



Issue: Ensuring that refugee-children are experiencing equal rights as natives

Forum: Human Rights Council

Position: Chairs

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Introduction

Over half the world's refugees are children. Some travel with their families, some alone, and therefore risk everything. Refugees are a fair indicator of the places on our world that are the worst to live in, as only in these horrific situations people prefer to risk their lives, rather than to stay in their hometowns. The treacherous part in all of this is that the refugee children are even more vulnerable, being exposed to greater risks of exploitation and harsh conditions. The Human Rights Council is to delve into the subject and prioritize the measures that ought to be taken in order to protect the children that have had to flee their homes.

“We knew it was dangerous, I knew it was dangerous, but when you have a lion at your back and the sea in front, you take the sea.”

-A teenager from the Gambia interviewed in Italy

Definition of Key Terms

As defined by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund:

<https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Data-brief-children-on-the-move-key-facts-and-figures-1.pdf>

Migrants

Individuals who move, or have moved across an international border, or away from their habitual place of residence within a state – regardless of their legal status, whether they move voluntarily or involuntarily, why they move, or how long they stay. This includes, among others, refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugees

Individuals who have been granted protection in another country because of a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinions.

Asylum seeker

Individuals who seek safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and await a decision on their application for refugee status.

IDPs

Individuals or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

Stateless person

A person not considered a national by any state, who as such lacks the rights that come from national diplomatic protection of a state and may not be entitled to return in the event that he or she leaves.

General Overview

It is essential for the delegates of the Human Rights Council to take note of the actual numbers as well as to be aware of the risks the children face and the repercussions that follow. Finally, the most effective measures are to be implemented in the UN member states, that both combat the roots of the issue whilst also protecting the victims of the matter. In the end, it also remains questionable in what ways the refugee children get the chance to

Numbers

As stated earlier, over 50% of the world's refugees are children. According to UNICEF, the children that are travelling to Europe are primarily from the following three countries: Syria (54 percent), Iraq (27 percent) and Afghanistan (13 percent).

"We're now refugees. People don't like us. No one is loyal, everyone lies. I was a kid before. I am older now. I know more."

- Rawan, aged 12, who had to flee from Aleppo in Syria.

It is estimated that more than one child dies every day along the perilous route from North Africa to Italy. Boys aged 16 to 17 that are travelling all alone make up the vast majority. Most of them flee from numerous countries in (West-)Africa. Most head for neighbouring countries, however, the abuse they experience along the way compels them to push on towards Europa, despite that it was not their intended destination.



The heartbreaking picture of Syrian toddler Aydan that shocked the world

Around the world, almost 1 in 10 children live in countries and areas affected by armed conflicts, and more than 400 million live in extreme poverty. The number of child refugees worldwide more than doubled from 4 million to 9 million between the years of 2005 and 2015. The children who arrived in Italy from 2016 to 2017 comprised of a shocking number

of 90% of unaccompanied kids. Lastly, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than other children.

Risks

As stated before, the risks are enormous. First of all, the children are vulnerable to exploitation and violence. As children, especially those travelling without parents, are not well protected and not strong nor rich enough to protect themselves from harm, they are easily preyed upon by smugglers and even enslaved by traffickers (for further reading, see our other HRC-issue on child labour). Such threats to safety and well-being are amplified for refugee children with disabilities.

Secondly, the children tend to be parted from their families, because of the limited opportunities for families to move together. Families, for example, split up before a boat travel as there is no room left, but fail to meet each other again from the moment on that they have parted.

Thirdly, every child in the world has the right to be educated and this is exactly what the refugee children miss out on. It has been stated that, even when education is provided in the refugee camps for example, or even in the case they have reached their final destination, the children find it more difficult to learn as compared to their home situations, because of the constant anxiety and lack of a stable environment.



Kids playing in the mess that is their refugee camp.

Subsequently, we move on to some more dreadful details. Despite the fact that the refugee camps appear to be relatively safe, this turns out to be one real miscalculation. The camps are poorly constructed and vulnerable to almost anything. This January, migrant camps in Syria were flooded by torrential rains, washing away the tents and once again depriving the migrants of their homes. Devastating storms in the camps in Lebanon ravaged thousands of tents and resulted into many casualties and the death of an eight year old girl.

“These tents aren’t good enough for a chicken”

- Khaled Alawi, Syrian refugee

The camps are not only prone to the dangers of nature, but also to the woes of humans. Children desperate to raise money or find shelter sometimes seek to sell sex. A Harvard study found that the purchasers of migrant child sex were mainly men over 35, while the children engaging in ‘survival sex’ are mainly teenage boys, particularly from Afghanistan. News reports even noted that a four-year old girl was raped in a camp in Greece.

Repercussions

Children are increasingly showing signs of deep psychological trauma as a result of the suffering they have experienced during and after their journeys. In a refugee camp in Turkey, nearly half of the Syrian refugee children have developed post-traumatic stress syndrome, according to a study by the Migration Policy Institute.

The war and flight have caused the children serious mental disorders. Eight in ten have experienced death in the family as a result of the war. Six in ten have seen someone being kicked, shot at or physically damaged and three in ten have themselves experienced violence.

Natives and refugee children

Displacement has long-lasting effects on children and caregivers, often involving exposure to trauma and disruption of family structures. Relocation brings additional stressors, as families negotiate their needs within foreign social structures and with limited supports. Within this complex dynamic, a child enters a new educational environment and must negotiate multiple transitions, including transitions in family, friendships, schooling, community, language, culture, and identity. Although educational success is critical to overall well-being in refugee children, there are still limited data on educational outcomes or learning problems in this group.

According to a new study from psychologists at the University of London, schools can provide the ideal environment to improve integration and reduce the difficulties faced by refugee children in Western asylum countries. The research highlights that schools can give the refugee children what they yearn: a stable environment. It is there where the refugee children can connect with the natives and develop meaningful connections to peers, teachers and other professionals. Summarized, a place where children can be children.

Major Parties Involved

UNICEF

UNICEF is the UN fund that strives for the rights of the child worldwide. UNICEF relies on contributions from governments and private donors. Most of UNICEF's work is in the field, with a presence in 190 countries and territories. UNICEF's network of over 150 country offices and headquarters carry out UNICEF's mission through programs developed with host governments.



A girl from Honduras and her baby stopped by the US border, both afterwards being attacked by a tear gas ambush.

Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan

The top three list of countries that the most refugees have fled from comprises of Syria and Iraq (8.3 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million) and South Sudan (2.4 million).

Turkey, Jordan, Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Pakistan

According to the numbers of the World Bank, Turkey (3.4 million), Jordan (2.9 million), Palestinian Territories (2.2 million), Lebanon (1.5 million) and Pakistan (1.4 million) make up the five countries that host the most refugees.

Timeline of Key Events

1951	United Nations 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees
1989	Signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
2015	Adoption of the UN Sustainability Goals adopted, including goal 10.7 on migration (“Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”); and notably target 16.2 (“End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”)

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. It also includes four articles that are particularly relevant to children involved in or affected by forced displacement. Namely article 2 on the principle of non-discrimination, article 3 on the best interest of the child, article 6 on the right to life and survival and development and article 12 on the right to child participation. States Parties of the Convention are obliged to uphold the above articles, regardless of a child’s migration status. A total of 196 countries have become States Parties to the Convention, the United States not having ratified this treaty.

Furthermore, the United Nations 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees is a legal code protecting the rights of refugees at an international level. Moreover, it also defines under which conditions a person should be considered as a refugee and thus be given these rights.

Possible Solutions



This issue of (children) refugees is undoubtedly juxtaposed and interconnected with many other issues that are discussed at the United Nations, as this problem obviously is one horrific example of the many consequences that are caused by war and/or poverty. This meaning that, in order to fully resolve the refugee issue, the issues of war and/or poverty should be combatted, or as put in a more tangible manner, its effects minimalised.

The delegates can focus their resolutions on these two aspects of the issue: combating the cause for the refugees being on the lam, as well as mitigating the effects on the victims, in this case the refugee children.

A young Arab refugee child at school in Germany.

One could think of expanding the efforts as constructed by UNICEF. THE UNICEF guardians have proven to be of utmost importance in guiding the children in their new and unknown environment. Various significant UNICEF stations could be established or enlarged on the road that the refugee children embark on. Government donations could help improve the treacherous situations in the refugee camps in order to protect it from harm by nature, and, not to mention, other humans.

Lastly, a more humane integration procedure is applicable for almost all member states. UNICEF guides could help the children find a school, help them learn the language and adapt to the new culture. As research has shown that schools are the best place for refugee children to find a stable environment and by doing so, also better integrate into their new societies, this should be a top priority in order to ensure equal rights as natives for all the refugee children.

“Children shouldn’t be victims. Children shouldn’t watch how people drown as they couldn’t get in the boat. They shouldn’t walk for days, not being showered. They shouldn’t be hungry and wear just one pair of shoes and one garment all the time. I dream of my house where I can sleep in my bed and attend school.”

- Said, a 14-year-old refugee from Syria

Appendix/Appendices

Facts and figures on refugee children by UNICEF

<https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Data-brief-children-on-the-move-key-facts-and-figures-1.pdf>

TED talk from refugee child to fashion model

https://www.ted.com/talks/halima_aden_a_place_of_hope_from_refugee_camp_to_international_fashion_model

TED talk on mental health support for refugees

https://www.ted.com/talks/essam_daod_how_we_can_bring_mental_health_support_to_refugees

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/child-refugees?CMP=ILC-refresh>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5428192/>