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**HRC– Promoting education of
refugee and displaced children**

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Forum: HRC

Issue: Promoting education of refugee and displaced children

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Introduction

Access to education is a basic human right, and it is important to highlight how it contributes to the eradication of poverty, economic growth and financial stability. However, millions of children are deprived of this basic right, especially considering refugee and displaced youth. Out of 17.2 million refugees in the world, half are children. Refugee and displaced children represent 1 out of every 220 kids below the age of 15 years, and the number increases yearly. Globally, 91% of children attend primary school, however, this number drops to 50% amongst refugee and displaced children. In regards to secondary education, the global index of 84% drops drastically to 23%, going further down to 9% in low income countries. The issue is critical in regards to tertiary education, where only 1% of university students represent refugees. Displaced children are taken away from their homes, their countries and sometimes are separated from their families and communities, therefore it is fundamental that education and personal development is not only encouraged but endorsed. Given the seriousness of the issue at hand, UNHCR has developed 3 basic concepts and approaches on the issue of education for refugee children. The first one is the Humanitarian approach, that considers education to be a component of rapid response, to provide children with immediate protection. The second one is the human rights approach, that considers education a fundamental right that is to be respected under any means, to provide children with the tools to reach their full potential. The third is the developmental approach, that considers education as a long term investment, and takes a long term approach considering what education today can provide for future generations.

Overall, it is of great significance to deal with the issue at hand and provide all children with their basic right to education, not only to respect their rights today but also to assure that they can reach their full potential and be productive members of a civil society in the future.



Definition of key-terms

Refugee

Refugee: A person who has been forced to move out of their country of origin based on a well-founded fear out of fear of persecution, war or natural Disaster

Internally displaced person

Internally displaced person: A person forced to flee their home in fear of persecution, war or natural disasters, but without leaving their country of origin. These people do not fit in the definition of refugees and therefore are not subject to the same protections

Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers: People who have left their country of origin and are looking for a safe place to live in another nation. They are refugees whose claim has not been yet definitely evaluated.

Migration Stream

Migration Steam: A large group of migrants from a particular country or region, to a specific destination

Right to Asylum

Right to asylum: An ancient right granting all citizens with the possibility of seeking asylum in other countries to prevent persecution. Stated under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as, under article 14, as “*Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.*” (UN, 1948)

Dublin Regulation:

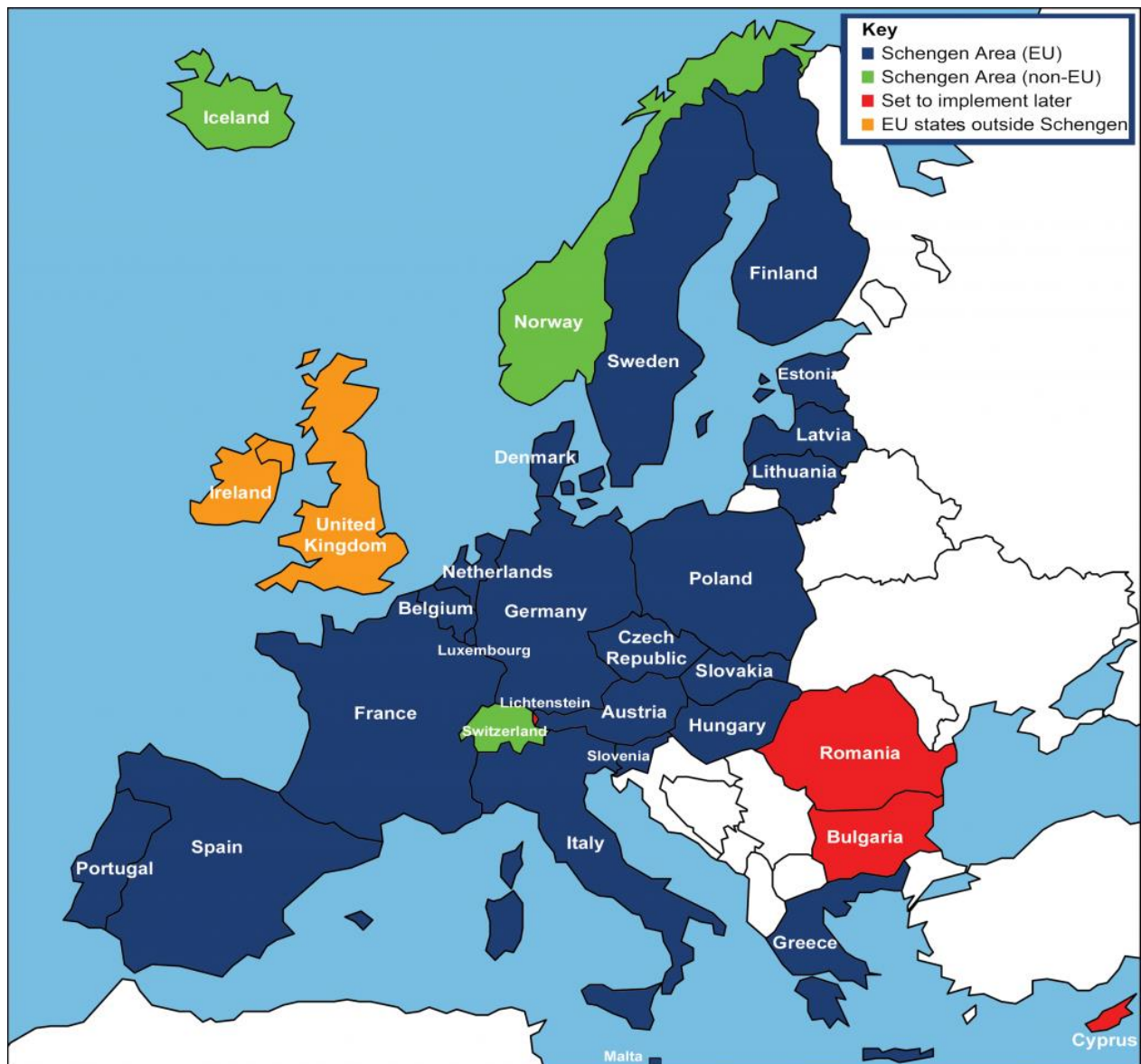
The Dublin regulation is an agreement that determines which nation is to be responsible for examining the application of an asylum seeker. Its goal is to determine which country will be responsible rapidly and prevent asylum seekers from seeking asylum in multiple nations or the application to be passed on from country to country.

1951 Refugee Convention:

A convention grounded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that defines the status of refugees as well as their rights under external jurisdiction, including their right to freedom of religion and access to basic health and social services

Schengen Area:

The Schengen area is an agreement defined in 1985 to abolish border controls and regulations amongst a group of European countries. The increase in refugees and migrants has overwhelmed these controls, by migrating along the area freely once they reached the European continent.



General Overview

Migration Stream

Up to 2016, 65.6 million people had been displaced forcibly worldwide, with 10 million individuals being classified as “Stateless” by the UNHCR. 55% of all refugees came from the same 3 countries, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria (UNHCR, 2016). It is extremely hard to state exactly the causes of this migration stream, however, it can be concluded that fear of persecution, war and state failure are issues of great importance in the topic at hand. In regards to Syrian migrants, that constitute over 30% of all asylum seekers, their migrations is caused by the civil war. Moreover, Afghans hope to escape the war with the Taliban rebels and Eritreans escape from forced labor mainly. On the same line, exacerbating poverty in countries such as Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and Pakistan, amongst others, also motivate migrations. These reasons have led 28,300 people from being forced to flee their countries or regions of origin each day, the biggest figure to have been ever recorded

Human Rights for refugees and displaced children

Even though education is a topic of focus for refugee and displaced children, there are multiple other aspects that affect these children’s living standards and likeability of having a normal and safe childhood. A clear example of this is how basic human rights are not respected when addressing refugee and displaced children, these including basic living rights such as the right to food and right to play. In regards to the right to food, stated under article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, most refugee camps fall short on the demands of calories to be ingested by each individual. Furthermore, the food that is actually provided is most of the time lacking in needed vitamins and minerals, given the lack of vegetables and fruits. This has a great effect in the physical development of refugee children. Moreover, the right to play, stated under article 31 of the Rights Of The Child is also often disregarded. Not being considered a priority, Internally Displaced children are often prohibited or prevented from playing freely and participating in recreational activities, because of fear of persecution or dangerous environments. This is an issue of great importance given that leisure and recreational activities play a huge role in the cognitive and psychological development of children.

Educational Crisis

It is fair to say that education is fundamental to assure that all individuals can reach their maximum potential, and therefore, it has been a point of focus for all legislations and action plans in regards to refugees and displaced children. It is stated under article



22 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees that states “shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education” (UNHCR, Convention Relating to the Status Of Refugees, 1951), however, the vast majority of refugee and displaced children do not graduate high school. Refugee and displaced children are 5 times more likely to not attend primary school, and considering the average length of time a refugee spends in exile is 20 years -more than a child’s entire childhood- it is fair to conclude that this lack of education has everlasting effects. Moreover, 86% of refugees reside in developing countries, therefore partaking in a bigger issue of education in these nations (UNHCR, MISSING OUT, Refugee Education in Crisis, 2016) .

Causes of the Educational Crisis

Even though education is considered a universal right for all children, in most cases, education is lacking for refugee and displaced children. In regards to refugee children, education in refugee camps is often very basic, classes lack necessary materials, and classes are often very crowded. Furthermore, these classes are given in a pre-stated language that might sometimes not be the mother tongue of the child, therefore strongly limiting the individual’s capacity to learn. Displaced children, on the other hand, face other problems in regards to education. Most displaced individuals do not have a steady home or place of residence, therefore making it extremely difficult for children to attend classes. Moreover, children who had missed years of education before fleeing, because of conflicts of persecution are more likely to not receive an education once displaced, therefore limiting their likeability of a better lifestyle in their new country or region of residence.

Funds And National Development

Education for refugee and displaced children is mainly financed by emergency funds, and therefore is usually not included in national education programmes or development, and considered a separate unit of education. Because of this, these children do not have access to development plans or educational sector planning, and can not benefit from new regulations or national educational programmes. Furthermore, and an issue that is not to be disregarded is that by not taking part in national educational programmes, refugee children's educational needs and achievements usually go unnoticed or are disregarded, demotivating and creating a bigger disadvantage for the students

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Major parties involved and their views

Syrian Arab Republic:

Since 2011, Syria has been in the midst of a civil war, between the government of president Bashar al-Assad and opposing groups, that has affected Syria economically, socially and politically. In the first 5 years of the war, 400,000 Syrians were killed (UN, UN Envoy for Syria, 2016), and by 2018, the conflict has caused 5,6 million Syrians to flee the country and 6.1 million to be displaced internally.

South Sudan:

Since 2013, conflict and instability in South Sudan has caused 4 million people to be forced to flee their homes, 2 million being displaced internally and 4 million externally (UNHCR, South Sudan Emergency, 2018). The conflict, between government and opposed forces has been going on for years and is the cause for the displacement of millions of individuals. Most of these refugees are women and children, that often get to their destination malnourished and sick because of food shortages and flooding.

Afghanistan:

Afghanistan is the country of origin of the biggest refugee population in Asia and the second biggest one worldwide. The conflict began in 2001, after the attack to the twin towers in the USA, and is still affecting the country. The conflict and political instability has caused millions of citizens to flee Afghanistan, and the UNHCR has been working in taking back refugees safely to their country or regions of origin since the conflict began.

European Union (EU):

The European Union hosts the most amounts of refugees worldwide, with the countries hosting the most amounts being Turkey, Germany, Greece and Italy. Throughout the years, the EU has contributed financially through humanitarian projects and member state donations to provide shelter, health services and education to refugees and displaced

children in their territories. Total funding provided by the EU is over 5 billion dollars, with over 1 million going directly to Turkish refugee camps

Lebanon:

Lebanon accepted over 1 million Syrian refugees in the last years, making it the nation with highest concentration of refugees per capita. Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, thousands of refugees fled to Lebanon each year, creating a great strain and strongly pressuring the economy and infrastructure of the country. Even when faced with these complications, in 2014, Lebanon had enrolled 105,000 Syrian students in their own schooling systems.

Turkey:

Turkey is one of the nations that hosts the most amounts of refugees, and has spent over 8 billion dollars in the maintenance of these individuals in their territories. Thousands of illegal migrants enter Turkey each week, and refugee camps are available for many individuals, while others flee with hopes of getting into other countries of the EU. Today, Turkey hosts 3.9 million refugees (European Commission, 2018), but only 230,000 of these have access to living in camps, where they receive education, shelter and food. To maintain the camps and all other refugees, the EU has contracted 45 humanitarian projects with 19 humanitarian organizations to deal with funds and financial aid, amongst other difficulties.]

Timeline of important events/Documents

1951: The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees stated, under article 22 the right to primary education for refugees

1966: Introduction of post secondary scholarships for refugees and displaced children in urban areas, granted by the UNHCR

1988: The first guidelines on refugee education were published, titled “Organising Primary Education for Refugee Children in Emergency Situations: Guidelines for Field Managers”

1994: The genocide in Rwanda, together with growing conflicts in Afghanistan, Angola, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Liberia caused an increase in migrant masses and led to a focus on education on crisis

2000: The UNHCR recreated the position of Senior Education Officer

2002: The UNHCR agenda for protection and its action plan stated that “education is a tool for protection” (UNHCR, Agenda for protection, 2002)

2007: UNHCR triennial education strategy, focusing on access, quality and protection

2011: Syria crisis begins in March

2011: First refugee camps open in turkey

2012: Education stated as one of the first priorities for all UNHCR developments

2012: First refugee camp open in Jordan

2013: Syrian refugees reach the mark of 1 million, outpacing projections and plans of action

2013: UN humanitarian agencies call for the biggest funding programme in history, of 4.4\$ billion, for shelter, protection and education of refugee and displaced people

2015: Over 300 migrants die after sinking of inflatable boats in near the coasts of Lybia

2015: The European Council held an emergency meeting on the refugee crisis

2015: Austria introduced border controls in its border with Hungary to cope with immigrant inflow

2015: In December, it is recorded that in 2015, 3735 migrants died trying to reach Europe

2016: Turkey and the EU made an agreement that stated that illegal migrants found in Greece would be sent back to Turkey if they had not before asked for asylum

2016: Austrian government passed a law that allowed the country to claim a state of emergency if another significant migration stream was to happen

2017: With growing tensions between Turkey and the EU after the Turkish constitutional referendum, Turkey's internal minister threatens to send 15000 refugees to the EU every month |

UN involvement

UNHCR

Since 1950, the UNHCR, as a UN sub-body has helped provide safe shelter and access to basic rights to refugees, stateless and displaced people. It has worked continuously, amongst other things, to provide “inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning” (UN, Goal 4, 2015). As years passed, this sub-body gained more importance in regards to donations and international funding, with its original annual budget being 300,000\$USD and the 2016 budget 6.54\$ billion. The UNHCR is present in 130 countries, and help refugees, returnees, internally displaced people, stateless individuals, and asylum seekers, hoping to provide safe shelter, protection, education and access to human rights to all individuals. In regards to education, the UNHCR has developed multiple plans of action as well as programmes to help refugee and displaced children above the globe. Below, are some of the programmes presented by the UNHCR:

- **HER TURN:** A programme designed to promote inclusive education for all girls and women in refugee camps and fund the education of internally displaced girls. Presented by Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for refugees, this programme hopes to provide all girls with non-discriminatory, inclusive education. This programme highlights the importance of education for girls for not only individual achievements but also as a strategy to eradicate poverty, battle child marriage and prevent teenage pregnancies.
- **DAFI PROGRAMME:** A programme that grants scholarships and financial aid to refugee and displaced children to provide them with quality tertiary education. Funded by donations, and controlled by the UNHCR, this programme encourages refugee children to finish their studies by celebrating achievements and granting scholarships as well as financial aid for housing, food and study material for those students who have excelled in their primary and secondary studies and wish to continue. |

Possible Solutions

Given the magnitude of the issue at hand, and the fact that it is affecting millions of individuals each year, it is fundamental that all solutions are developed holistically, prioritizing the universal right to education and the need for education so that all children can reach their full potential.

It is fundamental that all necessary funds are available, to assure not only the right to food and shelter, but also to make sure that all refugee and displaced children can have access to quality education. It is necessary that all nations contribute to the UNHCR financially, to assure that school programmes are well developed, children have the necessary material and there is a safe learning environment for all individuals.

Furthermore, it is strongly significant that education in refugee camps and areas that host displaced children is not only of quality but also inclusive and non-discriminatory. Language can be a great barrier in these cases, and therefore, it is fundamental that, considering the country of origin of refugee and displaced children in a certain area, classes are available in their mother tongue, to allow universal understanding of school curriculums. Moreover, gender and race differences must not be presented as a problem or have any effect whatsoever in the education provided to refugees. It is fundamental that all nations assure that under their jurisdiction, education is universal, as stated by the rights of the child, and that this applies to immigrants as well.

In order to make sure that all of the rights described above are respected and not overlooked under any circumstances, refugees and displaced children and their families must have a space where they can report any situations in which their rights are not being respected. It is fundamental that all children and youth can report to the UNHCR or other platforms any circumstances where their education is not respected or is discriminatory in any way. This way, it can be assured that individuals are aware that they have a say in their rights and can demand these rights to be respected, not only as refugees or displaced students, but as world citizens.

Moreover, curricula in schools must also be a topic of focus. It is fundamental that refugee and displaced children are taught, under the jurisdiction of any country, about their rights as children as world citizens. The teaching of human rights must be strongly encouraged in all member states' educational systems and should be promoted under any circumstances. It is

important to highlight the importance of teaching children about their universal rights, especially in crisis and emergency situations to prevent them from not fighting for these rights, if they do not know they have them.

It is fundamental that once a child is in an educational facility, whether this may be in a national school, or in a refugee camp, this child's achievements and academic excellence is recognized in the same ways that other students'. It is of great importance that these children have the opportunity to apply to the same scholarships and be acknowledged for their achievements. This does not only have a great effect on the student in regards to motivation but also encourages individuals to continue their academic studies and strive for secondary and tertiary education.

In regards to school programmes, curriculums connected to art, dance, theater or other form of expression can also be greatly beneficial, given the importance and fundamental role they can play in the personal and psychological development of a child.

Finally, it is fundamental to take into account that refugee children have often suffered from traumatic experiences and have lost years of their education. Because of this, all educational programmes that host refugee and displaced children should include available psychological support and be inclusive for children who have not had a steady academic career, being forced to be introduced in previous year groups. It is fundamental that these children's needs are not overlooked and that their suffering and trauma are acknowledged and worked on.

Overall, it must not be forgotten that refugee children constitute millions of opportunities and lives full of potential, that must not be disregarded, and all solutions must be focused on the idea that not only are they individuals suffering from traumatic experiences, and are victims of conflict and chaos, but they are in fact children, that must be protected under any means.

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