

GMUNC XIII



SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN &
CULTURAL COMMITTEE

SOCHUM

Improving Education Inequality in
South East Asia

I. Conference Information

It's our immense pleasure to welcome all delegates to the Gunn Model United Nations Conference XIII! Before delegates start reading this background guide, please remember position papers are due on October 17 to be considered for a research award. With the final deadline on October 23 for general awards (all awards except research awards). If you do not submit a position paper by this date by 11:59, you will **NOT** be eligible for any committee awards. For questions on position paper requirements please check out the position paper writing guide on the GMUNC website (<https://gmunc.org/conference>). In addition we will not tolerate any use of AI, if a sufficient detection of AI is found you will be disqualified from **ALL** awards and your Delegation will be made aware. Please send position papers in **PDF format** (we will not accept sharing of google docs or any other methods) and committee-specific inquiries to the committee email address gmuncxiiieducation@gmail.com.

II. Chair Bios

Head Chair Bio: Welcome, delegates! I'm Melody Na, and I'm so excited to be your Head Chair for SOCHUM this year. I am currently a senior at Gunn High School, and have been participating in Model UN since 8th grade as a delegate and Co-Chair for GMUNC XII. Outside of MUN, I am involved in my school's newspaper, Spanish Club, and play the cello. My passion for international relations has deepened as I have lived in four different countries and have experienced the significance of communication and relationship between various nations. I hope to learn even more about MUN from a different perspective as a Head Chair, and am excited for the opportunity to encounter various creative ideas during the debate!

Co-Chair Bio: Greetings delegates! My name is Phoebe Selker, and I am excited to serve as one of your chairs for SOCHUM this year. This will be my first experience as a chair after participating as a delegate at several conferences last year, and I look forward to seeing debate from a new perspective. Outside of MUN, I run the Women In Politics club at Gunn High School, as my interest in politics and social justice was what first drew me to Model UN. I encourage all delegates to continue educating themselves about injustices around the world. I am excited to see the ideas and solutions we develop as a committee, and I cannot wait to meet all of you!



III. Foreward

Welcome to the Gunn Model United Nations Conference XIII's Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)! Having previously co-chaired at GMUNC, I am honored to be a part of this conference again and excited for another memorable year.

Exploring topics and discussing questions related to human rights and social development in this committee, delegates would be able to enhance their topic understanding, acquire the skills to foster a meaningful debate, and reach consensus. The main focus of this conference will be the issue of education inequality in Southeast Asia. Delegates are expected to do thorough research and preparation, maintain a respectful debate atmosphere, and collaborate peacefully.

As delegates are composing their research and position papers, it is important to consider various groups of people, especially marginalized ones, and focus on the long-term and structural solutions. Referring to various bodies of the UN, such as SOCHUM, UNESCO, and UNHCR, is also helpful. Most importantly, make sure to stay consistent to the stance of the assigned country.

The chairs encourage active engagement and hope this conference will be a great learning experience. I wish you the best with writing your position papers and look forward to seeing everyone on October 24, 2026 for GMUNC XIII.

Melody Na

Head Chair

IV. Introduction

Tackling issues surrounding basic human rights has been one of the most crucial focuses within the United Nations for many decades since its founding. As the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, SOCHUM is responsible for discussing and addressing questions regarding the protection of human rights and advancement of social progress.

Established in 1945 alongside the creation of the UN and five other committees under the Charter of the United Nations, SOCHUM has played a significant role in re-shaping the global society and paving the way toward social advancement. The committee comprises all 193 Member States of the UN, providing an environment for the international community to express its ideas and voice its concerns on humanitarian matters.

During committee sessions, all delegates are expected to propose solutions, share ideas, negotiate, and draft resolutions on social, humanitarian, and cultural issues. Although SOCHUM is able to make strong recommendations to the General Assembly and other bodies, it does not have the authority to legally enforce resolutions. The non-binding resolutions cannot pass nor execute laws.



V. Background Information

Starting in the second half of the 19th century, many Southeast Asian countries underwent Western colonial rule and experienced some changes in their education system. As European colonial governments introduced their Western-style public school system, the former Buddhist-centered education system in most Mainland Southeast Asia countries and the decentralized and community-based system in most Maritime countries. While some nations noticed clear changes to the education system, some others saw a much more gradual growth. For instance, the Western-style education emerged and influenced the new state-run school system drastically in countries like the Philippines, whereas countries such as Cambodia experienced slower growth. Several social, economic, and political factors affected the level of implementation in each country during this period. Therefore, the magnitude of inequality in terms of education has varied across countries in the region.



L'UNE DES ÉCOLES PRIMAIRES DE HANOI. CLASSE DE GÉOGRAPHIE. 1920-1929

While these changes laid the groundwork for modern schooling, education inequality still persists as a serious issue in Southeast Asia. Most of the countries in this region are classified as developing nations and often encounter structural problems, such as lack of adequate infrastructure. The rural-urban divide and severe wealth gap have also greatly contributed to this inequality, excluding certain marginalized and lower-income groups from receiving quality education.



To illustrate this divide, in developing countries like Cambodia, many schools, especially in the rural areas, lack proper facilities, teaching materials, and quality resources, including teachers. The inequity becomes more pronounced in higher education due to the smaller number of secondary schools. Many students give up pursuing education beyond elementary school as

they often encounter challenges such as having to travel long distances or having to support the family through farming.

Listed as the fourth Sustainable Developing Goal, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is an essential tool toward human development. Providing the opportunity for growth for each generation allows the future of the country to improve significantly. Through benefitting the economy, governance, and overall stability within the nation, education is a necessity for social advancement.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



VI. Past International Actions

Over the years, the United Nations has worked on improving education inequality through adopting resolutions, monitoring, allocating additional resources, etc.

The first major resolution that addressed education inequality was the General Assembly Resolution 217 (III), which was passed on December 10, 1948. Also known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this document established education as one of the fundamental pillars of human rights. The document highlights that elementary education is compulsory and that higher education must be equally accessible to everyone. By clearly defining what education should look like universally, this resolution led to numerous discussions and reforms in education. The UN still continues to adopt resolutions to further improve inequality in education.



On November 20, 1989, the UN General Assembly additionally adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Alongside all other Member States, all 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states (excluding Timor-Leste, which officially joined in 2025) ratified the document, which states that “primary education shall be compulsory and made available free to all” and that “secondary education in its different forms shall be available and accessible to all through every appropriate means.” This was a legally binding international treaty for nations that ratified it, marking the beginning of the collective shift toward equitable education.



At the same time focusing on a more localized project, in 2019, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMO) released the Southeast Asian Primary Learning Metrics to evaluate the learning outcomes in six Southeast Asian countries—Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam—and identify ways to mitigate factors that hinder foundational learning. Additional assessments have been conducted in the following years.



The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and SEAMO also cooperated and published the Global Education Monitoring Southeast Asia Report on Technology in Education in 2023, explicitly showing the need for more attention and effort from governments in order to reduce the disparity in access to digital education.



VII. Current Situation

In recent years, though the school enrollment rate has increased, many children and adolescents in the developing countries of Southeast Asia still do not achieve basic literacy and numeracy skills. In fact, the issue of learning poverty intensified due to COVID-19 and its impact on school closures, which hindered approximately 70 million children in Southeast Asia to receive proper education. For instance, 1 in 2 children at Grade 5 in Southeast Asia still lacks proficient reading skills, failing to perform at the expected level. The results from an assessment conducted in six countries—Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam—demonstrated that while math skills improved slightly, 19% of Grade 5 students still have math skills of a Grade 3 student, and that growth in reading skills has been stagnant.



Furthermore, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2024 regional report showed that learning gaps reflected socioeconomic divides in Southeast Asia. For example, despite being in the same age group, children from lower socioeconomic groups

performed significantly worse than their wealthier peers. Those who do not use the language of instruction at home also showed lower proficiency than those who do. Especially in regions like Southeast Asia, factors such as family income and language spoken at home continue to greatly affect and impede children's right to education, which should be protected, according to the standards outlined by the UN.

Foundational literacy and numeracy skills play a crucial role in allowing students to move onto higher education and later on work efficiently for the society and the country's economy. However, without appropriate measures taken to alleviate this problem, such learning disparity will continue to persist and become even more conspicuous. Therefore, collective interest on this matter and continued effort to address this learning crisis from the international community is essential today.

VIII. Country Positions OR Individual Positions

- **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member Countries**
- **People's Republic of China**
 - Deeply involved in Southeast Asian economy
 - The region's largest trading partner and source of investment
- **United States of America**
 - Views education as an essential component for democratic governance
- **Japan**
 - One of the most important development partners in Southeast Asia

IX. Questions to Consider

- How can the **structural** issues of learning inequality in Southeast Asia be addressed?
- What are some potential **long-term** solutions?
- How can developed countries (MDCs) support the developing countries (LDCs) of Southeast Asia?
- How can the Member States effectively utilize **Official Development Assistance** (ODA)?
- What are some ways to address the **socioeconomic divide** (income, language, rural-urban divide, etc.) that continues to affect learning inequality?

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