



# Background Guide

## ECOSOC

1 | Promoting the Establishment of a Minimum Wage System in Developing Countries to Reduce Social and Economic Inequalities

JEJUMUN IX

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## Committee Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN). ECOSOC coordinates the UN's efforts to promote economic and social progress, serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and formulates relevant policy recommendations for its 54 member governments.

ECOSOC oversees the activity of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which was founded in 1919 through the Treaty of Versailles as the first and oldest specialized agency of the UN. The ILO aims to ensure accessible, productive, and sustainable working conditions worldwide, and acts as a major contributor to international labor law. With its focus on international development, the ILO is a member of the United Nations Development Group, a coalition of UN organizations aiming to help meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Commission for Social Development (CSocD), established in 1946, operates under ECOSOC's purview. CSocD's 46 member governments adopted the Ten Commandments at the March 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development (WSSD). The Ten Commandments seek to, among others, support full employment as a basic policy goal, accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries, and increase resources allocated to social development.

ECOSOC believes in the importance of upholding a minimum standard of living to protect the health and well-being of workers in the labor force. Under the agenda 'Promoting the establishment of a minimum wage system in developing countries to reduce social and economic inequalities', the committee will discuss solutions and draft resolutions that promote the establishment of a minimum wage system in order to secure the welfare of citizens of developing countries.

## Agenda Introduction

A minimum wage system is meant to protect workers against unduly low pay. Minimum wages help ensure that workers are justly remunerated for their labor, and guarantee minimum standards of living to all who are employed and in need of such protection. Minimum wages can also work in tandem with other policies to overcome poverty, reduce inequality, and address the wage gap between men and women across industries, by securing workers' rights to equal compensation for work amounting to commensurate value.

The prompt establishment of minimum wages is key to securing a threshold of acceptable living for workers in developing nations, where workers' rights are often put at risk by inadequate labor laws and employers' negligence. Well-designed and effective minimum wages can contribute to objectives such as SDG 8, which promotes "sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all", highlighting the importance of achieving equal pay for work of equal value, and SDG 10, which seeks to "reduce inequality within and among countries", emphasizing income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population.

Minimum wage systems in developing nations are crucial for fostering the growth of a protected, thriving, and motivated workforce. They are important not only from a socio-economic standpoint, but also for guaranteeing basic standards of living that workers everywhere have a right to. Through the agenda 'Promoting the establishment of a minimum wage system in developing countries to reduce social and economic inequalities', ECOSOC seeks to address the social and economic inequalities endemic to developing nations as well as secure acceptable living standards for workers in developing economies.

# Letter from the Chairs

Dear esteemed delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Economic and Social Council! We are Steven Yang, Wendy Lee and Chandler Ahn from North London Collegiate School Jeju. It is an honour to serve as your chairs for the JejuMUN 9 Conference. We will be supporting your process of debating about the agenda and devising the ideal resolutions in response to global issues by cooperating with your fellow delegates.

In the Economic and Social Council, you will be discussing the agenda: promoting the establishment of a minimum wage system in developing countries to reduce social and economic inequalities. We advise you to take advantage of resources available both online and offline which includes, but not limited to the CIA World Factbook, official government statistics, reliable journal articles and the chair report which contains sufficient information about the agenda. We would like to emphasise that the more background knowledge delegates have, the more effective debates and resolutions will be formulated.

We are aware that preparing and debating in an MUN Conference is not comfortable for beginners, but we guarantee that this will be a wonderful experience that will positively impact you in the future. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at any time. And most importantly, have fun!

Best regards,

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# Key Terms

## **Compensation Discrimination**

inequality in payments to different individuals due to gender, race, age or any other social factors

## **Economic Inequality**

disparities among individuals incomes and wealth among a society

## **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

tripartite agency of the UN that convenes governments, employers and workers of 187 member states of the UN for the objective of setting labour standards, developing policies and devising programmes promoting fair and decent work for everyone

## **Minimum Wage**

the minimum amount of remuneration that an employer is required to pay wage earners for the work performed during a given period, which cannot be reduced by collective agreement or an individual contract

## **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

global goals adopted by the UN to universally cooperate to end poverty, save the planet and ensure all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030

## **Social Inequality**

unusual opportunities & rewards for different social positions or statuses within society

## **The Commission for Social Development (CSocD)**

body of the UN established through an ECOSOC resolution for the purpose of advising ECOSOC on social policies, especially the ones that are not covered by specialised inter-governmental agencies

## **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

organisation of the UN that works to eradicate poverty while protecting the planet which consists of 170 member states

# Historical Background

## Early Phase of Minimum Wage Laws

1894	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The first minimum wage law was introduced in New Zealand</li></ul>
1896	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Victoria, an Australian state, implemented the minimum wage law</li></ul>
1909	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UK enacted the minimum wage law</li></ul>
Early 1900s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Concerns about poor working conditions in sweatshops spread across the US</li><li>• Thus, the need for a minimum wage law arose in the nation</li></ul>
1923	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The US Supreme Court declared that setting a minimum wage is unconstitutional</li></ul>
1938	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under Franklin D. Roosevelt, the US Congress adopted the Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA) which also brought the minimum wage law to the nation</li><li>• \$0.25/hour</li></ul>
1941	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Despite numerous challenges, the Supreme Court approved the act as constitutional</li></ul>

## Spreading of Minimum Wage Laws Post WWII

The introduction of minimum wage laws were spreading across the globe, with the main focus along developed or developing nations. The dismantling of the United Kingdom's wage councils was an anomaly in this period.

1948	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• India, a newly industrialised country (NIC), adopted the minimum wage law</li></ul>
1961	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pakistan, another NIC, introduced the minimum wage law</li></ul>
1969-1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Netherlands &amp; France applied minimum wages respectively</li></ul>
1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimum wages were implemented in Spain</li></ul>
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UK's wage councils were dismantled</li></ul>

## 1990s to the Present

The growth in spreading of the minimum wage law exponential and minimum wages increased along with inflation due to overall development of the global economy. Hence, the United States' minimum wage is \$7.25/hour after raising 22 times.

Early 1990s~	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• European nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted statutory minimum wage laws</li><li>• Thus, all European nations have minimum wages</li></ul>
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• China enacted the minimum wage law as along with their commencement in their economic development</li></ul>
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• South Africa legislated minimum wages as Apartheid (legalising of segregationist policies against non-white citizens) ended</li></ul>
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UK introduced a statutory minimum wage law</li></ul>
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• China strengthened its minimum wage law</li></ul>
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The minimum wage law was initiated in Malaysia</li></ul>
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted</li><li>• SDG 8: "Decent Work &amp; Economic Growth"</li><li>• SDG 10: "Reduced Inequality"<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ (SDGs above are relevant to the agenda)</li></ul></li></ul>
2015-2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Laos and Macao implemented minimum wages respectively</li></ul>
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The European Union (EU) agreed a legislation that allows adequate wages to be given to workers and strengthen the bond between European nations to protect workers through the provision of minimum wage</li></ul>



## Current State of Affairs

Due to the exponential rate of global development, workers have continued to emphasise the need for the rise in minimum wage despite the impacts originated from the COVID-19 pandemic. Having higher minimum wages did satisfy numerous workers and contributed to the perpetual development of the economy by stimulating demand for goods. But the reality is that both threats of unemployment are increasing due to industries' shift towards artificial intelligence (AI). The trend of employers from the previous decade is replacing costly employees with AI which will save their budget in the long run. Consequently, a French research showed that 20% increase in AI led to 1.6% decline in employment.

Additionally, it is vital to be aware of the continuing segregatory actions though violations of minimum wage. In the United States, for example, 60% of the nation's workers had at least \$1 missing from their hourly minimum wage. Along with an unpaid budget, workers experienced being forced to work extra hours without any financial reward. According to a 2019 study conducted by Policy Matters Ohio, black and hispanic people comprised 22% of 'wage theft victims', workers who were not paid as in the contract. Gender discrimination is also a problem to be resolved. 62% of wage theft victims were women which proves the severity of gender inequality towards individuals' life in society.

The problem of child labour has been continuing for centuries despite the global criticism towards the harsh physical work. According to the ILO, 218 million children between ages 5 and 17 are employed to work in various industries such as agriculture, garment and mining. Along these industries, agriculture, especially coffee and cacao beans, is most prominent and exploiting. To be extreme, children are not doing manual labour, but are actually 'enslaved' which means they could not expect a peaceful day. Aly Diabate, a former child cocoa worker, reflected that workers were beaten if they were not working at a fast pace. The fact that shocks the globe is how the beans produced through child labour are supplied to prominent transnational corporations (TNCs) which develops the irony of people criticising child labour consuming goods produced from harsh labour.

Extreme working conditions for manual labour only reward children with a pittance. According to an ILO-led survey to research the payment to children in Ghana, India, Senegal and Indonesia working in agricultural industries, the wages provided to children were far below the minimum wage of nations. The minimum wage in Ghana is \$7.70, but these children were earning less than \$1.25. In India, 15% of rural children workers and 20% of urban children workers were paid less than the minimum wage too. In Indonesia, economic inequality has been shown that girls have been paid less than half of boys' salaries in reward to labour. In Senegal, a shocking 10% of children who are economically active were only paid which proves the need to bolster legislations to have children treated fairly in terms of

rewards. Therefore, it is imperative to consider the ineffectiveness of legislations regarding minimum wage which can be debated within the committee.

# Stances of Parties

## **Afghanistan**

As a developing country, Afghanistan has a minimum wage rate established for government workers, but not for private-sector workers. Although the Afghan labour law claims to eliminate discrimination within employment, a wide range of differences exist between employment categories. The labour law stands weak in consideration of the lack of government control and enforcement, leading to unfair wages and practices continuing to stand their ground in the country.

## **Australia**

With the Fair Work Act passed in 2009, the Fair Work Commission was established, reforming the Australian industrial relations system. The legislation ensures minimum working conditions and standards, alongside the provision of legal restrictions between employer and employees, by annual checkups.

## **Brazil**

Far away from reaching wage equality, close to 80% of the nation's wealth is held by the top 10 percent of the population. Despite the existence of a government-mandated minimum wage, the Brazilian labour law lacks in the scope of encompassing the protection of workers, neglecting workers in the primary and secondary sectors of employment, many of which do not work under legally established companies.

## **Canada**

Continuously developing its Labour Code, Canada's unemployment rate continues to decrease, as workers are legally protected in relation to their working conditions, hours, wages and more. The Labour Code is divided into four parts, in which the fourth, administrative monetary penalties, ensures the countries abide by it. However, with its increasing number of refugees, Canada has been facing an increase in income inequality.

## **Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

Although specifics in regards to various occupations and the minimum wage requirements aren't obtained, average citizens of the DPRK are required to maintain their assigned jobs by the government under the law. However, wages aren't justifiable in any sense, due to the nation's totalitarian nature with complete control by the Kim family along with the government. The daily manipulation of North Koreans contributed to people having to adhere to the laws, including labour, regardless of their performance.

## **France**

France holds its place as one of the main asylum host countries in Europe, which contributes to its increasing issues regarding fair employment and working conditions. Its minimum wage law was introduced in 1915, and since then, mandated by the government, ensuring all workers under registered work areas are granted the minimum wage, mitigated each year.

## **Germany**

With the largest economy in Europe, Germany recently approved to heighten its minimum wage to 12 Euros from October this year. Its success derives from the strength of its labour unions, mostly established around the German revolution, retaining their strength in workers' rights. However, the accelerating growth of a low-wage sector is resulting in an increase in its wealth gap.

## **India**

As one of the LEDCs, India does not have a national minimum wage set for any workers, which results in poor pay, working conditions, and rising rates of child labour. The implementation of a national minimum wage system will impact its social and economic conditions drastically, as the nation deals with overpopulation and unemployment. The system of state and sector minimum wages imposes challenges upon the propriety within the labour unions.

## **Iran**

The absence of trade unions in Iran notably lowers the allowance of the projection of workers' voices within the nations. Ranking as one of the LEDCs, the country faces a variety of issues in regards to its working conditions, as all executive decisions with relation to labour legislation are made under the government. For example, the recent 57% increase in minimum wage is impending to impose serious consequences on workers.

## **Iraq**

Considering the nation's position both socially and economically, Iraq has its placeholders in regards to labour laws, expected to be followed variably in different public sectors. However, since child labour in the agricultural sector is encouraged, unregulated farms do not have minimum wage systems for the children and labourers who work there. Thereby, the issue of intensive and forced child labour continues to rise.

## **Israel**

Israel has been noted as one of the economies that have been detrimentally truncated by COVID-19, but recently has been showing rejuvenation. Additionally, in recent years, the country enacted several laws following the International Labour Organization and Western

standards, including the Hours of Work and Rest Law, The Annual Leave Law, and more which contribute to the reawakening of the country's economy.

### **Japan**

Japan has been one of the economies where its minimum wage consistently increased over the past years, significantly strengthening it. Statistics from the last four years reflect at least a 3% increase in minimum wage, in respect to the previous year. Although the nation faced harsh consequences by the pandemic, it has successfully retained its minimum wage level and fair labour laws, contributing to its success in initiating competitiveness and growth.

### **Mexico**

For 2022, the minimum wage for Mexico was raised by 23%. Although this seems as though its economy is prospering, the crux of it derives from the fact that the minimum wage is incomparable to the amount needed for one to sustain their life within Mexico. Therefore, the Mexican minimum wage fails to serve its duty, on top of a wide range of other labour-related national issues, especially considering its recent interest in politics.

### **Pakistan**

Disregarding its minimum wage, Pakistan encounters countless labour issues including the presence of "unfree labour", which reflects the preeminent issue of the lack of proper contracts in employment. Additionally, women are faced with severe disadvantages within the workplace, mitigating the viability of the minimum wage system, as it fails to serve its purpose.

### **People's Republic of China**

Despite its constant advancements in various fields globally, China faces internal issues within the nation in regards to general labour law including minimum wage, as the different districts of its provinces and municipalities are settled with different legislations. Therefore, it is rudimentary to consider balancing the wage gap within provinces in order to recuperate the losses of its economy.

### **Republic of Korea**

As one of the rising economies, Korea is looking to increase its minimum wage, which has already been consistently increasing annually. Although its overall economy shows a positive trend, its problems of an increasing wealth gap and in compliance of working hours by a great number of establishment continue to raise concerns within the nation.

### **Russian Federation**

In line with the continued attack on Ukraine and rising tensions between Russia and global superpowers and the downturn in the Russian economy, the unequal treatment and wage for the people have significantly increased. Russia especially deals with severe child

labour. Legal enactments state that children between ages 14 and 15 are permitted to employment with basic education completed or under parental consent. However, a grand number of children who work on the streets and in commercial sexual exploitation are neither monitored nor known by the government, and make them susceptible to be victims of human trafficking. For them, minimum wage isn't a concern, but a safe working environment is.

### **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia doesn't have a minimum wage set for the private sector but only for the public sector. Since the country has a great number of foreign workers, it contributes to reducing the global unemployment rate. The implementation of a minimum wage for the private sector will promote further decrease in the global unemployment rate as foreign labourers are mostly paid less than half of the minimum wage value of the public sector, thus incapable of providing essentials for themselves.

### **Spain**

Spain has different minimum wages for different sectors, such as domestic workers, contingent and temporary workers, and general workers. Overall, the country has stable employment law and plans to increase its minimum wage by 3.6%, which proves its economic stability as well, as this increase marks the fourth increase since 2019.

### **Switzerland**

Switzerland is in the top 4% in the provision of minimum wage. The nation's economic growth of 3.5% in 2021 predicts a further increase in economic development, but Switzerland is in a predicament which is in a deficit of skilled professionals. The unemployment rate is forecasted to decrease steadily from 2.4% in 2022 to 2.3% in 2023, which proves the stability in the provision of wages to workers without risks of unfair working conditions. But people are paid based on their education and experience that can be seen as advantageous for the privileged.

### **Turkey**

Turkey has raised its minimum wage by 30% which was implemented from 1 July 2022 to save households from the nation's exponential inflation. The economic risk has been proved by its previous raise in January 2022 by 50% driven by an annual inflation rate of 73.5%. Still, the minimum wage is imposed as a government mandate which prevents employers from exploiting workers under harsh and unfair labour conditions due to the fear of punishment. Despite the nation's stable minimum wage laws, the risk of imminent unemployment remains within Turkish workers from the unstable economy.

### **United Arab Emirates**

Unlike its reputation as a wealthy MEDC led by its oil-dependent economy, the UAE currently has no minimum wage. Alongside this, the country generally has flexible labour laws including flexible working hours and employment especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, the economy of the UAE persists on ranking the 5th largest in the Middle East with a stable GDP rate. However, some issues are easily amplified as the government doesn't have direct control over the specifics of unjust employment-related issues that abide by the law.

### **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

The UK has adopted the minimum wage law in the early 20th century, and its firm policy has continued to the present day. The National Minimum Wage Act imposed in the late 1990s has mandated employers' provision of minimum wage regardless of any limiting factors. The nation's minimum wage is contingent on workers' age and if they are an apprentice. If workers are either under 18 or apprentices, the minimum wage is £4.81, and it increases as workers move to a higher age group: £6.83, £9.18 and £9.50 for ages 18-20, 21-22 and 23 or over, respectively. This legal act can be seen as contrary to nations with fixed minimum wages for all workers.

### **United States of America**

Marked by the Fair Labour Standards Act in 1938, the Congress enacted the national minimum wage under the US Constitution. Although it is currently set at 7.25 USD per hour, many workers voice their hardships due to the insufficiency of the minimum wage. This issue has been heightened after the severe unemployment wave caused by the pandemic, as companies focused on protecting their more "valued workers", and less so for their employees who were classified under lower employment statuses.

# Possible Solutions

## Minimum Wage Violations

In many communities where rudimentary minimum wage policies have been introduced, workers are so lightly protected that there is no system to handle minimum wage violations by employers. Lack of follow-up enforcement creates a vicious cycle where a lack of reports of wage theft due to law enforcement shortcomings creates a false belief among policymakers that the minimum wage system, which in reality is defunct, is functioning. Hence, establishing a feedback system to ensure that minimum wage laws are being enforced *de facto* is crucial to implementing a successful minimum wage system in developing nations.

## Gender Inequality

Self-regulated minimum wage in developing communities, where jobs are often gendered and women's contributions to the workforce undervalued compared to men's, may vary between genders, exacerbating the socio-economic inequality between men and women and crippling women's capacity for economic independence and empowerment. Even if equal pay for genders is guaranteed by local law, corrupt law enforcement, the absence of a follow-up system to ensure that perpetrating employers are punished, or a legislative blind spot with regards to gender inequality in the workplace may render female workers helpless in the event of gender-related minimum wage violations. A comprehensive system to ensure that minimum wages in a sector are equal for men and women may be crucial in protecting female workers' rights to equal pay for work of equal value.

## Funding

A large percentage of wages that employers in violation of minimum wage are ordered to pay back are never fully recovered. This is because law enforcement lack the tools to go after the employers who evade court orders to pay back their workers using a mix of bribes, meandering (poorly-funded law enforcement can't afford to pursue a single employer for an extended period of time), and corporate clout (multinational conglomerates in regional operation undercutting local employees' wages may hold sway over local law enforcement). This last case is especially difficult for law enforcement to tackle, as employees themselves are often loath to come forward for fear of losing their job and being permanently ousted from a community sprung up around the employment needs of a local factory or office. For low-income workers already living from paycheck to paycheck, owed wage is eventually received after months of backlogging can be fatal – by the time the paycheck reaches them, they may already well be on the way towards eviction, family separation, or starvation.

Developing nations may lack financial resources to direct towards law enforcement to chase down employers and secure repayment of stolen wages. Supplementing the power of law enforcement to guarantee repayment of stolen minimum wage will go a long way towards



ensuring victimized workers come forward with their allegations, cutting employers' theft in the long term, and increasing workers' faith in the state's ability to guarantee basic socio-economic wellbeing. Establishing a source of funding for developing nations looking to augment law enforcement's success in policing minimum wage, may be worth exploring.

## Questions to Consider

1. Are the countries in consideration signatories of the WSSD's Copenhagen Declaration and Program for Action (CDPA)?
2. In what ways could ECOSOC guarantee that minimum wage standards are respected by employers?
3. How can ECOSOC pursue a bilateral approach towards implementing policies that may provoke backlash from factions of member nations' governments?
4. What factors should be taken into consideration when establishing a minimum wage threshold? Should the figure be universal, or dependent on individual nations' circumstances?
5. Should there be an upper and lower international minimum wage standard that no nation is allowed to transgress?
6. How can minimum wages work in conjunction with existing infrastructure to supplement and reinforce other social and employment policies?

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