



**ARCMUN**

Aristotelio College Model United Nations

## **UNICEF**

### **The Issue of Child Refugees in Conflict Areas**

#### **Study Guide**

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## 1. Introduction to the Topic

In November 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Today, the UNCRC is one of the most ratified human rights treaties universally, an apparent indication of its success and states' commitment to protect children's rights. Nevertheless, during the last decades, the increasing number of armed conflicts, which have emerged, undermines its scope and poses an imminent threat for civilians, especially children. In times of prolonged conflicts, the rights of this vulnerable group are being violated, their education is disrupted and their future and lives are destroyed -sometimes irreversibly. Many children have fallen victims of abductions, military recruitment, sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation during wartime. The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 250 million children live in countries or areas affected by armed conflicts<sup>1</sup>. This disheartening and alarming number underlines the desperate need of protection, provision of medication, education or even the comfort of a safe environment.

Furthermore, the destructive effects and the degradation that warfare causes forces millions of people to flee their countries so as to escape war. According to UNICEF's report, in 2015, more than 28 million children were obliged to leave their homes due to violence and instability<sup>1</sup>. These child refugees suffer in numerous ways. They grow up in an unstable environment, improper for a child's mental health as well as in absence of basic human supplies such as food, water and clothing. They have further witnessed indescribable terrors, such as violence, torture, even deaths of their family members and the destruction of their homes. Not only have these children been traumatized from the brute violence, but also their difficulties continue to the country they seek asylum to, since they are often exposed to a variety of dangerous situations, similar to those that they have tried to escape from. They face legal or administrative barriers in receiving refugee status, they grow up in unstable environments, they are excluded from education and access to efficient healthcare, or even run the risk of exploitation, abuse or, worse, trafficking. In most cases, they are being subjected to racial discrimination.

UNICEF's role is considered significant in protecting children from the devastating effects of armed conflicts. It is upon its main duties to ensure that children worldwide grow in a protective environment so as to develop their full potentials, physically and mentally. By partnering up with governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, and young people themselves, UNICEF regulates humanitarian aid and children protection in conflict areas and supports their reintegration<sup>2</sup>. In other words, UNICEF is committed to provide to each and every child the right to the proper childhood they deserve. Understanding the issue of child refugees and the actions that UNICEF has taken will help evaluate the child protection systems it promotes in order to assist children's wellbeing during armed conflicts.

## 2. Definition of Key Term

### 2.1. Child

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. (2017). *27 million children out of school in conflict zones – UNICEF*. [online] Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_100857.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_100857.html) [Accessed 10 Oct. 2017].

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF. (2017). *UNICEF's approach to child protection*. [online] Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_57990.html](https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_57990.html) [Accessed 11 Oct. 2017].

According to Article 1 of UNCRC, a child is human being below the age of eighteen years<sup>3</sup>. Children, and young people in general, are the agent of change, vital for the future development of every society.

## **2.2. Refugee**

A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. The protection of refugees includes many aspects, such as: safety from being returned to danger, access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, and measures to ensure that their basic human rights are respected while they secure a longer-term solution<sup>4</sup>. The term, should not be confused with the term migrant, as their main difference is the fact that migrants are people choosing to leave their country mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons<sup>5</sup>.

## **2.3. Armed conflict**

Armed conflict can be either an *international* conflict, between two or more opposing States, or a *non-international* conflict, between governmental forces and non-governmental armed groups, or between such groups only<sup>6</sup>.

## **2.4. Humanitarian aid**

This term refers to the provision of assistance in order to save lives, relieve suffering and maintain human dignity during and after man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for when such situations occur.

## **2.5. Signature**

The signature of a treaty is an act by which a State provides an initial affirmation of the legal instrument. Signing does *not* create a binding legal obligation but does demonstrate the State's intent to examine the treaty domestically and consider ratifying it. While signing does not commit a State to ratification, it does oblige the State to refrain from acts that would defeat or undermine the treaty's objective and purpose.

## **2.6. Ratification**

The ratification of a treaty is an act by which a State signifies an agreement to be legally bound by the terms of a particular treaty.

# **3. History of the Topic**

## **3.1 World War Two (WWII)**

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<sup>3</sup> Ohchr.org. (2017). *OHCHR | Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2017].

<sup>4</sup> Refugees, U. (2017). *Refugees*. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refugees.html> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2017].

<sup>5</sup> Refugees, U. (2017). *UNHCR viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'migrant' – Which is right?*. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2017].

<sup>6</sup> Icrc.org. (2017). *How is the term "Armed Conflict" defined in international humanitarian law? - ICRC*. [online] Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/article/other/armed-conflict-article-170308.htm> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2017].

Children were massively affected by World War Two. Millions of people were evacuated from their homes from the very beginning of the Second World War, among them nearly two million children; they had to endure rationing, gas mask lessons and living with strangers. Children accounted for one in ten of the deaths during the Blitz of London, a period of intense bombing, from 1940 to 1941. Moreover children in Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium and France experienced the terror of Blitzkrieg, the method of warfare used by Nazi Germany consisting of quick and decisive short battles. Occupying troops were brutal as the children at Oradur-sur-Glane and Lidice found out. Young German boys were used by the Nazi Party in the final days of the Battle of Berlin. The bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed thousands of children. The crimes committed during the Holocaust involved countless thousands of children. The first experimental 'gas chambers' were used on German children who were mentally incapacitated. Joseph Mengele specifically targeted children for his experiments at Auschwitz <sup>7</sup>.

### 3.2 Yugoslav Wars

The breakdown of the former Yugoslavia came together with wars during the period 1991-2001, concerning the sovereignty of the current states that consisted it as well as national minorities, ethnical identity and nationalism issues. These wars were separate as events but all linked in essence. More than 330,000 people who were forced to flee their homes during these wars are still classified as refugees or displaced people. Between 1991 and 1995, some 200,000 were killed and an estimated 2.7 million made homeless – the greatest number in Europe since the Second World War. UN bodies and agencies have provided help to these people in many forms, helping them rebuild their old lives, as much as possible. Of course, a tremendous amount of the victims (killed or displaced) of the war, were children. This has been a major wound for the latest generations in Balkans <sup>8</sup>. More specifically, according to surveys documenting the impact of Bosnian war (during the breakdown of Yugoslavia) on children, almost 94% of them seemed to be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder <sup>9</sup>. Significant life activity affecting sadness and anxiety were reported by 90.6% and 95.5% of the children, respectively. The majority of children growing up during the conflict was faced with family separations, bereavement, direct contact with war and combat and extreme deprivation, but as researches found, children with greater mental traumas were those who witnesses death, injury or torture of a family member.

### 3.3 Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was a long-lasting and bloody war, between the communist government of North Vietnam (with the Soviet Union and its allies on their side) and South Vietnam (allied with the U.S. and its allies). The war was also conducted within the frame of the ongoing Cold War. The human costs were huge for all parts involved. It was not until 1995 that Vietnam official announced the esteemed number of war victims: nearly 2 million civilians, many of them children and some 1.1 million North Vietnamese and Viet Cong fighters <sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> History Learning Site. (2017). *Children and World War Two - History Learning Site*. [online] Available at: <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-two/children-and-world-war-two/> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>8</sup> Dhumieres, M. (2017). *Suffering goes on for 330,000 refugees of the Yugoslav war*. [online] The Independent. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/suffering-goes-on-for-330000-refugees-of-the-yugoslav-war-7622108.html> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>9</sup> Goldstein, R., Wampler, N. and Wise, P. (2017). *War Experiences and Distress Symptoms of Bosnian Children*.

<sup>10</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. (2017). *Vietnam War | Facts, Summary, Casualties, & Combatants*. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

The conflict caused huge refugee waves. A mass exodus in 1975 of people loyal to the South Vietnamese cause was followed by another wave in 1978 of “boat people,” refugees fleeing the economic restructuring imposed by the communist regime. These people, of course, experienced harsh conditions, making children an easy target to all kinds of assault and harassment <sup>11</sup>.

It should also be stated that, during the Vietnam War, chemicals were widely used on both people and the environment. Beyond the casualties at the time it was used, its disastrous impact is visible even today, since many children on Vietnam are still being born with diseases and disabilities related to the harmful chemicals carried out during the conflict <sup>12</sup>.

### **3.4 Syrian Civil War**

The Syrian Civil war is a conflict that started in 2011, during demonstrations against the President Bashar al-Assad. The ongoing civil war has been the biggest source of refugees and displaced people in recent history, with more than 4.5 million people having fled Syria since the start of the conflict, most of them women and children. A great number of Syrian refugees have sought safety in Europe, causing political divisions and rise of political extremism.

The UN issued that about 70% of people do not have access to adequate drinking water, one in three people are unable to meet their basic food needs, more than 2 million children are out of school, and four out of five people live in poverty. Besides the imminent threat of the war, refugee children are hard to adapt to the hosting societies, especially due to the exclusion they face from local communities.

After years of continuous conflict, Syria consists one of the most dangerous places for children to grow up to. Children casualty rates are the highest recorded in any recent conflict around the area: the UN estimates that officially at least 10.000 children have lost their lives, without mentioning the unaccountable injury rates <sup>13</sup>. The actual number is probably much higher, and is not going to stop increasing unless drastic measures are taken by the global community.

## **4. Legal Framework**

International humanitarian law creates a broad framework for the protection of children. In the event of armed conflicts, international or non-international, children are protected from the *general protection* provided for civilians, which are not involved in the hostilities. Moreover, considering the vulnerability of children, they are granted *special protection* regardless if they take direct part in the hostilities or not.

### **4.1. Geneva Conventions of 1949 & Additional Protocols**

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 consist of four treaties and three additional protocols and contain the most important rules and standards for humanitarian treatment in war. According to Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols, in both international and non-international armed conflicts fundamental guarantees, such as the right to life and prohibitions on

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<sup>11</sup> HISTORY.com. (2017). *Vietnam War - Vietnam War - HISTORY.com*. [online] Available at: <http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>12</sup> Rohn, A. (2017). What was the impact of the Vietnam War? - The Vietnam War. [online] The Vietnam War. Available at: <https://thevietnamwar.info/vietnam-war-impact/> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>13</sup> Unicef.org. (2017). [online] Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Under\\_Siege\\_March\\_2014.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Under_Siege_March_2014.pdf) [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

compulsion and torture, are provided to civilians, including children. Attack on the civilian population is forbidden according to these conventions<sup>14</sup>.

Despite the general protection that Geneva Conventions provide to all civilians, children are guaranteed special care and protection. According to article 77 of the Additional Protocol I: "Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The Parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason"<sup>15</sup>. This special protection includes, among others, provisions for assistance, identification and family reunification, education as well as exception from death penalty.

It is an undeniable fact that children frequently participate in armed hostilities, either due to forced recruitment in national armed forces or to assist combatants. The Additional Protocols to Geneva Conventions cover such situations by obliging States to take all feasible measures to prevent children under 15 from taking direct part in hostilities. They explicitly prohibit their recruitment and participation in armed forces and encourage Parties to give priority in recruiting among those aged from 15 to 18 to the oldest<sup>16</sup>.

#### **4.2. Convention on the Rights of the Child & Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which has been almost universally ratified, covers all the fundamental rights of the child. The Convention acknowledges children's right to be free from abuse and neglect, sexual exploitation, trafficking, abduction, torture, deprivation of liberty and other forms of maltreatment at all times, and provides special protections during times of conflict. More specifically, article 38 urges States Parties to take all necessary measures to protect and care for children affected by war. Furthermore, the aforementioned article endorses the obligation to forbid the direct involvement of those aged of less than 15 years in hostilities and that priority be given in recruitment to the oldest of those aged between 15 and 18<sup>17</sup>. Thus, its provisions reaffirm those enshrined in article 77 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions.

On 25 May 2000, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict was adopted. This Optional Protocol established a stringent framework which strengthened the protection for children in armed conflicts. More specifically, its provisions prohibited direct involvement in hostilities of members of armed forces below the age of 18 and the compulsory recruitment into the armed forces of persons below the age of 18. Additionally, it outlawed the recruitment (compulsory or voluntary) of persons under the age of 18 by armed groups distinct from the national armed forces<sup>18</sup>.

#### **4.3. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**

The Statute of the ICC defined rape or other forms of sexual violence, conscription or use in hostilities of children under the age of 15 as well as attacks against schools by national armed

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<sup>14</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross. (2017). *The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols*. [online] Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/geneva-conventions-1949-additional-protocols> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>15</sup> Icr.org. (2017). [online] Available at: [https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc\\_002\\_0321.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0321.pdf) [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ohchr.org. (2017). *OHCHR / Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>18</sup> Ohchr.org. (2017). *OHCHR / Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OPACCRC.aspx> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

forces a war crime<sup>19</sup>. The classification of such actions as war crimes, the gravest crimes in international law, means that those who commit them can be persecuted as criminally responsible for the actions of a country or its soldiers without limitation.

#### **4.4.1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees & the 1967 Protocol**

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol set the main principles concerning the right and protection of refugees. By defining the term ‘refugee’ and consolidating refugees’ rights as well as States’ legal obligations to protect them, the Convention establishes a securing framework for displaced people<sup>20</sup>. These rights include, among others, the right to seek asylum, the right not to be returned to a country where the refugee’s life or freedom would be in danger (non-refoulement), the right to non-discrimination, the right to documentation and to access work and education and the right to freedom of movement, to access courts and practise one’s religion.

### **5. International Organs and Bodies**

#### **5.1. Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) consists an elected committee of 18 independent experts. It was established in 1991, according to Article 43 of the UNCRC and has a monitoring role in order to ensure the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the implementation of the Optional Protocols to the Convention by its member states<sup>21</sup>. All State parties to the Convention and its Optional Protocols have the obligation to submit detailed, periodic reports to the Committee regarding the implementation of the children’s right at national level. Not only does the reporting process constitute a useful tool to examine States’ compliance to the Convention, but also it functions as an effective mechanism for policy development in the field of children’s rights as well to promote their respect. Furthermore, since 2014, apart from its main activity, the Committee has the ability to consider individual complaints, submitted by citizens, concerning violations of the rights safeguarded in the Convention and the Optional Protocols to it.

#### **5.2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also referred to as UN Refugee Agency, constitutes a United Nations programme, which was created on 14 December 1950<sup>22</sup>. The agency is mandated to initiate and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and assist in resolving their problems. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees, to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. Moreover, the organisation promotes the implementation of international conventions protecting refugees’ rights, controls states’ obligations to comply with international law and provides the necessary support to refugees, including basic supplies, shelter and healthcare.

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<sup>19</sup> Icc-cpi.int. (2017). [online] Available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/ADD16852-AEE9-4757-ABE7-9CDC7CF02886/283503/RomeStatutEng1.pdf> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>20</sup> Refugees, U. (2017). *The 1951 Refugee Convention*. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>21</sup> Ohchr.org. (2017). OHCHR | *Introduction*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/CRCIntro.aspx> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

<sup>22</sup> Refugees, U. (2017). *History of UNHCR*. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/history-of-unhcr.html> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2017].

## **6. Discussion of the Topic**

The issue of protection of children during armed conflicts can be divided into two main areas of concern, the first one being the physical and social protection of children present in the time of the conflict and the second one the protection of children who escaped the catastrophic consequences of war and are seeking asylum to another country.

### **6.1 Children in Armed Conflict Zones**

#### **6.1.1 The Issue of Child Soldiers**

Despite the absence of exact figures, it is estimated that thousands of children are serving as soldiers in armed conflicts around the world <sup>23</sup>. These boys and girls, some as young as 8 years old, serve in government forces and armed militia. Children become associated with armed forces in numerous ways. Some children are abducted or forcibly conscripted, others join armed groups out of desperation in order to escape poverty. Regardless of their involvement, child soldiers are exposed to acute violence and inhuman treatment. They may fight on the front lines, participate in suicide missions, act as spies or forced into sexual slavery. War violates every right of a child. In cases of prolonged armed conflicts, children experience multiple assaults, sometimes lasting the length of their childhood. What is even worrying is that the number of children recruited in conflicts across the Middle East and North Africa has more than doubled in a year, according to United Nations analysis. The huge increase in child soldiers in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and other countries follows years of ongoing violence and displacement. Such situations entail irreversible traumas for their physical and mental well-being and development. It is imperative that national governments and the international community take immediate action so as to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed forces.

Regardless of how children are recruited and of their roles, child soldiers are victims, whose participation in conflict bears serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being. They are subjected to horrifying abuse and witness death, killing, and sexual violence. Many of them are forced to commit violent acts and suffer serious long-term psychological consequences. The reintegration of these children into society consists an essential part of the work to assist child soldiers begin their lives anew. Within the UN system, UNICEF initiates the reintegration process of former child soldiers and its main priority is to prepare them for a return to peaceful life and childhood. This process constitutes a long, healing procedure, which requires extensive support from the international community. Psychosocial support and education training are important aspects of reintegration programmes. Reuniting children with their families and communities are also an essential part of the reintegration process.

#### **6.1.2 The Destructive Impact of Armed Conflicts on Education**

Education plays an important role in children's life so as to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for their development to reach their full potentials. In times of emergencies and armed conflicts children's education are disrupted either temporarily or worse through their childhood or lifetime. In conflict zones, education is in jeopardy, as schools are damaged and the lives of teachers and students are threatened. Bombings of schools, kidnappings, illegal arrests, torture and killings of students and teachers are only some of the assaults that hinder children's education. According to UNICEF's report, "27 million children of primary and

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<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2017). *Facts About Child Soldiers*. [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/12/03/facts-about-child-soldiers> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2017].

lower secondary school age are out of school in 24 conflict-affected countries”<sup>24</sup>. Children with low levels of education are at great risk of exploitation.

Education is particularly significant during armed conflicts. It represents a state of normalcy in the chaos of war. Children who attend school benefit from the regular contacts with their peers and teachers and have the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge necessary for their survival. Formal education could further benefit the whole community, since the ability to maintain an uninterrupted educational system demonstrates a strong faith and confidence in the future. It instils the idea of protecting higher values that education promotes. Thus, it is paramount to ensure that children receive quality education through relief programmes even during prolonged conflicts.

### **6.1.3 The Issue of Healthcare and Nutrition**

Among the thousands of children killed during armed conflicts as casualties of warfare, the number of those which die from malnutrition and diseases is alarming. According to World Health Organisation, approximately 3.1 million children die from malnutrition every year. Armed conflicts, particularly extended ones, result to destruction of agriculture infrastructures, health services, water and sanitation systems, which has severe repercussions on children’s health. Many die due to diminished proportion of food intake, while others affected by malnutrition, are unable to resist curable childhood diseases or infections.

To worsen the situation, health facilities are destroyed or put out of service owing to attacks. Moreover, the shortages of health workers and personnel renders the health services insufficient. Children are mainly affected from the lack of vaccinations, which exposes them to diseases that could be prevented otherwise. This is why it is more than essential that the health sector continues to safeguard children’s access to healthcare.

## **6.2 Child Refugees**

### **6.2.1 Difficulties in Receiving Refugee Status and Receiving Conditions**

Armed conflicts internationally threaten millions, which have no other choice but to refuge and seek protection to another country. Almost half of the total forcibly displaced people worldwide are children. Hence, children are more vulnerable, taking into consideration more practical issues too, like circumstances such as increased family separation and difficulties in obtaining birth certificates. Unregistered children face difficulties at each stage of their life, including higher risks of illegal adoption and trafficking as infants, denials of health and education in childhood, early marriage and, possibly, the inability to be recognized as a national<sup>25</sup>.

There can also be difficulties emerging to relevant aspects of their lives as migrants, for example gaining civil status documentation in many contexts. Internally displaced and conflict-affected families report significant obstacles in obtaining, renewing and replacing civil status and identity documents, while refugees are often unfamiliar with the procedures to do so in the new states they reside to.

### **6.2.2 The Issue of Unaccompanied Minors**

Another major problem inextricably linked to the creation of refugee waves is unaccompanied minors. An unaccompanied minor is a child who is separated from both parents and generally

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<sup>24</sup> UNICEF. (2017). *27 million children out of school in conflict zones – UNICEF*. [online] Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_100857.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_100857.html) [Accessed 5 Nov. 2017].

<sup>25</sup> Refugees, U. (2017). *Our Children, Our Future: Belonging and Legal Identity*. [online] UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/regional-expert-meeting-on-belonging-and-legal-identity-in-the-arab-region.html/> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2017].

not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so. According to UNICEF's data, in 2016, 92% of all children reaching Italian seas were unaccompanied and/or separated. Reports add that 170.000 unaccompanied children applied for asylum in 2016-17. Unaccompanied children also make numbers referring to lost children incidents. In January 2016, EU's criminal intelligence agencies have reported the disappearance of 10.000 children since their entrance in Europe<sup>26</sup>. This does not necessarily mean that they have been abducted, exploited or killed, but it is a further sign of insufficient documentation and civil registration mechanisms. An effective protection and assistance must be provided by every host country to unaccompanied children in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

Firstly, unaccompanied minors arriving to any port should be immediately detected by the local authorities and dealt with on a priority basis. Children ought to be registered through special interviews and after their social and medical background are specified they should be appointed to a guardian or adviser, as they are not yet legally independent and generally able to take care of themselves. Asylum procedures should always be more easily accessible to them and under no circumstances should unaccompanied children be held under detention<sup>27</sup>. If their family have been split during a transportation and can be found in another county the biggest possible effort should be put, in order for the child to be reunited with its family members.

### **6.2.3 Access to Healthcare and Education**

It has been said that the best way to break the vicious circle of the refugee crisis, is through education and healthcare<sup>28</sup>. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, clearly states that "each child has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health." Migrant children should have access to effective and sufficient health services just like national children do. The Convention sets out the duty for states to supply healthcare services to kids that have suffered in any way. Of course this applies to mental health as well, given that the majority of these children have lived through traumatic, war experiences that they will probably carry with them for the rest of their lives. All the above, through the assistance of qualified psycho-social counselling.

According to UNHCR's statistics, only half of the refugee children population refugee have access to primary education, as refugee population is 5 times more likely than average civilians to be out of school<sup>29</sup>. As specifically mentioned in Article 10 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children internationally should be provided basic education by the asylum country, no matter their status. This of course requires immediate and effective registration of the children to the educational system through corresponding authorities. Emphasis should be given to the way that education of the new state is provided to these children, meaning it must be done with total respect to the child's cultural identity such as customs, religion, traditions and maintenance of their mother tongue, among others.

It is an undeniable fact that children are highly resilient and somehow they always manage to find ways to cope with the face of hardship. They draw strength from their families and find joy in friendships. By learning in school, participating in sports activities and having the space and time to explore and use some of their personal talents and skills, children can be actively

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<sup>26</sup> Townsend, M. (2017). *10,000 refugee children are missing, says Europol*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/30/fears-for-missing-child-refugees> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2017].

<sup>27</sup> Unhcr.org. (2017). [online] Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3d4f91cf4.pdf> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2017].

<sup>28</sup> Company (2017). *Provide Education and Health Care for the Refugee Children in Syria* - *NYTimes.com*. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/04/29/finding-solutions-for-syrias-growing-refugee-crisis/provide-education-and-health-care-for-the-refugee-children-in-syria> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2017].

<sup>29</sup> Unhcr.org. (2017). [online] Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/59b696f44.pdf> [Accessed 5 Nov. 2017].

involved within their local communities, wherever that be. International community needs to work with them in order to help them empower themselves and advocate their rights<sup>30</sup>.

## 7. Questions to be addressed

- Are the existing measures and legal framework adequate to safeguard children rights in times of war?
- What is the role of governments in establishing a safe environment for children in conflict areas?
- What is the role of intergovernmental organizations, especially UNICEF, and NGOs in these fields?
- What is the responsibility of hosting states towards child refugees and are provisions for healthcare and education adequate?
- What should humanitarian aid assisting children in conflict areas include?
- How is possible to achieve the integration of child refugees in local communities?
- Which are the main threats girls face in war zones and refugees' camps and how could they be mitigated?

## 8. Conclusion

Taking all the aforementioned into consideration, children are at the same time one of the most vulnerable and resilient social groups. It is an undeniable fact that instead of being granted the best possible living conditions anywhere they live, their rights are still being violated today in every possible way. Their needs should be prioritized in every possible manner. We should ensure their incessant education and encourage them to train and improve themselves daily, given the fact that they are the foundation to every society and constitute our future.

It is under the responsibilities of the UN and especially UNICEF to make sure that these needs are met as well as encourage States to invest on the most hopeful part of their population, children. Taking into account that every country's culture and traditions vary considerably, the process of granting children with a safe and meaningful childhood, is, therefore, to differ. Thus, delegates of each country are more than encouraged to extend their research beyond this study guide and make sure they have outlined their country's profile, policy and legal framework regarding the issue.

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