

YMCA MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Topic Descriptions

Committee: European Summit

Chair: Sophia Rodkin

Topic #1: Combating Europe's Housing Crisis

Introduction & Background

A **housing crisis** is typically defined as a lack of affordable housing. The current housing crisis in Europe is mainly caused by **rising housing prices**, but also by other factors, such as low construction rates. Europe saw a sharp increase in housing prices in 2015, and prices continued to rise at an alarming rate in subsequent years. The **economic impacts of the pandemic** and the subsequent **decreased construction rates** worsened the issue. The amount of people without proper housing in Europe has more than doubled in the last 15 years. In recent years, groups and measures such as Housing Europe, the Affordable Housing Initiative, and the Housing Partnership of the EU's Urban Agenda have focused on increasing access to affordable housing.

Current Status

Many Europeans are waiting longer to move out of their parents' homes because of the housing crisis, which often negatively impacts their long-term economic success. The effects of the housing crisis are particularly prominent in cities because of overpopulation in these areas, though they are felt throughout the whole continent. Construction rates remain abnormally low throughout Europe. Many European countries have begun to turn to **social housing**, government-owned housing that is available to the public at cheaper rates, to help manage the housing crisis. However, this type of housing can lead to issues such as poor housing conditions and an overconcentration of low-income residents that can negatively impact the job market. One major cause of the high housing prices is **inflation**, which, while it has relatively stabilized since its peak in 2022, continues to cause rising prices in European nations and increases the **cost of living**.

Themes to Consider

Solving Europe's housing crisis, or at least lessening its impacts, would **decrease homelessness and financial insecurity** for European citizens and help the economy by decreasing unemployment rates. A study conducted by Harvard University shows that those without adequate housing are 11 to 22% more likely to lose their jobs.

Increasing construction rates, which would thus **increase the supply of housing** and lower its costs, is one viable solution to the housing crisis. However, achieving increased construction can be difficult due to the substantial fees and costs that are involved in building new housing. Nations can also set aside money for more sustainable housing, which could allow unused buildings to be converted into housing. However, this can be very expensive too.

Measures such as **raising interest rates** can help combat the rise in prices caused by the inflation rampant throughout Europe. However, this can also be counteractive because, when faced with higher prices, workers demand higher wages, and business owners then have to charge higher prices to account for this, ending up only perpetuating inflation.

Two-thirds of EU member states reported an **increase in population density** between 2001 and 2022, but the **weak infrastructure** throughout Europe poses a major issue for this growing population. Energy, transport, and water are three infrastructure sectors that need major improvements. These infrastructure issues do not allow for the proper development of

housing, such as high-rise buildings, to accommodate these rising populations, leaving many instead with cramped or inadequate housing.

Discussion Questions

1. What can the EU do to decrease housing prices in a time of rampant inflation?
2. How can the United Nations encourage the construction of new and sustainable housing in member nations?
3. How can the United Nations support citizens impacted by the lack of affordable housing?

Resources

1. Albert, Eric, et al. "Why Europe's Housing Crisis Is Taking Hold." *Le Monde*, 14 Mar. 2024, www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2024/03/14/why-europe-s-housing-crisis-is-taking-hold_6616974_19.html#:~:text=Across%20Europe%2C%20house%20prices%20fell,report%20published%20in%20December%202023. Accessed 11 May 2024.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Article detailing the issues with Europe's economic issues and its lack of housing.

2. "European Manifesto to Lead the Way out of the Housing Crisis." *Housing Europe*, 2025, www.housingeurope.eu/resource-1874/european-manifesto-to-lead-the-way-out-of-the-housing-crisis. Accessed 11 May 2024.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Steps Europe can take to try to lessen the impacts of and end its housing crisis.

3. "Housing Instability Increases Likelihood of Job Loss." *National Low Income Housing Coalition*, 20 Feb. 2018, nlihc.org/resource/housing-instability-increases-likelihood-job-loss#:~:text=The%20authors%20used%20statistical%20models,job%20loss%20on%20housing%20loss. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Statistics and information on how lack of housing impacts unemployment rates.

4. "The Housing Partnership of the Urban Agenda for the EU." *Re-Dwell*, 13 Nov. 2023, www.re-dwell.eu/case-studies/the-housing-partnership-of-the-urban-agenda-for-the-eu#:~:text=The%20Urban%20Agenda%20operates%20through,regulations%20and%20over%20all%20housing%20policy. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Describes the goals and the role of the Urban Agenda, specifically its Housing Partnership.

5. "Housing Price Statistics -- Housing Price Index." *Eurostat*, ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Housing_price_statistics_-_house_price_index#:~:text=The%20basic%20act%20providing%20for,1470%2C%20of%2017%20July%202023. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Graphs and explanations of statistics relating to housing prices throughout Europe.

6. "Regions and Cities Urge to Address the Housing Crisis on the Ground." *European Committee of the Regions*, cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/plenary-affordable-housing.aspx. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Discusses the issue of housing affordability and the importance of sustainable housing.

Topic #2: Enacting AI Policies

Introduction & Background

Artificial intelligence is a form of technology that can simulate human intelligence, including machines and computer systems. As artificial intelligence grows more advanced, it is important to consider both the **dangers and benefits** that this type of technology may pose. The EU recently enacted the **AI Act**, the world's first legal framework for AI, which the European Commission first proposed more than five years ago. This allows the free use of minimal-risk AI and bans any use of AI that poses a risk to human rights. Higher-risk AI, such as water networks or medical devices, faces tougher requirements to prove that it is safe and reliable. AI has been used since the 1950s, although it has become increasingly popular in recent years as it can be used to provide personalized recommendations, perform dangerous or repetitive tasks, store and sort through data, and much more.

Current Status

In 2023, **over one-third of European businesses adopted some form of AI**, rising from one-quarter of businesses in 2022. The **European Commission's Digital Decade** policy program aims to create and sustain digital infrastructure, make sure all populated areas have access to 5G connectivity, and allow a modern digital economy to grow and thrive by 2030. AI is increasingly being used in enterprises to boost operational efficiency. AI has become an increasingly prominent part of people's everyday lives worldwide through technology in the home and online.

Themes to Consider

The AI Act has given prominence to the idea that, while AI is a useful tool, it **should be controlled by humans** to ensure safety. AI poses issues such as algorithmic bias and privacy invasions. By 2030, **AI could replace the equivalent of 300 million full-time jobs**.

Despite the dangers AI poses, it also offers many potential benefits. For example, AI can also be used to **tackle environmental issues** by designing more energy-efficient buildings and tracking deforestation.

Additionally, **global growth driven by AI could be nearly 25% higher** than that driven by automation without AI. The use of AI in businesses can increase productivity and cost efficiency. 83% of companies worldwide reported that using AI in their business strategies is a top priority.

AI's role in education is widely debated, with some saying that AI is a useful tool for students that should be utilized to its full potential, with others claiming that it is preventing students from developing proper critical thinking skills and allowing them to get through school without learning necessary information. 54% of parents think AI could potentially have a positive effect on their child's education, but **87% of educators said they have not received any AI training** as part of professional development.

AI can also be used in politics to help with promoting transparency, automating tasks, and enhancing policy analysis. However, AI in government can also be dangerous because it can **pose a threat to national security**. Therefore, it is important to carefully monitor this technology and make sure it is used only with positive intents.

Discussion Questions

1. How can member nations of the United Nations work together to use AI to combat environmental issues?
2. What legislation can the United Nations impose to ensure that AI is not used maliciously without limiting its benefits?
3. How can the United Nations help and encourage educators to use AI to help their students?

Resources

1. "Europe's World-First AI Rules Get Final Approval from Lawmakers. Here's What Happens Next." *PBS*, 13 Mar. 2024, www.pbs.org/newshour/world/europes-world-first-ai-rules-get-final-approval-from-lawmakers-heres-what-happens-next. Accessed 11 May 2024.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Explains the impact of Europe's AI Act and includes a brief description of the act.

2. "How Artificial Intelligence Is Helping Tackle Environmental Challenges." *UN Environment Programme*, 7 Nov. 2022, www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/how-artificial-intelligence-helping-tackle-environmental-challenges. Accessed 11 May 2024.

(Highly Recommended) Description: Talks about different ways AI can be used to help the environment.

3. "AI Act." *European Commission*, digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai#:~:text=The%20AI%20Act%20is%20the%20first-ever%20comprehensive%20legal,risks%20of%20very%20powerful%20and%20impactful%20AI%20models. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Explains Europe's AI Act and its purposes.

4. "Europe's Digital Decade: Digital Targets for 2030." *European Commission*, commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Discusses Europe's goals and plans regarding AI .

5. "The European Market Potential for Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Software Development Services." *CBI*, 21 June 2023, www.cbi.eu/market-information/outsourcing-itobpo/artificial-intelligence-ai-and-machine-learning-ml/market-potential. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Discusses the market for AI in Europe and how it can be utilized.

6. "How Will Artificial Intelligence Affect Jobs 2024-2030." *Nexford University*, 10 Jan. 2024,

www.nexford.edu/insights/how-will-ai-affect-jobs#:~:text=How%20Will%20AI%20Affect%20Jobs%20%2D%20How%20many%20jobs%20will%20AI,jobs%20and%20a%20productivity%20boom. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Article discussing both the impact AI will likely have on jobs in the future and also its potential benefits.

Topic #3: Decreasing Air Pollution

Introduction & Background

Air pollution is the contamination of the environment by any chemical, physical, or biological agent that modifies the natural characteristics of the atmosphere. Industrial facilities, motor vehicles, and household appliances are all common sources of air pollution. Air pollution has decreased significantly in Europe since 1990. Despite this, experts estimate that **air pollution decreases the average life expectancy in Europe by nearly one year**. Countless Europeans are impacted by unsafe and unclean air. In 2021, 97% of Europe's urban population was exposed to concentrations of fine particulate matter above the health-based guideline level set by the World Health Organization, which can be detrimental to European citizens' health.

Current Status

In April 2024, the EU Parliament adopted new rules to improve air quality in the EU. These included **requiring countries to monitor pollutants that pose a risk to public health and the environment** and setting stricter targets for several pollutants. The EU has adopted strict policies on air pollution since the 1980s. Despite these measures, air pollution remains the largest environmental health risk in Europe. Between 2014 and 2020, member nations submitted 944 plans to tackle air pollution, about 60% of which have actually been implemented. Most focus on the transport sector, though some focus on industry, agriculture, or energy.

Themes To Consider

By far, the largest source of ammonia emissions in Europe is agriculture. **Emissions from livestock manure and chemicals comprise 95% of ammonia emissions**, and agriculture is responsible for 10% of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. Increasing restrictions for farmers, including how they handle animal waste and soil management, could help to decrease these ammonia emissions.

While these emissions from agriculture pose a major health risk, it is also important to remember that agriculture is crucial for all of Europe and that it could be difficult for farmers to suddenly change their practices.

Energy consumption is also a major source of air pollution throughout Europe. Over 50% of fine particulate matter in Europe comes from energy consumption. **Fossil fuels**, which include coal, natural gas, and oil, produce more air pollution than any other energy source. Nearly 70% of the EU's energy in 2022 was produced by fossil fuels.

A study by the European Environment Agency estimates that air pollution and greenhouse gases emitted from large industrial sites in Europe have cost society between €277 and €433 billion. People living in large industrial cities or regions typically experience more air pollution. **Measures such as ensuring factories use less toxic raw materials or fuels and a less-polluting industrial process** can be extremely helpful in addressing air pollution.

Air pollution is harmful not only to human health but also to plants, animals, and their habitats. It can also cause corrosion of vital infrastructure. Overall, **it has been extremely harmful to Europe's economy**, causing lost working days and increasing healthcare costs for Europe's citizens.

Discussion Questions

1. How can the United Nations incentivize farmers to reduce their ammonia emissions?
2. What regulations can the United Nations impose upon factories to ensure that they reduce emissions without seriously limiting production?
3. How can the United Nations ensure the health and safety of citizens living in areas with large amounts of air pollution?

Resources

1. "Air Pollution." *European Environment Agency*, www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/air-pollution. Accessed 11 May 2024.
(Highly Recommended) Description: Explains what air pollution is, its potential impacts, and the EU's action regarding this pollution.
2. Fuller, Gary. "What Can Be Done to Combat Air Pollution in Europe?" *Guardian*, 21 Sept. 2023, www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/21/what-can-be-done-to-combat-air-pollution-in-europe. Accessed 11 May 2024.
(Highly Recommended) Description: Article explaining several different methods that can be used to reduce air pollution.
3. "Air Pollution: What Are the Effects and EU Actions to Reduce It?" *European Parliament*, 9 May 2023, www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20230822STO04226/air-pollution-what-are-the-effects-and-eu-actions-to-reduce-it#:~:text=In%20April%202024%2C%20Parliament%20adopted.health%2C%20natural%20ecosystems%20and%20biodiversity. Accessed 11 May 2024.
Description: Explains the EU's Zero Pollution Plan and the dangers of air pollution.
4. "Ambient (Outdoor) Air Pollution." *World Health Organization*, 19 Dec. 2022, [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health). Accessed 11 May 2024.
Description: Discusses the causes of air pollution and how it can be reduced.
5. "Industry." *European Environment Agency*, www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/industry#:~:text=The%20most%20polluting%20sectors%20of,management%2C%20livestock%20and%20wastewater%20treatment. Accessed 11 May 2024.
Description: Talks about the impact that industry and manufacturing have on air pollution.
6. "'Every Breath You Take': Air Pollution Stifles Europe's Health Targets." *Reuters*, 24 Nov. 2022,

www.reuters.com/world/europe/every-breath-you-take-air-pollution-stifles-europes-health-targets-2022-11-24/. Accessed 11 May 2024.

Description: Discusses how air pollution is a danger to the health of European citizens.