

Committee: Special Committee on the protection of minorities

Topic: The question of the treatment of children in refugee camps

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Summary

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees [UNHCR], there are and 26.4 million refugees in the world, around half of which are children.

Children who are in refugee camps alone or who are traveling alone are much more susceptible to physical and emotional trauma.

Children come into refugee camps having had years of their basic education disrupted, and are forced to catch up while also adapting to their new lives.

Some groups of refugee children face specific risks, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated from family members and those who have been living in refugee camps for extended periods of time.

Refugee camps are not representations of natural communities which are healthy to grow up and develop in. This means that long stays in camps should be avoided, and solutions for children in refugee camps should be found as soon as they can be.

Refugee children who stay in camps for prolonged periods of time, without being exposed to normal cultural and social patterns may face serious difficulty adjusting to a new society.

The issue of refugee children and the treatment that they receive in refugee camps is forever growing and it is important to face the issue head on in order for it to be solved.

Further research and regulations are required to ensure that children who do end up in refugee camps are being treated well and do not stay there for prolonged periods of time.

Definition of Key Terms

Refugee - refugees are persons who are outside of their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution conflict generalized violence or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and as a result require international protection.

Refugee camp - refugee camps are temporary settlements created to provide refugees with immediate aid and protection.

Minority Group - a national or ethnic, religious or linguistic group whose members share a common identity and are fewer in numbers than the rest of the population.

Internally displaced person - someone who is forced to flee their home but who remains within their country's borders.

Asylum seeker - a person who has applied for asylum and is waiting for a decision as to whether or not they are a refugee.

Background Information

In most groups of refugees, more than half of the population are children. Children depend on adults not only for physical and mental support, but also for their development. The disruption of these refugee children's lives due to violence disruption of families and lack of community have huge impacts on their physical and mental well being. From early ages refugee children are witness to violence crime and war.

Many children arrive in refugee camps with their education already disrupted, which forces them to catch up on missed schooling while also adapting to their new life. Refugee children sometimes face serious adaptation problems when they finally leave the camp. This is especially true for those who have been born in camps and who have spent their entire memorable life there. The chance that these children have to learn diminishes greatly when they are forced to flee their home country. Inadequate school capacity or staff training, language barriers and limited catch up classes are just some of the challenges faced by refugee children.

In recent years it has come to global attention that children are not being treated with care in refugee camps, and many of their basic human rights are being taken away from them. The conditions in many refugee camps across the world are less than ideal. In Texas many children are crammed into small, cold rooms with emergency silver blankets on shared mats to sleep on.

In refugee camps there is access to food and water but the amounts are not sufficient enough to sustain growing children, there is often long waits for small amounts of food and water this mimics the uncertainty of the supply of food and water in a child home country. Children can often be provided with little protection from harsh weather conditions in these camps, which can also cause further health issues. Refugee children living in camps face nutritional and health risks due to over-crowding, poverty and the food available. These risks exist both during the emergency phase of entering a refugee camp and living in the camp for long periods of time.

Children in refugee camps are more likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems due to the trauma that they have experienced. Children often witnessed the death of a care or parent, which causes them to arrive in refugee camps alone. If children are moved from one to two refugee camps, they may be separated from their parents or family members, which can result in developing mental health issues, such as post traumatic stress [PTSD]. In refugee camps all over the world there is a lack of access to mental health services for children, and this only contributes to the development of these issues.

In many refugee camps such as Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya children are subject to sexual and physical violence early on in life the resources in Kakuma refugee camp are overtaxed which leaves children with few opportunities for education overcrowding in this camp and many others leads to disease is spreading rapidly especially among children due to malnutrition.

In recent years, there has been a large surge in refugees entering foreign countries. For example, in Turkey, stress is put on the nation child protection system which hinders efforts to respond to potential risks or violations in regards to child protection. Refugee children can often be at a higher risk to exploitation, neglect, violence and discrimination.

The outbreak of Covid-19 across the globe has had a serious impact on the quality of lives of refugee children. Medical resources and covid tests are not widely available, and the overcrowded nature in most refugee camps across the world makes them an easy place for the spread of this infectious disease. Most refugee children do not have access to masks or any person protection equipment (PPE), and many of them are malnourished due to lack of food/water, which means that these children are more likely to become sick from Covid-19, and the dense populations in camps means that the spread is much more likely to occur.

In many cases, military or armed attacks on refugee camps can occur from across borders or within national borders. These attacks can kill or seriously injure refugee children.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Turkey – as of March 2021, Turkey were hosting approximately 3.7 million Syrian refugees, around 46% of which are children.

UNICEF – KfW Development Bank is financing the UNICEF project in Turkey. €40 million was paid in 2016, and a further €44 million in 2017. This project allows 13,000 voluntary Syrian teachers to teach in Turkey and also finances more than 277,000 pupils for a whole school year.

Italy – At the end of June 2020, most Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) were in shelters for unaccompanied children. These are run by state authorities and non-profit organisations.

UNHCR – The UNHCR was established in 1950 to deal with the refugee crisis as a result of World War Two. The UNHCR works with national authorities and other international or local organisations to assist and protect displaced children. In line with its mandate, the UNHCR looks to provide international protection to refugees, including children, until solutions are found for them. They continue to intervene with refugee children being forcibly recruited from refugee camps to join opposition groups or armed forces.

Germany – in 2015, Germany welcomed over one million refugees. German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that Germany would put no limit on the amount of refugees coming into the country, which included many children. The government then began the journey of settling and integrating refugees into society.

Timeline of Events

Description

14th December 1950

The UNHCR was formed in order to deal with the refugee crisis that occurred as a result of World War Two. According to the UNHCR, it's mandate is 'to provide, on a non-political and humanitarian basis, international protection to refugees and to seek permanent solutions for them.'

28th July 1951 - The 1951 Refugee Convention was signed. It is a United Nations multilateral treaty which defines what a refugee is. It sets out rights for people granted asylum seeker status and the responsibilities of the nations which give them this status. It came into effect on the 22nd of April in 1954.

1986 - The Executive Committee created Conclusion number 43, on detention of refugees. This sets limited circumstances for which refugees may be detained for illegal entry. This can be applied to refugee children, as they should not be detained in connection with illegal entry to a country.

20th June 2001 - World Refugee Day was established to commemorate the anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees.

2016 - The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was established. Certain articles in this declaration emphasize the importance of addressing the needs of refugee children who have been subject to physical or psychological abuse.

December 17th 2018 - The Global compact on refugees was affirmed by the United Nations general assembly. It recognizes that a sustainable solution to the refugee crisis cannot be reached without international cooperation.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

UNHCR – The main purpose of the UNHCR is to ‘safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee’. The UNCHR try to ensure that everyone has the right to be an asylum seeker and seek refuge in another country. In conjunction with UNICEF, the UNHCR have created a blueprint for joint action for refugee children. This emphasizes their efforts to promote and protect the rights and safety of refugee children

UNICEF - UNICEF and it's partners worked to develop a roadmap, which provides guidelines that aim to improve the care and protection of refugee children. UNICEF also work in these childrens countries of origin in attempt to lessen the impact of poverty, conflict and lack of education, which is what causes children to end up in these camps.

1951 Refugee Convention – the key legal document regulating international standards for refugee work, which is administered by the UNHCR. It was established in order to handle the millions of displaced people after World War Two. This convention defines the term refugee, as well as outlining the rights of displaced people, and highlights the legal obligations of nations and states to protect them. The main principle of this convention is that a refugee should not be returned to a country in which their life or freedom faces serious threats.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

In the Global Compact on Refugees, commitments have been made to improving and expanding health care systems to accommodate refugees including children. It also specifically mentions actions required to include mental health facilities. It provides a blueprint for governments and international organisations to ensure that host communities receive sufficient support and refugees can lead meaningful lives. The four main aims of this compact are to: ease pressure on host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand access to third-country solutions; and to support conditions in countries of origin for the return in safety and in dignity.

The UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children aims to ensure that no refugee child is left behind. This blueprint has 3 sectors: education; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and child protection. The timeline for this blueprint was extended until the end of 2022. It emphasises efforts to promote and protect the rights of refugee children

UNICEF has worked in conjunction with its partners to develop a roadmap which provides guidelines that will hopefully improve the care and protection of refugee children.

The Refugee Education 2030 was developed as a strategy for refugee inclusion. It is an update of the UNHCR 2012-2016 Refugee Education Strategy, which focused on the provision of refugee education. The updated version aims for the inclusion of refugee children in equitable quality education, which

Action Against Hunger work across the world in places such as Yemen, Nigeria and D.R Congo in order to save the lives of children suffering malnutrition and provide access to clean and safe drinking water.

When the UNHCR was launched in 1950, the annual budget was \$300,000 (US), and as of 2021 it has reached \$9.51 billion (US). This significant increase is proportional to the increase in the number of refugees worldwide. The increase of this budget aims to provide more help and solutions for refugees across the globe,

Possible Solutions

Provide health/mental health services which are culturally and linguistically adapted for individual children, in order to make it easier for them to understand and relieve some of their stress.

Create a program or organisation which will allow for the supply of adequate amounts of food for children in refugee camps, and to ensure that food is of good nutritional value and will aid the growth and development of children.

Introduce mandatory education systems for children in all refugee camps through funding and voluntary work, which could be overseen by a UN sub-body.

Create an organisation or NGO specifically dedicated to supplying PPE/masks to refugee camps to protect the inhabitants from COVID-19. Promote vaccination donation programmes through a mass media campaign to encourage those in developed regions to donate money to supply vaccinations to children in refugee camps.

Operate a help-line for children who have been subject to physical, sexual or psychological trauma, which could be tied in with the providing of mental health and health services.

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