**Forum:** Human Right Council

**Issue:** Improving outcomes for refugee children

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**Introduction**

*“We owe our children—the most vulnerable citizens in any society—a life free from violence and fear.” – Nelson Mandela*

The struggles of refugees and asylum seekers have been a long-lasting problem. Whenever a conflict takes place, regardless of it being a civil war, riot, mass persecution or a national armed conflict, it will always trigger new refugees and people displaced. Yet, only recently did the issue become a pressing global concern as the total number of refugees almost doubled in the past decades, according to a report from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). A part of the reason is the increased frequency of global conflicts, and this is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic that started at the beginning of 2020 since countries became more unwilling to accept and host refugees in their countries. In 2022, the forcibly displaced population reached roughly 100 million, which was an over 10% increase from the previous year.

Refugees mainly fled from Asia and Africa, particularly in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Research conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis shows that Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia are the top five countries of origin of those refugees, and these countries are all war-torn and less economically developed countries (LEDCs). Thus, it can be concluded that conflicts and poverty are the two root causes of the creation of refugees.

Currently, under the global refugee crisis, the proportion of refugees under the age of 18 is alarming. Statistics from UNICEF shows that children accounted for almost half of the total refugee population and the increasing trend shows no signs of halting. The impacts of war and turmoil on refugee children are detrimental as they are deprived of safe accommodation and daily necessities such as food supplies required for their wellbeing and they constantly live in fear of violence from a very young age. Therefore, this can not only lead to physical weaknesses and malnutrition but also deterioration of mental health for those refugee children. Meanwhile, the lack of proper education for refugee children is also a key concern as currently almost 48 per cent of refugee children remain out of school. This would lead to a lack of job opportunities for those refugees when they arrive in the hosting countries, which again puts them in the poverty trap and may prevent them from leaving the vicious refugee cycle.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Armed conflicts**

Wars, conflicts and acts of aggression between sovereign nations. It can also take place in the form of internal conflicts (civil war) and armed action by sovereign armies of insurgent groups. Due to its involvement with weaponry, armed conflicts often lead to the devastating loss of civilian lives, mass displacement and violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

**Asylum**

A form of protection which allows an individual to remain in other countries instead of being removed (deported) to a country where he or she fears persecution or harm. Asylum seekers are not classified and qualified as refugees until they receive asylum.

**Asylum seeker**

Someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed.

**Displacement**

Involuntary movement of people due to persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations.

**Internally Displaced Person**

People who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, 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 border.

**Refugee**

People who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.

**Resettlement**

The transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them as refugees and ultimately grant them permanent settlement.

**Sanctuary**

Place of refuge provided to asylum seekers who seek protection.

**Background**

**Child Refugees**

Just in 2021, 86.9 million people, of whom 36.5 million were children, were forced to leave their homes and become refugees due to armed conflicts or persecution. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 25 people were displaced every minute in the aftermath of conflict and wars in 2018. In retrospect, while World War Ⅱ alone led to 40 million displacements, in the decades during and after the Vietnam war, between 200,000 and 400,000 refugees died as they were compelled to leave the war zones by boats to cross unsafe waters in search of asylum. With continuing and emerging conflicts, the refugee crisis is only getting worse and more severe in recent years. Millions of children are caught in this dreadful state of becoming child refugees.

**Main Causes of the Refugee Crisis**

 Persecutions and internal strife are the biggest reasons for the refugee crisis, as quoted by three out of five major refugee crisis-ridden countries, Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar. Persecutions occur for varied issues of religion, nationality, race, ethnicity, or politics. People suffer significantly from persecution as invading forces constantly violate their human rights. Persecution reaches out by altering the landscape of people’s daily life, its impact ranging from their workplaces to places of worship, to schools, to public and private spaces, causing physical and psychological damage to the affected. With the continuous pressure of the constant violation of human rights, many of the affected decide to leave their homes or even their country to liberate themselves from severe persecution.

Furthermore, armed conflict is another big cause of refugees. Armed conflicts are not specified as conflicts between two or more countries but also include groups within the same country or region. The destructiveness of the war forces people to seek security and flee the country. Not only do armed conflicts include wars, but also ethnic, religious, and tribal violence. Such violence usually leads to a civil war, causing more displacement of people worldwide. These refugees, forcibly displaced, are put into a refugee camp and live in limbo in a stateless condition. Currently, the refugees and displaced people from regions of armed conflict are being brought into focus as the Syrian civil war, and the Russia-Ukraine war has highlighted the importance of the noticeable number of refugees coming.

Refugee children, who have no say or power in such situations, are a great concern in the current refugee crisis. Currently, refugee children make up more than half of the refugee population, and most of the time, they spend their entire childhood in distant camps, far removed from their homes. Due to the intensified persecution and internal strife these days, refugee children are often separated even from their families amidst the chaos of having to flee quickly from the sites of armed conflict and persecution. Despite the family's will to stay together, many families have broken apart. In the process, these children face the dangers of violence, abuse, or human trafficking. The separation isolates the refugee children from their natural sources of protection, thus making them extremely vulnerable to human traffickers, abuse, and exploitation are more likely to become victims of serious crimes.

**Difficulties faced by refugees**

Despite the continued attempts to improve the world’s common perception of refugees or how they are viewed, the refugees entering a new country are still struggling to become a part of the community. Many communities are unaware of refugees' potential difficulties, leading to discrimination against them. Granted that the issue of discrimination that refugees face is complex, awareness of the difficulties and challenges they have overcome and continue to face might alleviate this negative perception. Especially in the European regions, many communities show prejudice over the refugees' religious or ethnic groups. The communities may often stereotype the refugees as prospective terrorists and discriminate against the refugees through such means of economic activities, education, and settlement.

***Economic difficulties***

While the refugees are valuable resources for the labor force, they are constantly struggling to find their ground in the country’s economy and gain economic stability. Often, the language barrier or a lack of education are the factors that lead to the refugees’ high unemployment rate. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), refugees are the most vulnerable in a nation’s economy and labor market. In comparison to the unemployment rate of the native European people, the refugees have a 9% higher rate of unemployment. Even if the refugees find a job, it is most likely that they will end up as victims of labor exploitation, where they face issues such as underpayment, risks of injury, and violation of rights. As 83% of the refugees are still hosted in low- and middle-income countries, the problem of refugees’ economic stability persists. These economic difficulties for the parent refugees heavily impact the refugee children. When their parents do not have sufficient money, it indicates that the children will barely have access to good quality of life, such as adequate food sources and quality education. In some extreme cases, child labor may be where the children are exploited to work in horrible conditions. While this may contribute to the overall income of the refugee children’s families, it will negatively impact their mental and physical health.

***Educational difficulties***

7.4 million refugee children do not receive education even though they have the right to receive one. Regarding the dangerous situations in the refugee’s origin nations, most refugees have not received a proper education. It is highly crucial for the youths to receive education as it enables them to know and learn about how the world functions and builds a foundation for their future. Currently, only 61% of refugee children receive primary education, while 90% of children globally receive primary education. It becomes more challenging for refugee children to receive higher education as they age. Despite the desperate need for quality education for refugees, it is not getting fulfilled. There are various obstacles to why refugee children have difficulty getting a quality education. In refugee camps, it is difficult because they lack professionals who can teach the children. During the refugee children’s settlement in a new country, they often lack certificates or documents to enroll in a school because they have left everything in their homes. Even worse, when documents are ready, some host countries may refuse to accept the certification because of the refugee’s country of origin. As emphasized by the UNHCR, education is crucial because it protects refugee children from soldier recruitment or other dangerous exploitations and empowers the youth to strive for a better life.

***Physical difficulties***

Refugees face a ceaseless struggle with housing and receiving welfare care services as they enter the country. As refugees earn less money compared to the citizens, it is tough for them to afford a safe house, so they search for an adequate-level place where they can at least provide themselves with proper shelter. In such inadequate homes, refugees often find themselves stuck in insecure or unhygienic situations. Refugees become vulnerable to many diseases without the ability to afford warm and secure houses and clean water sources. Especially for the refugee children, whose immune systems are still developing, the unsanitary conditions are fatal threats. Refugee children are exposed to diseases such as COVID-19, Human Immunodeficiency Virus type 1 (HIV), tuberculosis, malaria, and other parasitic infections, which puts their lives at great risk. Likewise, in these strained circumstances, the refugees struggle to provide their children with balanced nutrition during a crucial development period. They might eat the same food for weeks, which leads to malnutrition.

***Psychological difficulties***

Moreover, psychological healthcare is another difficulty for the refugees in promoting their well-being. Since many refugees are unaware of the policies of medical services, and some have financial issues, the refugees, on average, appear to have significantly delayed medical care and assistance compared to the citizens. Easier and more efficient access to medical aid for refugees would really support the refugees who are burdened. Child refugees suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PSTD), as from witness to violence, subject to abuse, and experiencing isolation through separation from families, would need the most support in recovering some sense of normalcy and assurance if they are not to be permanently afflicted.

**Major Parties Involved**

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

The UNHCR, created in 1950, is a United Nations organization that supports the millions of people who fled the country, lost their homes, or were displaced due to a war conflict. The UNHCR aims to secure the rights of the refugees and further assist the refugees in seeking asylum. They provide the pathway from the refugees’ harshly destroyed homes to a new permanent home, where they can seek safety and security. Throughout their rehabilitation, the UNHCR ensures that no discrimination occurs during the process, preventing any discriminatory actions on race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, and acknowledges the refugee’s right to return or to remain.

**United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

UNICEF was founded in 1946 in the aftermath of World War Ⅱ. In general, UNICEF serves the purpose of removing the potential challenges in a children’s path, including discrimination, violence, poverty, and disease. They ensure that all children receive proper care to have a solid foundation to survive in the community. In specific, UNICEF provides humanitarian supplies for children in refugee camps. They provide a safe environment for the children and their guardians to live in, as well as cooperate with the national or local governments to secure the children's rights through placing specific laws or policies that address the needs of refugee children.

**Syria**

Syria is one of the major countries regarding the number of refugees. The Syrian Civil war is the biggest cause of refugees in Syria. There is an estimated amount of 6.9 million internally displaced refugees and another 5.6 million Internationally Displaced People (IDP) solely due to the Syrian Civil war. The Syrian refugee crisis occurred in 2011, and the country is continuing its state of suffering.

**Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has a long history of violence and refugees. For more than 40 years, Afghan refugees have been suffering from displacement issues and are still one of the most prominent groups involved in displacement situations. Since their first violence in 1978 (The Saur Revolution) until the recent day, an estimated total of 24 million Afghan refugees have been recorded. The Afghan refugees were forcibly displaced not only because of political instability issues but also of natural disasters and food insecurity. The Taliban have also taken control over Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, in August 2021 and are intensifying the violence in the nation.

**Ukraine**

Ukraine is currently under a refugee crisis. Since the invasion by Russian Federation in February 2022, more than 5.3 million people have fled the country and were either internally or internationally displaced. As of March 2022, the United Nations claimed that, in an estimate, every child per second in Ukraine is currently becoming a refugee. The Russia-Ukrainian war is only making the situation worse for the refugees. There are rights of Ukrainian Refugees that come under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), including such crucial rights to stay within the European Union (EU), to receive health care and education, and to proper means of employment.

**Germany**

Germany is the biggest refugee-hosting country in Europe. Just by June of 2021, Germany recorded 1.24 million refugees and an additional 233,000 asylum seekers. Germany is a good country for refugees to survive as they offer policies such as offering free welfare services and financial support in terms of pocket money for the socially underprivileged, respecting and ensuring the refugees' safety, just like any other German citizens. Germany even protracts to collaborating with diverse refugee-helping organizations and continues to raise awareness about the refugees and improve their situations.

**Türkiye**

Türkiye, accumulatively, is the country that hosts the largest number of refugees. As of 2022, Türkiye hosts 3.8 million refugees in their country. Türkiye is a party of the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as the 1967 Protocol, and they have been making continuous efforts to make the country a better place for refugees. According to the UNHCR, Türkiye has made adequate reforms to its laws and institutions so that a more efficient national asylum system could be set up for the incoming refugees. Their laws ensured that the human rights of the refugees were respected thoroughly. Even further ahead, for the 1.2 million refugee children in Türkiye, of many who suffered from psychological traumas, the government has provided professional psychological treatment and quality education to improve the outcomes of those future adults. Türkiye provided 56 schools around the refugee residencies where the refugee children could get educated.

**Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

**Education**

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Refugee Protocol, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, education is a fundamental “human right”. Unfortunately, the reality is that, among the 7.9 million refugee children of school age, only half of them have attended school or were enrolled in some form sort of education program. Meanwhile, the refugee children receiving higher education beyond secondary school is extremely limited at barely 3%, making it extremely difficult for those refugee children to find employment in the future to be self-sustaining in the hosting countries.

Therefore, to resolve the issue of a lack of proper education for children, especially refugee children, UNICEF has established many education programs all over the world by collaborating with governments, particularly in low-income countries. For example, UNICEF funded a Makani center in Amman, the Capital of Jordan, in 2015, which eventually give nearly half a million children of all nationalities the opportunities to receive an education. Those centers are comparatively cheaper to build and maintain compared to ordinary schools, yet they provide sufficient academic support to refugee children and allow them to learn a wide range of skills and explore their interests in art, music and sports. Meanwhile, UNICEF also assisted the Jordan government to initiate a learning recovery program in 2021 that aimed to recover refugee children from education losses caused by school closures since around 29% of learning time has been lost in low-income countries in Asia due to COVID-19, according to the Asian Development Bank. It’s also crucial to acknowledge that all of those education programs couldn’t be carried out effectively and successfully without the support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit agencies. For example, “Save the Children” has made remarkable accomplishments through fundraising by delivering education to 273 million children in the last decade, including many refugee children.

**Health**

The physical health problems of refugee children are also a major issue as they often lack proper medical care and diets with sufficient nutrition that is required for their intellectual and physical growth. Therefore, international agencies like UNICEF act as platforms to promote joint efforts for the health of refugee children. For instance, in response to the refugee crisis in Iran’s neighboring country, Afghanistan, UNICEF Iran has actively cooperated with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Relief International, and many other NGOs to distribute hygiene kits to Afghan refugee communities, including 800 for refugee households in Kerman province and 2000 in Yazd province. Those hygiene items are extremely useful not just because they strengthen the refugee children’s health and prevent the spread of diseases, but they also have positive effects on avoiding absenteeism of school-age refugee children and thus leading to better outcomes in future careers. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is also an example of international development agencies that has provided almost $690 million in food assistance alone in 2018 and has been doing so for the past 60 years.

Research also shows that because of past trauma of displacement, refugee children are more mentally vulnerable compared to other children and are more likely to be subjected to stress-related illnesses, such as sleeping and eating disorders and separation fears. Thus, many organizations are currently working on the support of refugee children’s psychological well-being. Amna, formerly known as Refugee Trauma Initiative, have been providing a variety of sessions like storytelling, singing and acting to refugee children all around the world since 2016, and those activities are all set based on the “Baytna” early childhood development model that can strengthen the mental health of refugee children.

**Possible Solutions**

There are numerous solutions that have the potential to solve the refugee crisis, protect the refugee’s rights, and ultimately improve the outcomes for the refugee children. Immediate measures should be taken to address this issue; hence, these three possible solutions will suit solving the problem.

* One of the possible solutions to this issue is implementing integration programs for refugees in host countries. As integrating naturally and efficiently into the community is a struggle for refugees, a method of helping them to integrate must exist. As noted previously, language barriers and communication are an obstacle in many refugees’ life. Regarding this, language support programs for refugees can be one way. Refugees can improve their communication skills by taking free language learning classes with multi-level options for fast and slow learners. Even more so, if these can be further tailored to include not just language for conducting daily life but also field and profession-specific or trade-specific language skills, they may be better equipped to undertake work that puts to use their skill sets and improve earning capacity. They could then continue a proper daily life just like any other citizens. The purpose of these programs should prioritize the adaptation of the refugees. Furthermore, when it comes to the youth segment of the refugee population, the programs should not force the refugees, especially the youths, but instead, encourage them so that they are motivated to assimilate themselves into society actively. An educational space or program could also be set up for the youths. Refugee children need to be educated adequately because they will serve as future contributors to a nation’s economy and society. The education programs can possibly include the core subjects such as Math, English, Language, Science, and Social Studies so that refugee children are knowledgeable in the foundational fields of academics. Since these support programs require financial resources and volunteers, those things should be considered when going into detail about executing or implementing the solution, to the greatest extent possible, building a synergy between the refugee and local populations.
* Along with integration programs may come welfare support for refugees in the community. The welfare systems may include physical and psychological support, specifically medical care. There should be welfare for basic necessities such as food, clean water, shelter, and safety, as children can focus on learning and being healthy only if their basic needs are fulfilled. For instance, for those refugee children with malnutrition, dietary change is necessary, so food with high energy and calories can be provided. Also, as many refugee children suffer psychological trauma from witnessing or experiencing violence or separation from their families, providing therapeutic services would assist them. Establishing such welfare support will protect the rights of the refugees exposed to armed conflicts. In this type of solution, medical policies, insurance, and the availability of a medical labor force must be considered. Furthermore, financial welfare support can be rewarded to the refugees. With access to money, refugees will become more secure and adapt well to society. The money could potentially be utilized to nurture the children by providing sufficient food sources and education. Financial support may come in the form of monetary funds, either funded by the community, government, or an organization. The amount of money rewarded can take the host country’s economic situation into measure.
* Finally, raising awareness is a crucial step in addressing this child refugee problem. Raising awareness is a suitable solution to almost all kinds of problems, but awareness is vital in this issue of refugees and refugee children’s future outcomes. Raising awareness will allow a community to act for an improved living for the refugees. There is a severe need for the perceptions of refugees to be changed. These kinds of perceptions descended from the adults and elderly, and since the world is evolving, the perceptions now need to develop too. Campaigns and informational posters are effective methods of spreading awareness for adult society. As the youths need to be aware of the issue, social media platforms can work to publish refugee news. Even further, improving the refugee situation could be included in school curriculums. It may even be possible for UN organizations or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to establish an educational program for communities to spread knowledge about the current crisis and possible methods to prevent the situation from worsening, as raising awareness can help to raise money to assist those in need.

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**Appendix or Appendices**

1. <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends.html?query=UNHCR%20Global%20Trends>

*Annual UNHCR reports that record latest statistics on global refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people and the efforts made by UNHCR.*

1. <https://www.unhcr.org/5f4f9a2b4>

*Annual UNHCR report specialized in the education of refugee children.*