college graduates in the US drop out of college or university before completing their degrees,³ leaving them with a hefty debt and a more difficult career path.⁵

Higher education seems to be the way of the future - the number of students receiving a higher education even in developing countries is on the rise, and many believe that our world can only improve by increasing the education level of its populations.⁴ As MUN representatives, think about the following questions: where does your country stand on providing access to higher education? Does your country attempt to provide equal access to higher education to all minorities and classes? If so, how? Is there a good way to approach the rising costs of higher education? Are there ways to diversify your higher educational experiences? Should your country (developed or developing) take any steps to facilitate the success of higher education institutions? What would those steps look like?

¹ www.crosswalk.com/family/homeschool/why-is-higher-education-important-1367463.html

² www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/201104/5-ways-higher-education-transforms-lives

³ www.usatoday.com/story/money/2017/01/12/pay-gap-between-college-grads-and-everyone-else-record/96493348/

⁴ www.insightintodiversity.com/report-reveals-global-disparities-in-higher-education-access-based-on-income-gender-and-ethnicity/

⁵ www.timeshighereducation.com/features/higher-education-what-it-good

⁶ www.cornerstone.edu/blogs/lifelong-learning-matters/post/do-college-grads-really-earn-more-than-high-school-grads

General Assembly Topic 2

The Global Prison Crisis

Despite efforts taken on the local and global level to reduce and reform prisons, the worldwide incarceration of over 10 million persons has continued to grow. Even with incarcerated persons making up a considerable part of the population, inmates and ex-convicts are continually forgotten and disregarded in society. BBC reports show that major countries like the US, China, Russia, Mexico, and England are all among the highest incarcerating countries in the world. The more laws in existence the more likely one is to break the law¹. This has forced many countries to deal with the exponential growth of prisoners as well as the overwhelming challenge associated with mass incarceration. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that 114 national prisons operated with an occupancy level of or over 100%². This issue poses a major burden on state governments to simply have enough space for all these prisoners to exist, which has led to the inevitable neglect of proper treatment or suitable living conditions.

The lack of organization and purpose on the global stage has caused a general lack of interest or care for our prison systems or the prisoners inside of them. In 2015 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime created a comprehensive reform bill focused on a multistep plan to attack this growing issue. It included Nelson Mandela's *Standard Minimum for the Treatment of Prisoners* which outlined the prisoners basic rights to water, food, and a clean place to live. However, this bill lacks proper implications for the failure to uphold these guidelines. This voluntary aid does not actually help prisoners being mistreated in the worst countries because of the general disregard for inmates or their needs. This bill also does not address a few major issues in prison systems today, such as the widespread use of solitary confinement and use of death sentences. Penal Reform International argues that when inmates are taken into solitary confinement they are completely cut off from the other prisoners and any visitors which are both important parts of their rehabilitation.

Medical studies have found that this solitude can cause major mental and physical symptoms manifesting in 'isolation syndrome'³ symptoms of which include anxiety, depression, anger, cognitive disturbances, perceptual distortions, paranoia, psychosis, self-harm and suicide. Prolonged isolation can destroy a person's personality and their mental health and its effects may last long after the end of the period of segregation, destroying all hope of a successful reintegration or rehabilitation after the sentence is served. Solitary confinement also increases the risk of torture and ill-treatment which usually go unchecked because of how isolated the inmates are kept.

What does the prison system in your country look like? Should countries be held accountable for violations in the current bill? If so, what would the repercussions to the violations be? Should solitary confinement be allowed? If so, should any regulations be placed to keep prisoners safe?

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/06/prisons/html/nn2page1.stm>

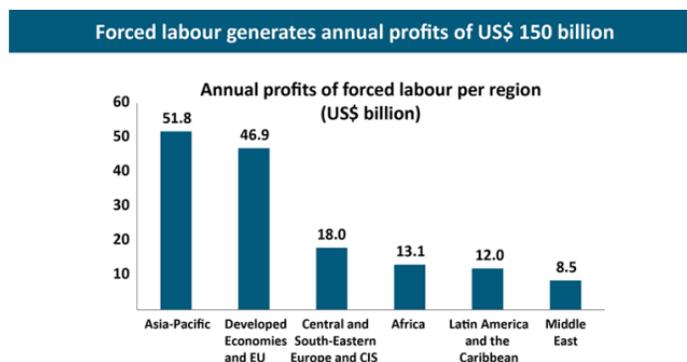
² https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/UNODC_Strategy_on_Addressing_the_Global_Prison_Crisis.pdf

³ <https://www.penalreform.org/priorities/prison-conditions/key-facts/solitary-confinement/>

General Assembly Topic 3

Violation of labor laws/ Fair labor

One of the core goals of the United Nations is to protect human rights. Wherever and whenever human rights are being infringed upon, the UN has a responsibility to take action¹ Forced labor and child labor are common practices in many countries today, and the UN is charged to step in on the Human rights issue. According to the International Labor Organization, an estimated 40.3 million people are in what is considered “modern slavery,” and one in every four of these people is a child. Others are migrant workers who come from other countries to work and send remittances to their families. In Qatar, for example, migrant workers are forced to work under a sponsor. There are numerous reports of wages being delayed, workers not being paid at all, and workers who are put in dangerous work environments. If the migrant workers want to return home, they must get approval of their sponsor. The approval never comes. Additionally, as is the wont of the Chinese, Thai, and many other fishing industries, workers are underpaid and placed in hazardous work environments.² Last year (2017), in ILO Convention No. 188, new labor standards were set for fisheries, yet since then, there is still a large amount of workers who are left unpaid and overworked. The millions of workers who are in the fishing industry are just a part of the whole when it comes to forced labor.³⁴ In East Asia, textile companies are culpable for thousands of abused workers. The abysmal conditions in textile sweatshops create inhumane workplaces for thousands of workers who have nowhere else to work. Wages are as low as fifty cents per hour in some Asian countries, and workers are often fired for unionizing. Forced labor is not only a huge human rights violation because it also creates an enormous challenge for the global economy.⁵ Countries that protect the workers’ rights are put at an economic disadvantage. The profits of hiring forced labor are much greater than the profits a corporation can produce if it chooses to pay its workers fairly. This makes is more appealing for corporations in developed countries to send their means of production overseas, where labor costs can be reduced exponentially. The UN is required to address this as the protection of human rights and the global economy are at stake. As delegates of MUN, first, you must know your country’s labor laws and how they are being enforced. Second, research how cheap labor has affected the global economy and your economy as a whole. And, finally, approach the challenge that this problem has presented and create a viable resolution.⁶



¹ www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/definition/lang--en/index.htm.

² <https://www.newsweek.com/qatar-world-cup-workers-rights-construction-442373>

³ www.ilo.org/washington/WCMS_596898/lang--en/index.htm.

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/03/11/work-faster-or-get-out/labor-rights-abuses-cambodias-garment-industry>

⁵ www.industrialunion.org/indonesia-low-wages-in-the-textile-and-garment-industry-undermine-workers-rights.

⁶ www.democracyjournal.org/magazine/43/labor-and-capital-in-the-global-economy/.